

The slow decline of western culture at the hands of feckless, weak, progressive socialist leaders that gave tacit approval to the invasion of Europe and America by immigrants that will never assimilate.

My Sicilian Father: Exile in America, the Promised Land

By Lewis Allen Lambert

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TIME TO SEND IN THE CLOWNS

The tacit support of
unfettered immigration by Europe
and America will
destroy Western culture



Lewis Allen Lambert

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Time to Send in The Clowns

While walking to the school for his interview, JC reflected upon his accomplishments since he graduated college more than 20 years ago.

FROM CAMPUS TO CHAOS

JC was a 1987 graduate of Princeton University, with a degree in Middle Eastern studies and a minor in Arabic language studies. He also studied the Koran and knew it as well as any Muslim scholar. As a ROTC student, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the army and was immediately sent to a Department of Defense advanced language school to hone his language skills. The 15-month program was a total immersion in the language. He learned latter that during his language training, several government agencies tried to persuade the army to transfer him to their agency.

After JC graduated, he was sent to Ranger training in Georgia. As he neared completion of this tough physical test, he heard rumors he was going to be assigned to a Special Forces unit.

As most rumors in the army went, it wasn't true. Instead, as a newly promoted first lieutenant, he was assigned to the American military attaché's staff in Amman, Jordan. This was a highly unusual assignment for a junior officer especially one with no field experience outside of a training environment. Most unusual was the fact that JC wasn't assigned to liaise with the Jordanian military, as would be expected; rather he was assigned to become the CIA station chief's eyes and ears.

JC was thrust into the world of diplomatic social events to include wining and dining foreign military personnel from many countries. On occasion, he served as the Ambassador's personal interpreter.

He spent two years gathering intelligence information and winning the admiration of the civilian and military representatives of the Arab nations' representatives assigned to Jordan. As a non-Muslim, he amazed his ambassador's guests and his new

colleagues in both his knowledge of their language and the depth of his understanding of the Koran. He was invited to Friday prayer services by several of his newly won admirers. At first, he begged off but once the CIA station chief found out about it, JC was asked to accept those invitations. Whatever the CIA had in mind for JC, it was above his pay grade.

In 1990, after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, Captain McKenzie was assigned to a small intelligence gathering unit that was deployed with the lead coalition troops attacking the Iraqi invaders. His unit's role was to process captured Iraqi prisoners to obtain as much current intelligence information as possible.

Upon reviewing the interrogation reports, JC realized the enlisted troops had no valuable information. He personally spoke with several prisoners just to satisfy his curiosity. He noted that none of the Iraqi prisoners in his sector were officers. JC learned that as soon as the coalition forces made contact with Iraqi units, their officers withdrew to the rear to places unknown. Those who didn't flee were killed in battle. Though the enlisted troops were forbidden to surrender, most did so when their officers fled. This small tidbit of information was valuable to intelligence analysts about the character of the regular Iraqi Army officer corps. The Republican Guard, the elite force of Saddam Hussein's regime was quite different and much more disciplined. Unfortunately for JC, none were found in his sector.

The Gulf War lasted about 100 days and with the flow of prisoners ebbing, JC was sent back to the United States for intense intelligence field training. So far JC thought his army career was on a sharp detour from a normal one. After six months of learning the covert world's tradecraft, he was assigned to the embassy in Cairo. Once again, JC became the toast of the diplomatic corps. He hated his job and the oppressive Cairo heat. He was bored, lonely and longing for some female companionship. Though several wives of

diplomats and some of the older daughters of western officials assigned to Cairo threw themselves at him, JC dared not play the deadly game of intriguing sexual liaisons in dirty little Cairo hotels. Instead, JC focused on satisfying his lust with single female military officers whom he had met at social events. When duty called, he gladly answered allowing several female officers to fulfill their desires as well with as little risk as possible. It was a win-win situation for all.

Near the end of his Cairo assignment, JC was selected for early promotion to major. JC understood a below-the-zone selection, or early selection was based on a superb military record but his credentials for promotion were certainly far from that. The only other reason for his early promotion, he surmised, was to keep him from resigning his commission since he was well past his required initial length of service.

