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Editorial Review

Review
“A work of enormous power and artistry; no mere ‘entertainment’…but fiction on a grand scale.”—*The Washington Post*

“An irresistible book…Charlie is the ultimate double agent.”—*The New York Times*

About the Author
New York Times bestselling author **John le Carré** (*A Delicate Truth* and *Spy Who Came in from the Cold*) was born in 1931 and attended the universities of Bern and Oxford. He taught at Eton and served briefly in British Intelligence during the Cold War. For the last fifty years he has lived by his pen. He divides his time between London and Cornwall.

Chapter One

It was the Bad Godesberg incident that gave the proof, though the German authorities had no earthly means of knowing this. Before Bad Godesberg, there had been growing suspicion; a lot of it. But the high quality of the planning, as against the poor quality of the bomb, turned the suspicion into certainty. Sooner or later, they say in the trade, a man will sign his name. The vexation lies in the waiting.

It exploded much later than intended, probably a good twelve hours later, at twenty-six minutes past eight on Monday morning. Several defunct wristwatches, the property of victims, confirmed the time. As with its predecessors over the last few months, there had been no warning. But then none had been intended. The Düsseldorf car-bombing of a visiting Israeli arms-procurement official had been preceded by no warning, neither had the book bomb sent to the organisers of an Orthodox Jewish congress in Antwerp, which blew up the honorary secretary and burnt her assistant to death. Neither had the dustbin bomb outside an Israeli bank in Zürich, which maimed two passers-by. Only the Stockholm bomb had a warning, and that turned out to be a completely different group, not part of the series at all.

At twenty-five minutes past eight, the Drosselstrasse in Bad Godesberg had been just another leafy diplomatic backwater, about as far from the political turmoils of Bonn as you could reasonably get while staying within fifteen minutes' drive of them. It was a new street but mature, with lush, secretive gardens, and maids' quarters over the garages, and Gothic security grilles over the bottle-glass windows. The Rhineland weather for most of the year has the warm wet drip of the jungle; its vegetation, like its diplomatic community, grows almost as fast as the Germans build their roads, and slightly faster than they make their maps. Thus the fronts of some of the houses were already half obscured by dense plantations of conifers, which, if they ever grow to proper size, will presumably one day plunge the whole area into a Grimm's fairy-tale blackout. These trees turned out to be remarkably effective against blast and, within days of the explosion, one local garden centre had made them a speciality.

Several of the houses wear a patently nationalistic look. The Norwegian Ambassador's residence, for example, just around the corner from the Drosselstrasse, is an austere, red-bricked farmhouse lifted straight from the stockbroker hinterlands of Oslo. The Egyptian consulate, up the other end, has the forlorn air of an Alexandrian villa fallen on hard times. Mournful Arab music issues from it, and its windows are permanently shuttered against the skirmishing North African heat. The season was mid-May and the day had started

glorious, with blossom and new leaves rocking together in the light breeze. The magnolia trees were just finished and their sad white petals, mostly shed, afterwards became a feature of the debris. With so much greenery, the bustle of the commuter traffic from the trunk road barely penetrated. The most audible sound until the explosion was the clamour of birds, including several plump doves that had taken a liking to the Australian Military Attache's mauve wistaria, his pride. A kilometre southward, unseen Rhine barges provided a throbbing, stately hum, but the residents grow deaf to it unless it stops. In short, it was a morning to assure you that whatever calamities you might be reading about in West Germany's earnest, rather panicky newspapers -- depression, inflation, insolvency, unemployment, all the usual and apparently incurable ailments of a massively prosperous capitalist economy -- Bad Godesberg was a settled, decent place to be alive in, and Bonn was not half so bad as it is painted.

Depending on nationality and rank, some husbands had already left for work, but diplomats are nothing if not cliches of their kind. A melancholy Scandinavian Counsellor, for example, was still in bed, suffering from a hangover brought on by marital stress. A South American chargé, clad in a hairnet and Chinese silk dressing-gown, the prize of a tour in Peking, was leaning out of the window giving shopping instructions to his Filipino chauffeur. The Italian Counsellor was shaving but naked. He liked to shave after his bath but before his daily exercises. His wife, fully clothed, was already downstairs remonstrating with an unrepentant daughter for returning home late the night before, a dialogue they enjoyed most mornings of the week. An envoy from the Ivory Coast was speaking on the international telephone, advising his masters of his latest efforts to wring development aid out of an increasingly reluctant German exchequer. When the line went dead, they thought he had hung up on them, and sent him an acid telegram enquiring whether he wished to resign. The Israeli Labour Attaché had left more than an hour ago. He was not at ease in Bonn and as best he could he liked to work Jerusalem hours. So it went, with a lot of rather cheap ethnic jokes finding a basis in reality and death.

Somewhere in every bomb explosion there is a miracle, and in this case it was supplied by the American School bus, which had just come and gone again with most of the community's younger children who congregated every schoolday in the turning-circle not fifty metres from the epicentre. By a mercy none of the children had forgotten his homework, none had overslept or shown resistance to education on this Monday morning, so the bus got away on time. The rear windows shattered, the driver went side-winding into the verge, a French girl lost an eye, but essentially the children escaped scot-free, which was afterwards held to be a deliverance. For that also is a feature of such explosions, or at least of their immediate aftermath: a communal, wild urge to celebrate the living, rather than to waste time mourning the dead. The real grief in such cases comes later when the shock wears off, usually after several hours, though occasionally less.