In 1997, JC was assigned to the Arabic language section of the National Security Agency where he managed an intelligence analysis branch. Though much of the voice intercepts were run through translation software, JC's job was to parse the names of Arab diplomats and military officers and prepare a daily report on their activities. JC was surprised to find many of his former friends from the Arab world on the intercepts. He realized his drinking buddies, some Muslims do drink when away from home, were on a watch list. For nearly two years, JC had no other function to perform and didn't know what was done with his reports. For whatever reason, someone was tracking the movements and associations of senior Arab officials and military leaders.

Near the end of his assignment, JC was provided with a list of names to extract from the translated intercepts. They were definitely not the folks he previously dealt with. When he inquired about the names, he was told they were terrorists who had

planned, controlled, financed or engaged in attacks on Israel and on westerners in both the Middle East and in Europe.

In late 2000, JC requested another assignment. He was tired of being an administrative clerk. After nearly ten years of being a translator and a schmoozer, he wanted a real job, one where he was stimulated and challenged.

In early 2001, he was assigned to a Delta Force training unit. For the first time in his army career, JC was tested physically and mentally a hundred times more than his Ranger and language training programs combined. More than 60 percent of his fellow candidates were eliminated before the program was half over. He and his fellow survivors were reminded time and again by their instructors not to focus on the guys who didn't make it, but to focus on themselves and the buddy assigned to them. On his worst days, JC thought about his time as a schmoozer in the Middle East. In hindsight, he thought he really had it good.

The day the twin towers came down was supposed to be JC's final day of training. Graduation ceremonies were cancelled and the 25 remaining candidates were assigned to various Delta Force units. For nearly a month his unit trained for various scenarios where they might be deployed in case the country went to war.

In late October, 2001, JC boarded an aircraft headed to Germany. It was dark when they landed. After filing into a large hanger, the Delta Force team members exchanged their uniforms for winter gear. JC noted it wasn't military issue but rather clothing which was indigenous to Afghanistan. There were other members of various military units in the process of exchanging uniforms for local Afghan clothing. He spotted a small unit of Marines and a larger contingent of Special Forces.

On the long flight to Kabul, JC got to know some of his new team members quite well. Three of them spoke either Pashtu or Urdu. His Arabic language skills probably wouldn't be tested; at

least that was JC's assumption. The team was told not to shave until told to do so. Between the new clothes and the unshaven faces, JC realized he was not going to be with the regular army any longer.

JC's team was inserted into a small camp at the base of an Afghan mountain range bordering Pakistan. All the members of his team, except for the medic and himself were trained snipers. Their job was two-fold. First, they were to track down the remnants of the Al-Qaeda forces that were training in Afghanistan prior to the 9/11 attacks. This included their leader, Osama bin Laden. Once found, JC's team was to engage them and either capture or kill them if they had the opportunity. They were to call in air strikes as the terrorists fled to Pakistan. The few prisoners captured by the team weren't Afghanis. Most came from Arabic speaking countries. JC was asked to interrogate them. The CIA controlled interrogation sessions were far from civilized; some bordered on barbaric. He was reminded if any of his team members were captured, it would be far worse for them.

The team returned to their base camp as Air Force and Navy fighter bombers pounded the mountain trails where his team had previously tracked the fleeing terrorists. After four months of traipsing up and down mountains in search of Al-Qaeda terrorists, JC's team returned to Germany for rest and relaxation.

His team was reminded not to shave since they would be returning to Afghanistan. Instead of being billeted on a military base, they were given civilian clothes and taken to a very nice hotel in Bavaria. The beer flowed, German women became targets of opportunity, and rest and relaxation were sacrificed for physical pleasure.

One week later they were back on an aircraft headed to Afghanistan. Once in Kabul they were given the latest intelligence briefings. They were told that several high value prisoners were

captured and turned over to the CIA. Some disappeared off the grid while others were taken to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where a new detention facility was being constructed.

The new mission for JC's team was to hunt Taliban forces wherever they were hiding. Outside of Kabul, Afghanis didn't trust the coalition forces and they feared reprisals from the Taliban if they appeared to cooperate with those forces.

Delta Force teams were assigned to various rural operational areas to win the hearts and minds of the local tribal leaders to cooperate with them. The campaign worked quite well. JC's unit captured or killed more than 100 Taliban terrorists over a three-month period.

JC remained in Afghanistan for another year. When he departed, he thought he was done with the war. After only 10 days in the U.S., he returned to Germany and was assigned to a small group of special operators, all of whom spoke a smattering of Arabic. It was February, 2003, a month before the invasion of Iraq.

As the senior officer, JC was given command of the unit, his second and hopefully the last of his career. JC was told he and his team would be inserted into Baghdad where they would link up with indigenous CIA assets. His team would become the eyes and ears of the Pentagon before the beginning of the Iraq war. The team was to identify targets for Navy and Air Force aircraft which were to be launched prior to the land invasion. In addition, they were to locate any downed aircrews that survived and rescue them before the Iraqis grabbed them. JC didn't know how many such teams were in Baghdad, but it had to be several to cover such a large area.

After the invasion and until several days after Baghdad was occupied by coalition forces, JC and his team were given the job of hunting the former regime's bad guys, all of whom had their pictures printed on the decks of playing cards. The cards were

distributed to the coalition units in Iraq. The cards became a widespread collector's item and found their way outside of Iraq.

JC spent the remainder of 2003 in Baghdad. He had an opportunity to return home for one week. He spent part of his time in the Pentagon being debriefed as well as briefing senior staff officers on his activities in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Though JC tried not to be negative about the situation in Afghanistan, he couldn't mask his feelings. His audience wasn't impressed by his candid assessment.

He didn't know if his outspoken opinions resulted in his next assignment being a form of punishment, but he was sent to Gitmo as the commander of the military interrogation unit. While serving in that capacity, he was informed he was on the Lieutenant Colonel promotion list.

Most of the prisoners at Club Gitmo had been thoroughly interrogated by the units that captured them or by the CIA. Anyone with valuable information had been dealt with. JC's responsibilities were to follow up on initial prisoner interrogations and to take a last shot at the new arrivals for any information of value. On occasion they dug out a valuable nugget which buoyed his team's morale.

In the winter of 2005, he was assigned to the CIA station chief in Yemen. There were rumors that Osama bin Laden was hiding in the country where he had lived before. JC became part of a CIA-led pursuit team following leads that were generated by captured terrorists. This was the first time JC felt as though he wasn't in control of his own destiny. He engaged in several fire fights and was wounded on the last one.

He was sent to a military hospital in Germany to recuperate, during which time he seriously considered retiring when he reached 20 years of service. He had little time for himself and because of his training and skills, and the fact he was single, he saw more

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combat and intelligence missions than most of his fellow soldiers. Since he had great academic credentials, he believed he could get a much better paying job with practically no risk and lots of time for a personal life.

THE LAST MISSION

In October, 2006, JC was given travel orders to Israel with no specific assignment. He was met by an embassy staffer who drove him to a hotel. The room was reserved and paid for in advance. Not knowing, nor wanting to know, what was in store for him, JC decided to take a long hot shower, eat a sumptuous meal, and sleep for as long as possible.

At daybreak the following morning, JC was startled by a loud knock on the door. He thought it might be room service with a welcome to Tel Aviv breakfast. He ambled out of bed and opened the door. The man on the other side wasn't room service. JC invited him in thinking he was an embassy staffer.

"You have to come with me. Dress in civilian clothes and hurry up," the visitor said.

"I don't know who you are or why I have to go with you," JC responded.

Not knowing why, he was in Israel, or whether to trust anyone other than an American, JC quizzed the man standing before him.

"I am with Mossad and we are going to a meeting," the visitor responded.

JC was normally a vigilant perceptive person, but he was having a problem getting his arms around what was going on. Upon further questioning the visitor told him they had a meeting with the CIA station chief in 20 minutes. JC decided to let the chips fall where they may and leave the comfort of his room for an expected boring meeting.