The actual noise of the bomb was not a thing people remembered, not if they were close. Across the river in Königswinter, they heard a whole foreign war and drifted around shaken and half deaf, grinning at each other like accomplices in survival. Those accursed diplomats, they told each other, what could you expect? Pack the lot of them off to Berlin where they can spend our taxes in peace! But those at hand heard at first nothing whatever. All they could speak of, if they could speak at all, was the road tipping, or a chimney-stack silently lifting off the roof across the way, or the gale ripping through their houses, how it stretched their skin, thumped them, knocked them down, blew the flowers out of the vases and the vases against the wall. They remembered the tinkling of falling glass all right, and the timid brushing noise of the young foliage hitting the road. And the mewing of people too frightened to scream. So that clearly they were not so much unaware of noise as blasted out of their natural senses. There were also several references by witnesses to the din of the French Counsellor's kitchen radio howling out a recipe for the day. One wife, believing herself to be rational, wanted to know from the police whether it was possible that the blast had turned up the radio's volume. In an explosion, the officers replied gently as they led her away in a blanket, anything was possible, but in this case the explanation was different. With all the glass blown out of the French Counsellor's windows, and with no one inside in a condition to turn the radio off, there was nothing to stop it from talking

straight into the street. But she didn't really understand.

The press was soon there, of course, straining at the cordons, and the first enthusiastic reports killed eight and wounded thirty and laid the blame on a dotty German right-wing organisation called Nibelungen 5, which consisted of two mentally retarded boys and one mad old man, who could not have blown up a balloon. By midday the press had been forced to scale their bag down to five dead, one of them Israeli, four critically injured, and twelve others in hospital for this and that, and they were talking of the Italian Red Brigades, for which, once more, there was not a shred of proof. Next day they did another turnabout and gave the credit to Black September. The day after that, credit for the outrage was claimed by a group calling itself the Palestine Agony, which laid convincing claim to the previous explosions also. But Palestine Agony stuck, even if it was less of a name for the perpetrators than an explanation for their action. And as such it worked, for it was duly taken up as a headline for many ponderous leading articles.

Of the non-Jews who died, one was the Italians' Sicilian cook, another their Filipino chauffeur. Of the four injured, one was the wife of the Israeli Labour Attaché, in whose house the bomb had exploded. She lost a leg. The dead Israeli was their small son Gabriel. But the intended victim, it was afterwards widely concluded, was neither of these people, but rather an uncle of the Labour Attaché's injured wife who was here on a visit from Tel Aviv: a Talmudic scholar who was mildly celebrated for his hawkish opinions regarding the rights of Palestinians on the West Bank. In a word, he believed they should have none, and said so loud and often, in stark defiance of the opinions of his niece the Labour Attaché's wife, who was of Israel's liberated left, and whose kibbutz upbringing had not prepared her for the rigorous luxury of diplomatic life.

If Gabriel had been on the school bus, he would have been safe, but Gabriel was on that day, as on many others, unwell. He was a troubled, hyperactive child who till now had been regarded as a discordant element in the street, particularly during the siesta period. But, like his mother, he was gifted musically. Now, with perfect naturalness, no one in the street could remember a child they had loved more. A right-wing German tabloid, brimming with pro-Jewish sentiment, dubbed him "the Angel Gabriel" -- a title that, unknown to its editors, did service in both religions -- and for a full week ran invented stories of his saintliness. The quality papers echoed the sentiment. Christianity, one star commentator declared -- quoting without attribution from Disraeli -- was completed Judaism or it was nothing. Thus Gabriel was as much a Christian martyr as a Jewish one; and concerned Germans felt much better for knowing this. Thousands of marks, unsolicited, were sent in by readers and had to be disposed of somehow. There was talk of a Gabriel memorial, but very little talk of the other dead. In accordance with Jewish tradition, Gabriel's wretchedly small coffin was returned at once for burial in Israel; his mother, too sick to travel, stayed in Bonn until her husband could accompany her, and they could sit *shiva* together in Jerusalem.

By early afternoon of the day of the explosion, a six-man team of Israeli experts had flown in from Tel Aviv. On the German side, the controversial Dr. Alexis, of the Ministry of the Interior, was imprecisely charged with the investigation, and made the airport pilgrimage to meet them. Alexis was a clever, foxy creature, who had suffered all his life from being ten centimetres shorter than most of his fellow men. As a compensation for this handicap, perhaps, he was also headlong: in both his private and official lives, controversy attached to him easily. He was partly lawyer, partly security officer, partly power-player, as the Germans breed them these days, with salty liberal convictions not always welcome to the Coalition, and an unfortunate weakness for airing them on television. His father, it was vaguely understood, had been some kind of resister against the Hitler thing, and the mantle, in these altered times, fitted the erratic son uncomfortably. Certainly there were those in Bonn's glass palaces who found him insufficiently solid for the job; a recent divorce, with its disturbing revelations of a mistress twenty years his junior, had done little to improve their view of him.

If it had been anybody else arriving, Alexis would not have bothered with the airport at all -- there was to be

no press coverage of the event -- but relations between Israel and the Federal Republic were going through a trough, so he bowed to Ministry pressure and went. Against his wishes, they saddled him at the last minute with a slow-mannered Silesian policeman from Hamburg, a proclaimed conservative and tortoise, who had made a name for himself in the field of "student control" in the seventies and was accounted a great expert on troublemakers and their bombs. The other excuse was that he went down well with Israelis, though Alexis, like everyone else, knew he was there primarily as a counterweight to himself. More important, perhaps, in the fraught climate of the day, both Alexis and the Silesian were *unbelastet*, meaning that neither was old enough to bear the remotest responsibility for what Germans sadly refer to as their unconquered past. Whatever was being done to Jews today, Alexis and his unwished-for Silesian colleague had not done it yesterday; nor, if further reassurance was needed, had Alexis senior. The press, with guidance from Alexis, made a point of all this. Only one editorial suggested that as long as the Israelis persisted in their indiscriminate bombing of Palestinian camps and villages -- killing not one child but dozens at a time -- they must reckon on this type of barbaric reprisal. A white-hot, if slightly muddled, retort from the Israeli Embassy's Press Officer was run hastily the next day. Since 1961, he wrote, the State of Israel had been under constant attack from Arab terrorism. The Israelis would not kill a single Palestinian anywhere if only they could be left in peace. Gabriel had died for one reason only: because he was a Jew. The Germans might possibly remember that Gabriel was not alone in this. If they had forgotten the Holocaust, perhaps they recalled the Munich Olympics of ten years ago?

The editor closed the correspondence and took a day off.

The anonymous Air Force plane from Tel Aviv landed on the far side of the airfield, clearance formalities were waived, and collaboration began at once, a night-and-day affair. Alexis was under pressing orders to deny the Israelis nothing, but such orders were superfluous: he was *philosemitisch* and known for it. He had made his obligatory "liaison" visit to Tel Aviv and been photographed with bowed head at the Holocaust Museum. As to the ponderous Silesian -- well, as he did not tire of reminding everyone who would listen to him, they were all looking for the same enemy, weren't they? The Reds, clearly. By the fourth day, though the results of many enquiries were still outstanding, the joint working party had put together a convincing preliminary picture of what had happened.

In the first place, it was common ground that no special security watch had been kept on the target house, nor by the terms of the agreement between the Embassy and the Bonn security authorities was any provided for. The Israeli Ambassador's residence, three streets away, was protected round the clock. A green police caravan stood guard outside it; an iron fence comprised the perimeter; pairs of young sentries far too young to be troubled by the historical ironies of their presence dutifully patrolled the gardens with submachine guns. The Ambassador also rated a bullet-proof car and an escort of police outriders. He was an ambassador, after all, as well as a Jew, and here in double trust. But a mere Labour Attaché was different fare and one must not over-react; his house came under the general protection of the mobile diplomatic patrol, and all that could be said was that as an Israeli house it was certainly a subject of particular vigilance, as the police logs showed. As a further precaution, the addresses of Israeli staff were not printed in official diplomatic lists for fear of encouraging the impulsive gesture at a time when Israel was being a little hard to take. Politically.

At just after eight o'clock that Monday morning, the Labour Attaché unlocked his garage and, as usual, inspected the hubcaps of his car, as well as the underparts of the chassis, with the aid of a mirror fixed to a broom handle issued to him for the purpose. His wife's uncle, who was riding with him, confirmed this. The Labour Attaché looked under the driving seat before he turned on the ignition. Since the bombing had started, these precautions had become mandatory to all foreign-based Israeli personnel. He knew, as they all knew, that it takes about forty seconds to pack an ordinary commercial hubcap with explosive and less time than that to stick a limpet bomb under the petrol tank. He knew, as they all knew -- he had had it dinned into

him ever since his belated recruitment to diplomacy -- that a lot of people would like to blow him up. He read the newspapers and telegrams. Satisfied that the car was clean, he said goodbye to his wife and son and drove to work.

In the second place, the family's au pair girl, a Swede of impeccable record named Elke, had the day before begun a week's holiday in the Westerwald with her equally impeccable German boyfriend, Wolf, who was on leave from the Bundeswehr. Wolf had fetched Elke on Sunday afternoon in his open Volkswagen car, and anybody passing the house or keeping watch could have seen her emerge from the front door dressed in her going-away clothes, kiss little Gabriel goodbye, and set off with cheerful waves to the Labour Attaché, who remained on the doorstep to see her leave, while his wife, an impassioned grower of green vegetables, continued her work in the rear garden. Elke had been with them for a year or more, and, in the words of the Labour Attaché, she was a well-loved member of the household.

These two factors -- the absence of the well-loved au pair and the absence of a police check -- made the attack possible. What made it succeed was the fatal good nature of the Labour Attaché himself.

At six o'clock on the same Sunday evening -- two hours after Elke's departure therefore -- while the Labour Attaché was wrestling at religious conversation with his houseguest and his wife was wistfully tilling German soil, the front doorbell rang. One ring. As always, the Labour Attaché looked through the peephole before opening. As always, he armed himself with his service revolver while he peeped, though in theory the local restrictions forbade him any firearm. But all he saw in the fisheye lens was a blonde girl of around twenty-one or two, rather frail and affecting, standing on the doorstep beside a scuffed grey suitcase with Scandinavian Airline Systems labels tied to the handle. A taxi -- or was it a private saloon car? -- waited in the street behind her, and he could hear its engine running. Definitely. He even thought he heard the tick of a faulty magneto as well, but that was later, when he was clutching at straws. She was a really nice girl as he described her, ethereal and sporty both at once, with summer freckles -- *Sommersprossen* -- round her nose. Instead of the usual drab uniform of jeans and blouse, she wore a demure blue dress buttoned to the throat and a silk headscarf, white or cream, which set off her gold hair and -- as he readily confessed at the first heart-rending interview -- flattered his simple taste for respectability. Replacing his service revolver in the top drawer of the hall chest, therefore, he unchained the door to her and beamed because she was charming, and because he himself was shy and over-large.

All this, still, at the first interview. The Talmudic uncle saw nothing and heard nothing. As a witness, he was useless. From the moment he was left alone, with the door closed on him, he seems to have immersed himself in a commentary on the Mishna, in accordance with the general injunction upon him never to waste his time.