They climbed into a late model Cadillac SUV and headed to their rendezvous with the CIA station chief. They parked in front of an office building, took the elevator to the 10th floor, and entered a

conference room that was guarded by several mean looking hombres. The language he heard around him was Hebrew, so he assumed they were friendly. JC and Mr. Mossad sat together on one side of a long table and waited for additional attendees.

Two men speaking English entered the room and sat across from JC and Mr. Mossad. One of them introduced himself as Colonel Mike Jeffers, the American military attaché to Israel. JC assumed the other one was the CIA station chief, though he didn't say anything. The attaché pulled out a folder from his briefcase and shared it with the station chief.

"Apparently, Lt. Colonel James C. McKenzie, you've had quite an interesting career so far," Colonel Jeffers remarked.

JC didn't reply

"Our government wants you to work with the Israelis for the next few months," the colonel said.

Again, JC remained silent.

"The Pentagon has approved your assignment but it is strictly voluntary," the colonel continued.

"I would need more details before I'd commit to anything," JC replied.

Mr. Mossad finally introduced himself as Ari and began a long story of intrigue but to JC wasn't very intriguing.

The Israelis had inserted several covert operatives into Lebanon and Gaza. Most were Israelis of Arab descent. For reasons not discussed at this meeting, the non-Arab Israeli agents were found and executed. Only one managed to escape to Israel. The Arab-Israeli agents were also compromised. Two were executed and two were turned under duress and sent back to Israel as double agents. The Israelis quickly took them into custody to determine why and how they were caught, and what their captors had over them for them to agree to work against Israel.

The two Arab agents had no idea why their covers were compromised but they suspected someone in Mossad informed on them. The leverage was the threat of killing their families residing in Syria and in east Jerusalem. The Israelis allowed them to remain as faux spies so Mossad could monitor communications between their handlers and their new agents. All of this was of little interest to JC; he was waiting for the punch line.

It didn't take long for Ari to deliver it. Mossad was convinced it had a mole within its organization. It was therefore pointless to train another covert agent, to develop a plausible cover story, and to insert that agent. The solution to this problem was to ask the CIA to develop the cover story and with his assistance insert one of their covert operatives. The agent already trained for this job was sitting in the room. All eyes locked on to JC.

"Why would a new operation be safer than the previous ones?" JC asked.

"I would be the only one in Mossad who would know about the operation," Ari said.

"I'm not sure I want to trust my life to a man I don't know," JC responded.

"I've known Ari for 15 years and I would trust him with my life," the attaché added.

"Then perhaps you should go on this assignment instead," JC quipped.

No one in the room laughed.

JC told Ari and the two Americans he wanted all the details including the cover story and the mission's objectives before he would make a decision. They agreed.

For the next two weeks, Ari and JC spent long hours in the American embassy outlining the plan and the cover story. Preparation for the mission dragged on longer than expected. Apparently, Ari and the CIA were having trouble with the cover

story. Since non-Arabs would be conspicuous, inserting a foreigner without a strong cover story, would be suicidal. They really needed something that would make Hamas accept JC.

JC suggested he could be an American soldier who deserted his unit in Iraq, escaped to Syria, and found his way to Gaza. Ari listened, took notes but made no indication of approval. After thinking about it for a few minutes, Ari said they needed a reason why he found his way to Gaza of all places. The meeting ended without a resolution.

The following day, the CIA station chief began the meeting with an interesting question.

“Why are we sending a covert operative to Gaza?”

“Because Mossad needs someone on the ground who can report on the locations of rocket facilities so the IAF can take them out,” Ari responded.

“It might be better for our operative to be located in Lebanon and report on Hezbollah militants and any Al-Qaeda leaders working with them, after all Hezbollah is a greater threat to Israel,” the CIA station chief added.

“A cover story may be easier to construct for a role in Lebanon than in Gaza,” JC offered.

Everyone agreed to resume in the morning.

After a few visits to Jerusalem, JC’s interest in Judaism was piqued. It was the only major monotheistic religion he hadn’t studied in depth. He began with Hebrew lessons from someone recommended by Ari. He requested a total immersion course as he had previously done with Arabic. Ari also arranged for a Talmudic scholar to teach JC about Judaism. The days were more interesting since JC loved an academic environment.