The girl spoke accented English. Nordic, not French or Latin; they tried any number of accents on him, but the northern seaboard was as near as they could get. She enquired first whether Elke was at home, calling her not Elke but "Ucki," a pet name used by close friends only. The Labour Attaché explained that she had departed on holiday two hours ago: what a shame, but could he help? The girl expressed mild disappointment and said she would drop by another time. She had just arrived from Sweden, she said, and had promised Elke's mother she would deliver this suitcase containing some clothes and gramophone records. The gramophone records were a particularly neat touch, since Elke was mad about pop. The Labour Attaché by this time had insisted she step into the house and had even, in his innocence, picked up the suitcase for her and carried it across the threshold, a thing for which all his life he would never forgive himself. Yes, he had of course read the many exhortations about never accepting parcels delivered by intermediaries; yes, he knew that suitcases could bite. But this was Elke's nice friend Katrin, from her home town in Sweden, who had received the suitcase from her mother that very day! It was slightly heavier than he had expected, but he put this down to the gramophone records. When he remarked to her solicitously that it

must have used up all her luggage allowance, Katrin explained that Elke's mother had driven her to Stockholm Airport in order to pay the overweight. The suitcase was of the hard-walled type, he noticed, and felt tightly packed as well as heavy. No -- no movement as he lifted it, he was sure. A brown label, a fragment, survived.

He offered the girl a coffee but she declined, saying that she must not keep her driver waiting. Not taxi. *Driver.* The point was laboured to death by the investigating team. He asked her what she was doing in Germany and she replied that she hoped to enrol as a theological student at Bonn University. He hunted excitedly for a telephone pad, then for a pencil, and invited her to leave her name and address, but she gave them back to him, saying, with a smile, "Just tell her 'Katrin' and she'll know." She was staying at a Lutheran hostel for girls, she explained, but only while she looked for rooms. (Such a hostel exists in Bonn, another nice touch of accuracy.) She would come by again when Elke was back from holiday, she said. Maybe they could spend her birthday together. She hoped so. She really did. The Labour Attaché suggested they might make a party for Elke and her friends -- maybe a cheese fondue, which he could prepare by himself. For my wife -- as he afterwards explained with pathetic repetition -- is a kibbutznik, sir, and has no patience with fine cooking.

About here, from the direction of the street, the car or taxi started hooting. Pitch around middle C, several light short blasts, about three. They shook hands, and she gave him the key. Here the Labour Attaché noticed for the first time that the girl was wearing white cotton gloves, but she was that kind of girl and it was a sticky day for carrying a heavy suitcase. No handwriting on the pad, therefore, and no fingerprints on the pad or the suitcase either. Or on the key. The entire exchange had taken, the poor man later estimated, five minutes. Not more, because of the driver. The Labour Attaché watched her down the path -- a nice style of walking, sexy but not deliberately provocative. He closed and chained the door conscientiously, then took the suitcase to Elke's room, which was on the ground floor, and laid it on the foot of her bed, thinking loyally that by leaving it flat he was being kinder on the clothes and records. He put the key on top of it. From the garden, where she was implacably breaking hard ground with a hoe, his wife had heard nothing, and when she came indoors to rejoin the two men, her husband forgot to tell her.

Here a small and very human revision intruded.

Forgot? the Israeli team asked him incredulously. How do you *forget* a whole passage of domestic bother about Elke's friend from Sweden? The suitcase lying on the bed?

The Labour Attaché broke down again as he admitted it. No, he had not forgotten exactly.

Then what? they asked.

It was more -- it seemed -- that he had decided -- in his lonely, inward way -- that, well, that social matters had really ceased to interest his wife at all, sir. All she wanted was to return to her kibbutz and relate freely to people without this diplomatic persiflage. Put another way -- well, the girl was so pretty, sir -- well, perhaps he would be wiser to keep her to himself. As to the suitcase -- well, my wife never goes into Elke's room, you see -- went, I mean -- Elke looks after her room herself.

And the Talmudic scholar, your wife's uncle?

The Labour Attaché had told him nothing either. Confirmed by both parties.

They wrote it down without comment: *Keep her to himself.*

Here, like a mystery train that abruptly vanishes from the track, the passage of events stopped. The girl Elke, with Wolf gallantly in support, was whisked back to Bonn and knew no Katrin. Investigations into Elke's social life were launched, but they would take time. Her mother had sent no suitcase, nor would she have dreamed of doing so -- she disapproved of her daughter's low taste in music, she told the Swedish police, and would not think to encourage it. Wolf returned disconsolately to his unit, and was subjected to wearying but directionless questioning by military security. No driver came forward, whether of a taxi or a private car, though he was paged all over Germany by police and press, and offered, *in absentia,* great sums of money for his story. No suitable traveller from Sweden or anywhere else could be traced through the passenger lists, computers, and memory-storage systems at any German airport, let alone Cologne. The photographs of known and unknown female terrorists, including the entire register of "half-illegals," rang no bells with the Labour Attaché, though he was demented with grief and would have helped anybody to do anything, if only in order to feel useful himself. He could not remember what shoes the girl had on, or whether she wore lipstick, or scent, or mascara, or whether her hair had looked bleached or could have been a wig. How should he, he implied -- he who was by training an economist and in all other respects a shambling, connubial, warm-hearted fellow whose only real interest outside Israel and his family was Brahms -- how should he know about women's hair dye?

Yes, he remembered, she had good legs and a very white neck. Long sleeves, yes, or he would have noticed her arms. Yes, a petticoat or something, or he would have seen the shape of her body back-lit by the outside sunlight. A bra? -- maybe not, she had a small bosom and could have got away without one. Live models were dressed up for him. He must have looked at a hundred different blue dresses sent in from warehouses up and down Germany, but he could not remember for the life of him whether the dress had collar and cuffs of a different colour; and not all his spiritual torment could improve his memory. The more they asked him the more he forgot. The usual chance witnesses confirmed parts of his story but added nothing of substance. The police patrols had missed the incident completely, and probably the planting of the bomb was timed that way. The suitcase could have been one of twenty brands. The car or taxi was an Opel or it was a Ford; it was grey, it was not very clean, neither new nor old. A Bonn registration; no, it was from Siegburg. Yes, a taxi sign on the roof. No, it was a sunshine roof, and someone had heard music issuing, what programme was not established. Yes, a radio aerial. No, none. The driver was male Caucasian but could be a Turk. The Turks had done it. He was clean-shaven, had a moustache, was dark-haired. No, blond. Slight build, could be a woman in disguise. Somebody was sure there had been a small chimney-sweep dangling in the back window. Or it could have been a sticker. Yes, a sticker. Somebody said the driver wore an anorak. Or it could have been a pullover.

At this point of stalemate, the Israeli team seemed to go into a kind of collective coma. A lethargy overcame them; they arrived late and left early and spent a lot of time at their Embassy, where they appeared to be receiving new instructions. The days passed and Alexis decided they were waiting for something. Marking time but excited somehow. Urgent but becalmed, the way Alexis himself felt far too often. He had an uncommonly good eye for seeing such things far ahead of his colleagues. When it came to empathising with Jews, he believed that he lived in a kind of vacuum of excellence. On the third day, a broad-faced older man calling himself Schulmann joined their team, accompanied by a very thin sidekick half his age. Alexis likened them to a Jewish Caesar and his Cassius.

The arrival of Schulmann and his assistant provided the good Alexis with some rare relief from the controlled fury of his own investigation, and from the tiresomeness of being dogged everywhere by the Silesian policeman, whose manner was beginning to resemble more that of a successor than an assistant. The first thing he observed about Schulmann was that he immediately raised the temperature of the Israeli team. Till Schulmann came, the six men had had an air of incompleteness about them. They had been polite, they had drunk no alcohol, they had patiently spread their nets and preserved among themselves the dark-eyed

Oriental cohesion of a fighting unit. Their self-control was discomfiting to those who did not share it, and when, over a quick lunch in the canteen, the ponderous Silesian chose to make jokes about kosher food and patronise them about the beauties of their homeland, allowing himself in passing a grossly insulting reference to the quality of Israeli wine, they received his homage with a courtesy that Alexis knew cost them blood. Even when he went on to discuss the revival of the Jewish *Kultur* in Germany, and the smart way in which the new Jews had cornered the Frankfurt and Berlin property markets, they still held their tongues, though the financial antics of *shtetl* Jews who had not answered the call to Israel secretly disgusted them quite as much as the ham-handedness of their hosts. Then, suddenly, with Schulmann's arrival, everything became clear in a different way. He was the leader they had been waiting for: Schulmann from Jerusalem, his arrival announced a few hours in advance by a puzzled phone call from Head-quarters in Cologne.

"They're sending an extra specialist, he'll make his own way to you."

"Specialist in what?" Alexis had demanded, who made a very un-German point of loathing people with qualifications.

Not given. But suddenly there he was -- not a specialist, to Alexis's eye, but a broad-headed, bustling veteran of every battle since Thermopylae, age between forty and ninety, squat and Slav and strong, and far more European than Hebrew, with a barrel chest and a wrestler's wide stride and a way of putting everyone at his ease; and this seething acolyte of his, who had not been mentioned at all. Not Cassius, perhaps; rather, your archetypal Dostoevsky student: starved, and in conflict with demons. When Schulmann smiled, the wrinkles that flew into his face had been made by centuries of water flowing down the same rock paths, and his eyes clamped narrow like a Chinaman's. Then, long after him, his sidekick smiled, echoing some twisted inner meaning. When Schulmann greeted you, his whole right arm swung in on you in a crablike punch fast enough to wind you if you didn't block it. But the sidekick kept his arms at his sides as if he didn't trust them out alone. When Schulmann talked, he fired off conflicting ideas like a spread of bullets, then waited to see which ones went home and which came back at him. The sidekick's voice followed like a stretcher-party, softly collecting up the dead.

"I'm Schulmann; glad to meet you, Dr. Alexis," said Schulmann, in a cheerfully accented English.

Just Schulmann.

No first name, no rank, no academic title, no branch or occupation; and the student didn't have a name at all -- or not for Germans, anyway. A people's general, Schulmann was, the way Alexis read him; a giver of hope, a power-drill, a taskmaster extraordinary; an alleged specialist who needed a room to himself and got one the same day -- the sidekick saw to it. Soon, from behind its closed door, Schulmann's incessant voice had the tone of an out-of-town attorney, probing and evaluating their work till now. You didn't have to be a Hebrew scholar to hear the why's and how's and when's and why-not's. An improviser, thought Alexis: a born urban guerrilla himself. When he was silent, Alexis heard that too, and wondered what the devil he was reading suddenly that was interesting enough to stop his mouth from working. Or were they praying? -- did they do that? Unless it was the sidekick's turn to speak, of course, in which case Alexis would not have heard even a whisper, for the boy's voice in German company had as little volume as his body.

But more than anything else, it was Schulmann's driven urgency that Alexis felt most strongly. He was a kind of human ultimatum, passing on to his team the pressures that were upon himself, imposing a scarcely bearable desperation on their labours. We can win, but we can also lose, he was saying, in the Doctor's lively imagination. And we have been too late for too long. Schulmann was their impresario, their manager, their general -- all that -- but he was himself a much-commanded man. So at least Alexis read him, and he was not always so wrong. He saw it in the hard and questioning way Schulmann's men looked to him, not for the

detail of their work but for its progress -- does it help? -- is it a step along the road? He saw it in Schulmann's habitual gesture of cramming back the sleeve of his jacket by grasping the thick left forearm, then twisting his wrist around as if it were someone else's, until the dial of his old steel watch returned his stare. So Schulmann has a deadline too, thought Alexis: there is a time bomb ticking under *him* as well; the sidekick has it in his briefcase.