The cover story became a reality. The CIA was testing it for any holes. Basically, the story was not too far from the original one. JC would be a Canadian of Arab descent, who fought with Al-Qaeda

in Iraq and in Yemen. He fled to Lebanon because there was a large price on his head and he would be safer with Hezbollah. The Israelis, of course had to have the American and Canadian governments issue reward notices so they would become well-known in the region.

JC requested the proper documentation so he could prove he was Canadian. He wanted time to refresh his memory with the names of the terrorist leaders with whom he allegedly served. Preferably they would be either in Gitmo or dead. The terrorists had an outstanding intelligence network and they could certainly check up on him. But JC knew dates, names and places so he was certain he could sustain a thorough background check. He requested a reasonable back story about his family, his childhood, and where he went to school. He could never misjudge the terrorists' abilities to gather information about him.

Since JC would be inserted on January 2nd. he decided to remain in his hotel room through Christmas. Room service became JC's surrogate family. He never left his room. He had the beginnings of a smart beard that he needed for his cover.

Something else occurred during his self-imposed hermit life, he thought of Gabrielle and wondered if she ever had the opportunity to visit Israel. The man that was thrown out of Gabrielle's life because he wasn't a Jew was about to risk his life to help Israel; how ironic.

JC felt confident he could withstand Hezbollah's scrutiny. His cover story that he came to Lebanon to help fight the holy war against Israel would complement his fighting the infidels in Yemen and Iraq.

Ari visited JC in the hotel.

"How are your Judaism studies coming along? Are you serious about converting?"

"I am progressing and yes I am considering it, but I can hardly bring my reading material with me to Lebanon."

Ari scheduled a meeting for the next day to go over the insertion plan. Obviously, he couldn't discuss it over the phone, so they moved JC to a Mossad facility.

Ari spent most of the day with JC going over his cover story. He was shown a very detailed map where he should spend his time during the day. It was a café where many Islamic radicals met to exchange information but he was never to remain too long if no one engaged him in conversation. JC had to hang out every day until someone decided to speak with him. Though he wore a beard and had Mediterranean features, he was no Arab, at least under close scrutiny.

He had to be polite and answer a few questions about his presence in Lebanon, especially in that particular Hezbollah controlled neighborhood. Eventually someone of standing among the more radical Islamists would get more curious and want to take him somewhere else for further "consultation". JC had to let his cover story out piecemeal so the terrorists maintained their interest while they vetted him.

On the first day in January, JC spent the entire day reviewing the names and places he had occasion to fight the infidels and the names of some of the leaders who were now either dead or in Gitmo. In the evening, the CIA station chief visited him. He wanted to go over the mission, its objectives and how JC would communicate with the network working in Lebanon; a network that wasn't known to Mossad.

JC had to use the tradecraft he learned several years ago. He was never to have a face-to-face meeting with anyone other than the terrorists. He was given a list of code words that corresponded to potential targets, specific individuals, and locations of weapons' caches. His primary objective was to locate the newer longer range

missiles Hezbollah recently received from Iran. Most of his dead drops were in the Christian neighborhoods. JC had to travel at night to find his drops. This area was also his safe haven in case he had to disappear.

JC was quite apprehensive on the day he was to be inserted. He only felt this way a few times when he was in Iraq and Afghanistan. It wasn't really fear, but a decidedly uncomfortable feeling about the unknown.

At five in the afternoon, he climbed into to a small tarp covered truck. He was accompanied by two other men, neither of whom was known to him. During the three-hour journey no one spoke. One of the men offered JC a drink of bottled water. He also slipped JC a piece of paper along with the bottle. He was thankful for the water but couldn't read the note in the dark truck. While he struggled to see the few words the man who gave him the bottle handed him a small flashlight.

The note was from Ari. It read the man that gave him the note would take him into Lebanon through a safe border crossing. He would be dropped off near a small hotel where he was expected to spend one night. In the morning someone would come to escort him to the location where he would remain for the duration. He tore the note up into tiny pieces and let them fly from his hand out the back of the truck.