The interplay between the two men fascinated Alexis -- a welcome distraction for him in his stress. When Schulmann took a walk around the Drosselstrasse and stood in the precarious ruins of the bombed house, throwing out his arm, expostulating, exami too long. Schulmann was their impresario, their manager, their general -- all that -- but he was himself a much-commanded man. So at least Alexis read him, and he was not always so wrong. He saw it in the hard and questioning way Schulmann's men looked to him, not for the detail of their work but for its progress -- does it help? -- is it a step along the road? He saw it in Schulmann's habitual gesture of cramming back the sleeve of his jacket by grasping the thick left forearm, then twisting his wrist around as if it were someone else's, until the dial of his old steel watch returned his stare. So Schulmann has a deadline too, thought Alexis: there is a time bomb ticking under *him* as well; the sidekick has it in his briefcase.

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Everything pointed to it. The zealous, introverted wife dreaming only of her sacred earth; the Labour Attaché's appalling sense of guilt; his absurdly over-generous reception of the girl Katrin, practically appointing himself her proxy brother in Elke's absence; his bizarre admission that whereas he had entered Elke's room, his wife would never do so. To Alexis, who had been in similar situations in his day, and was in one now -- guilt-torn nerves exposed to every tiny sexual breeze -- the signs were written all over the file, and secretly it gratified him that Schulmann had read them too. But if Cologne was adamant on the point, Bonn was nearly hysterical. The Labour Attaché was a public hero: a bereaved father, the husband of a fearfully maimed woman. He was the victim of an anti-Semitic outrage on German soil; he was an Israeli diplomat accredited to Bonn, by definition as respectable as any Jew yet invented. Who were the Germans, of all people, they begged him to consider, that they should expose such a man as an adulterer? The same night, the distraught Labour Attaché followed his child to Israel, and the television news bulletins led nationwide with a shot of his burly back lumbering up the gangway, and the ever-present Alexis, hat in hand, watching him go with stony respect.

Some of Schulmann's activities did not reach the ears of Alexis till after the Israeli team had flown home. He discovered, for instance, almost by accident but not quite, that Schulmann and his sidekick had together sought out the girl Elke independently of the German investigators and had persuaded her, at dead of night, to postpone her departure for Sweden so that the three of them could enjoy an entirely voluntary and well-paid private talk together. They spent another afternoon interviewing her in a hotel bedroom and, in complete contrast to the economy of their social efforts in other fields, blithely rode with her in the taxi to the airport. All this -- so Alexis guessed -- with the aim of finding out who her *real* friends were, and where she went to play when her boyfriend was safely restored to the military. And where she bought the marihuana and

amphetamines that they had found in the wreck of her room. Or, more likely, who had given them to her, and in whose arms she liked to lie and talk about herself and her employers when she was really turned on and relaxed. Alexis deduced this partly because by now his own people had brought him their confidential report on Elke, and the questions he ascribed to Schulmann were the same ones he would have liked to ask of her himself, if Bonn had not been putting the muzzle on him and screaming "hands off."

No dirt, they kept on saying. Let the grass grow over it first. And Alexis, who was by now fighting for his survival, took the hint and shut up, because with every day that passed the Silesian's stock was rising to the detriment of his own.

All the same, he would have laid good money on the kind of answers that Schulmann in his frantic and remorseless urgency might have coaxed from her between glances at that old sundial of a watch of his -- the pen-portrait of the virile Arab student or junior attaché from the outer diplomatic fringes, for instance -- or was he Cuban? -- with money to burn and the right little packets of stuff, and an unexpected willingness to listen. Much later, when it was too late to matter, Alexis also learned -- by way of the Swedish security service, who had also formed an interest in Elke's love life -- that Schulmann and his sidekick had actually produced, in the small hours while others slept, a collection of photographs of likely candidates. And that from them she had picked one out, an alleged Cypriot whom she had known only by his first name, Marius, which he required her to pronounce in the French manner. And that she had signed a loose statement for them to the effect -- "Yes, this is the Marius I slept with" -- which, as they gave her to understand, they needed for Jerusalem. Why did they? Alexis wondered. To buy off Schulmann's deadline somehow? As surety, to whip up credit back at base? Alexis understood these things. And the more he thought about them, the greater became his sense of affinity with Schulmann, of comradely understanding. You and I are one, he kept hearing himself thinking. We struggle, we feel, we see.

Alexis perceived all this profoundly, with great self-conviction.

The obligatory closing conference took place in the lecture hall, with the ponderous Silesian presiding over three hundred chairs, mostly empty, but among them the two groups, German and Israeli, clustered like nuptial families either side of the church aisle. The Germans were fleshed out with officials from the Ministry of the Interior and some voting-fodder from the Bundestag; the Israelis had their Military Attache from the Embassy with them, but several of their team, including Schulmann's emaciated sidekick, had already left for Tel Aviv. Or so it was said by his comrades. The rest assembled at eleven in the morning, to be greeted with a buffet table covered with a white cloth on which the telltale fragments from the explosion were set out like archaeological finds at the end of a long dig, each with its own little museum label in electric type. On a pegboard wall beside it they could examine the usual horror pictures -- in colour, for extra realism. At the door, a pretty girl, smiling too nicely, handed out memorial folders in plastic covers containing background data. If she had handed out candy or ice-cream, Alexis would not have been surprised. The German contingent chattered and craned their necks at everything, including the Israelis, who for their part preserved the mortal stillness of men for whom every wasted minute was a martyrdom. Only Alexis -- he was assured of it -- perceived and shared their secret agony, whatever its source.

We Germans are simply too much, he decided. We are the living end. He had expected, until an hour before, to be holding the floor himself. He had anticipated -- even privately prepared -- one terse flash of his lapidary style, one brisk English "Thank you, gentlemen" and out. It was not to be. The barons had reached their decisions and they wanted the Silesian for breakfast, lunch, and dinner; they wanted no Alexis, even for coffee. So he made a show of lounging ostentatiously at the back with his arms folded, affecting a careless interest while he fumed and empathised with the Jews. When everyone but Alexis was sitting, the Silesian made his entry, using that special pelvic walk which in Alexis's experience overcame a certain type of

German whenever he took the rostrum. After him trod a scared young man in a white coat, laden with a duplicate of the now celebrated scuffed grey suitcase complete with its Scandinavian Airlines Systems labels, which he put on the dais as if it were an oblation. Searching for his hero Schulmann, Alexis found him alone in an aisle seat, well to the back. He had put away his jacket and necktie and wore a pair of comfortable slacks, which, because of his generous waistline, ended a little short of his unfashionable shoes. His steel watch winked on his brown wrist; the whiteness of his shirt against his weathered skin gave him the benign look of someone about to leave on holiday.

Hang on and I'll come with you, Alexis thought wistfully, recalling his painful session with the barons.

The Silesian spoke English "out of regard for our Israeli friends." But also, Alexis suspected, out of regard for those of his supporters who had come to observe their champion's performance. The Silesian had attended the obligatory counter-subversion course in Washington, and spoke therefore the butchered English of an astronaut. By way of introduction, the Silesian told them that the outrage was the work of "radical left elements," and when he threw in a reference to the "Socialist over-indulgence of modern youth," there was some supportive shuffling of approval in the parliamentary chairs. Our dear Fuhrer himself would have put it no better, Alexis thought, but remained outwardly nonchalant. The blast, for architectural reasons, had tended upward, said the Silesian, addressing himself to a diagram that his assistant unfurled behind him, and had sheared the central structure clean out of the house, taking the top floor and hence the child's bedroom with it. In short, it was a big bang, thought Alexis savagely, so why not say so and shut up? But the Silesian was not given to shutting up. The best estimates put the charge at five kilograms. The mother had survived because she was in the kitchen. The kitchen was an *Anbau.* This sudden, unexpected use of a German word induced -- in the German speakers, at least -- a peculiar embarrassment.

"Was ist Anbau?" the Silesian muttered grumpily at his assistant, making everyone sit up and hunt for a translation.

"Annexe," Alexis called in reply before the rest, and won restrained laughter from the knowing, and less restrained irritation from the Silesian supporters' club.

"Annexe," the Silesian repeated in his best English and, ignoring the unwelcome source, slogged blindly on.

In my next life I shall be a Jew or a Spaniard or an Eskimo or just a fully committed anarchist like everybody else, Alexis decided. But a German I shall never be -- you do it once as a penance and that's it. Only a German can make an inaugural lecture out of a dead Jewish child.

The Silesian was talking about the suitcase. Cheap and nasty, of a type favoured by such unpersons as guestworkers and Turks. And Socialists, he might have added. Those interested could read about it in their folders or study the surviving fragments of its steel frame on the buffet table. Or they could decide, as Alexis had decided long ago, that both bomb and suitcase were a blind alley. But they could not escape listening to the Silesian, because it was the Silesian's day and this speech was his victory-roll over the deposed libertarian enemy, Alexis.

From the suitcase itself, he passed to its contents. The device was wedged in place with two sorts of wadding, gentlemen, he said. Wadding type no. 1 was old newspaper, shown by tests to have come from the Bonn editions of the Springer press over the last six months -- and very suitable too, thought Alexis. Type 2 was a sliced-up army-surplus blanket similar to the one now demonstrated by my colleague Mr. somebody from the state analytical laboratories. While the scared assistant held up a large grey blanket for their inspection, the Silesian proudly reeled off his other brilliant clues. Alexis listened wearily to the familiar recitation: the crimped end of a detonator...minuscule particles of undetonated explosive, confirmed as standard Russian plastic, known to the Americans as C4 and to the British as PE and to the Israelis as

whatever it was known as...the winder of an inexpensive wristwatch...the charred but still identifiable spring of a domestic clothespeg. In a word, thought Alexis, a classic set-up, straight out of bomb school. No compromising materials, no touches of vanity, no frills, beyond a kiddy-kit booby trap built into the inside angle of the lid. Except that with the stuff the kids were getting together these days, thought Alexis, a set-up like this one made you quite nostalgic for the good old-fashioned terrorists of the seventies.

The Silesian seemed to think so too, but he was making a dreadful joke about it: "We are calling this the bikini bomb!" he boomed proudly. "The minimum! No extras!"

"And no arrests!" Alexis called out recklessly, and was rewarded with an admiring and strangely knowing smile from Schulmann.