Around 8:15 p.m. the two men got out. JC remained seated. There was conversation in Hebrew that he couldn't understand. When he was summoned to step out, he noted his guide was armed.

He spoke to JC in Arabic and said to follow closely behind him, and to stop when he stopped. He was told not to say a word. They walked for another two hours. By this time JC had to pee and he was very hungry. The man told JC to take a rest and to do whatever he had to do to relieve himself. He left JC on the side of

a small road. JC relieved himself and then sat down and waited. The man was gone for at least an hour. When he returned, he didn't say anything except to get up and follow him. Twenty minutes later they reached a small town that was well lit with street lights. It even had traffic lights.

JC had to know where he was. He finally broke his silence and asked where they were. The man said they were in Lebanon near the Syrian border. They walked for a few more minutes and entered a small rundown hotel. He was sure this wasn't a favorite vacation spot for westerners in the old days. JC approached the desk clerk and asked for a room. The clerk stared at him knowing very well that he was a foreigner and not an Arab. He asked for his documents. JC presented him with his Canadian passport. They exchanged pleasantries while the clerk recorded his information.

"What brings you to this hotel?" The clerk asked.

JC turned around to see what his guide was doing, but he was gone.

"I'm heading north to join the freedom fighters."

JC wasn't very convincing but his native fluency in the language together were quite convincing. He'd bet that when he woke up the next morning someone would be waiting to speak with him.

The CIA had arranged for someone to meet him and take him to the suburbs near Beirut. He only had a password to exchange. JC asked for something to eat and some bottled water. The clerk looked at his watch and then picked up the phone. He handed JC his key and said he'd take something up to him within the hour.

The room was Spartan; a cot with a thin mattress covered with dust was all that was in the room. The overhead light flickered on and off. He took off his coat and shoes and rested on the bed. Only a knock on the door kept him from sleeping.

He was handed a bowl of some sort of mush, a few pieces of bread and two warm bottles of water. His hunger had no rules regarding what passed his lips. He used the foul-smelling toilet that was equipped with cardboard thick toilet paper. He was grateful for that bit of comfort. He went back to bed until the roosters started to crow.

He assumed he could find a half-way decent restaurant nearby. As he asked the morning clerk where he could find one, the door suddenly swung open with a bang and two black uniformed men stormed into the small foyer. They began to question JC.

"Who are you and what do you want here?" one of them shouted.

"No need to shout," he replied.

"I've had a long journey and I am here in your country because I want to be here."

He handed over his passport which was conveniently well worn and covered with blood stains.

"Where are you from?"

Obviously neither of them could read.

"I am from Canada. I came to Afghanistan in 2001 to train with Al-Qaeda. I fought the Americans for two years and followed Osama into the Bora Bora Mountains."

"You will have to come with us to verify your story."

JC didn't know if this was good news or not. Perhaps he was going to get in with the right crowd earlier than expected. They told him to sit in the back seat of their car. They headed north for an hour or so. JC's belly was growling so loud they all heard it. They parked the car and the three of them got out and entered a fairly nice restaurant. The two goons stuck him with the bill.

For the remainder of the trip, JC was told to wear a black hood. With the sun bearing down on his right side he knew they were still driving north. JC could have sworn he smelled sea air. He

figured they were driving along the coast toward Beirut. JC was able to look down at his watch; it was a little after eleven in the morning. They were in traffic from the sound of horns and the stop and go driving.

JC was surprised when one of his companions addressed him.

"Hey, Canadian have you ever been to Beirut before?"

"I've never had the pleasure. I understand it's a beautiful city."

Both of them laughed. One of them said the Israelis have done much damage to it.

"Do you hate the Americans as much as the Israelis?"

"That's why I'm here, to fight the occupiers."

"You speak excellent Arabic for a westerner."

"I have been living in Arab speaking countries for six years, so I had lots of time to practice."

They made a sharp turn and pulled into a covered parking space. He was led out of the car and up two flights of steps. They sat him down and pulled his hood off. He was in a 12 by 12 room with one small covered window. There was a table in front of him. He was left alone for 30 minutes. When the door opened behind him, he was immediately surrounded by a half dozen black shirts. A tall man with gold teeth sat in front of him.