Brusquely bypassing his assistant, the Silesian now reached an arm into the suitcase and with a flourish extracted from it a piece of softwood on which the mock-up had been assembled, a thing like a toy racing-car circuit of thin, coated wire, ending in ten sticks of greyish plastic. As the uninitiated crowded round to take a closer look, Alexis was surprised to see Schulmann, hands in pockets, leave his place and amble over to join them. But why? Alexis asked of him mentally, his gaze fixed shamelessly upon him. Why so leisurely suddenly, when yesterday you had hardly the time to look at your battered watch? Abandoning his efforts at indifference, Alexis slipped quickly to his side. This is the way you make a bomb, the Silesian was suggesting, if you are cast in the conventional mould and want to blow up Jews. You buy a cheap watch like this one -- don't steal it, buy it at a big store at their peak shopping time and buy a couple of things either side of it to confuse the assistant's memory. Remove the hour hand. Drill a hole in the glass, put a drawing-pin in the hole, solder your electric circuit to the head of the drawing-pin with heavy glue. Now the battery. Now set the hand as close to the drawing-pin, or as far from it, as you wish. But allow, as a general rule, the shortest possible delay, in order that the bomb shall not be discovered and disarmed. Wind up the watch. Make sure the minute hand is still working. It is. Offer prayers to whoever you imagine made you, poke the detonator into the plastic. As the minute hand touches the shank of the pin, so the contact completes the electrical circuit and if the Lord is good, the bomb goes off.

To demonstrate this marvel, the Silesian removed the disarmed detonator and the ten sticks of demonstration plastic explosive and replaced them with a small light-bulb suitable for a hand-torch.

"Now I prove to you how the circuit works!" he shouted.

Nobody doubted that it worked, most knew the thing by heart, but for a moment, all the same, it seemed to Alexis that the bystanders shared an involuntary shudder as the bulb cheerily winked its signal. Only Schulmann appeared immune. Perhaps he really has seen too much, thought Alexis, and the pity has finally died in him. For Schulmann was ignoring the bulb completely. He remained stooping over the mock-up, smiling broadly and contemplating it with the critical attention of a connoisseur.

A parliamentarian, wishing to display his excellence, enquired why the bomb did not go off on time. "This bomb was fourteen hours in the house," he objected, in silky English. "A minute hand turns for one hour at most. An hour hand for twelve. How do we account, please, for fourteen hours in a bomb that can only wait twelve maximum?"

For every question, the Silesian had a lecture ready. He gave one now, while Schulmann, still with his indulgent smile, started to probe gently around the edges of the mockup with his thick fingers, as if he had lost something in the wadding below. Possibly the watch had failed, said the Silesian. Possibly the car journey to the Drosselstrasse had upset the mechanism. Possibly the Labour Attaché, in laying the suitcase on Elke's bed, had jolted the circuit, said the Silesian. Possibly the watch, being cheap, had stopped and restarted. Possibly anything, thought Alexis, unable to contain his irritation.

But Schulmann had a different suggestion, and a more ingenious one: "Or possibly this bomber did not scrape enough paint off the watch hand," he said, in a kind of distracted aside as he turned his attention to the hinges of the facsimile suitcase. Hauling an old service penknife from his pocket, he selected from its attachments a plump spike and began probing behind the head of the hinge-pin, confirming to himself the ease with which it could be removed. "Your laboratory people, they scraped off *all* the paint. But maybe this bomber is not so scientific as your laboratory people," he said as he snapped his knife shut with a loud clunk. "Not so able. Not so neat in his constructions."

But it was a girl, Alexis urgently objected in his mind; why does Schulmann say *he* suddenly, when we are supposed to be thinking of a pretty girl in a blue dress? Unaware apparently of how -- for the moment, at least -- he had upstaged the Silesian in the full flight of his performance, Schulmann transferred his attention to the homemade booby trap inside the lid, gently tugging at the stretch of wire that was stitched into the lining and joined to a dowel in the mouth of the clothespeg.

"There is something interesting, Herr Schulmann?" the Silesian enquired, with angelic self-restraint. "You have found a *clue*, perhaps? Tell us, please. We shall be interested."

Schulmann pondered this generous offer.

"Too little wire," he announced as he returned to the buffet table and hunted among its grisly exhibits. "Over here you have the remains of seventy-seven centimetres of wire." He was brandishing a charred skein. It was wound on itself like a woollen dummy, with a loop round its waist holding it together. "In your reconstruction, you have twenty-five centimetres maximum. Why are we missing half a metre of wire from your reconstruction?"

There was a moment's puzzled silence before the Silesian gave a loud, indulgent laugh.

"But, Herr Schulmann -- this was *spare* wire," he explained, as if reasoning with a child. "For the circuitry. Just common wire. When the bomber had made the device, there was evidently wire over, so he -- or she -- they threw it into the suitcase. This is for tidiness, this is normal. It was *spare* wire," he repeated. *"Übrig.* Without technical significance. *Sag ihm doch übrig."*

"Left over," someone translated needlessly. "It has no meaning, Mr. Schulmann. It is *left over."*

The moment was past, the gap had sealed, and the next glimpse Alexis had of Schulmann, he was poised discreetly at the door, in the act of leaving, his broad head turned part way towards Alexis, his watch arm raised, but in the manner of somebody consulting his stomach rather than the time. Their eyes did not quite meet, yet Alexis knew for certain that Schulmann was waiting for him, willing him across the room and saying *lunch.* The Silesian was still droning on, the audience still standing aimlessly round him like a bunch of grounded airline passengers. Detaching himself from its fringe, Alexis tiptoed quickly after the departing Schulmann. In the corridor, Schulmann grasped his arm in a spontaneous gesture of affection. On the pavement -- it was a lovely sunny day again -- both men took off their jackets and Alexis afterwards remembered very well how Schulmann rolled his up like a desert pillow while Alexis hailed a taxi and gave the name of an Italian restaurant on a hilltop on the far side of Bad Godesberg. He had taken women there before, but never men, and Alexis, in all things the voluptuary, was always conscious of first times.

On the drive they barely spoke. Schulmann admired the view and beamed about with the serenity of one who has earned his Sabbath, though it was midweek. His plane, Alexis recalled, was scheduled to leave Cologne in early evening. Like a child being taken out from school, Alexis counted the hours this would leave them, assuming Schulmann had no other engagements, a ridiculous but wonderful assumption. At the

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