"Welcome to Beirut, Canadian. Are you here as a tourist?"

"You have my passport. Does it look like I came through immigration?" JC retorted.

"Perhaps you should tell us what brings you here."

"I will be glad to if I could use the toilet and have a bottle of water."

Surprisingly they acquiesced to his request. Did they sense they had the real deal or were they just giving him a long leash?

JC began his story from the time he went to Afghanistan in 2001 until the time he left Iraq in 2006. He dropped a few names

of Al-Qaeda leaders he fought with and the names of the battles he participated in. They interrupted him to ask questions which he answered. He didn't want to seem too rehearsed so he stopped to think and corrected himself a few times. He was completely relaxed.

At one point the man with the gold teeth spoke to him in French. JC replied that he was from British Vancouver and never learned French. He continued with the time he was wounded and taken to Syria for medical treatment. He said it then he decided to leave Syria and come to Lebanon.

"Why would you leave your fellow freedom fighters?" Gold teeth asked him.

"I needed to rest. While I was in the hospital, I thought about what was important to me. The Americans changed their tactics and added thousands of additional troops. I admit I didn't want to die In Iraq. I'm not a Muslim; I didn't want to be a martyr. I wanted to fight for a just cause so I decided to come here."

"That's a compelling story. What do you think you can provide us that we don't already have?"

"I have combat experience. I was a leader of men and I am motivated by a good cause."

JC knew he wasn't that compelling but he needed to buy some time until he was contacted by whomever the CIA had in the area. If Hezbollah wasn't convinced, they might put him to a test.

"We will check into your story. In the meantime, you are free to go. We will be watching you."

JC knew there were numerous westerners fighting with Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Iraq. A few were from Canada. One was captured that he knew about and two were killed. Terrorists don't keep records on who was killed or captured, so he was probably safe.

He decided to find a comfortable but out-of-the mainstream hotel as close to the Christian area as possible. But first he wanted to treat himself to a great meal. Beirut was once known as the Paris of the Middle East. He expected to find something of that era but there were only a few cafes open that served a full meal.

JC finally found a well-attended café filled with older Arab men. He checked out the menu which had ten variations of lamb. So, lamb it would be. Not many people seemed interested in him even though he was a stranger in a neighborhood café.

The food was excellent. He was more than satisfied. As he sat there thinking of his next move, he realized he was disoriented with respect to where the Christian sector was located. He retraced the steps in his mind from where he was questioned to where he thought he had to go. He used the coast as starting point and then recalled what direction he walked to find this café. He figured he was about four miles west of where he wanted to go.

JC knew if he saw a church spire or a cross somewhere on the skyline, he would be close. He also reminded himself he was being followed. He didn't want to ask someone in Arabic where he could find a church, not a smart move.

He kept heading east until he found a policeman. Hopefully he was just a local cop and not part of the Hezbollah mafia. Since JC only knew of one landmark in the Christian area, he told the policeman he was a tourist who was trying to find a friend. When JC gave him the name of the landmark the policeman's eyes grew larger. He asked JC if his friend was a Christian. JC said he didn't know his religion and didn't care to know. The policeman smiled and pointed toward the direction JC was headed.

JC was certain that whoever followed him would stop and ask the policeman what they talked about. JC had to lose his tail. He put his knowledge of tradecraft to work and made the moves that

would cause his tail to lose him. JC prayed only one person was following him.

JC came upon a small church. Was this to be his safe haven? He walked around the building but dared not enter it. He found a nearby café and ordered an espresso. If his contact had a photo of him then sitting there in the open could possibly spark an approach.

On the first day no one came to him. He repeated this routine two more days making certain he lost his tail. Coming to the same place, albeit at different times of the day, for three consecutive days would certainly seem suspicious. It would probably result in another round of questioning. He also remembered being told he was not to contact anyone rather to wait until someone contacted him

On the third day JC chose a different café, one block further away from the church. He sat there for two hours until the sun slipped below the horizon. The street lights came on. JC turned around to watch the people coming from the church. He wanted to make sure they all could see his face.

When he turned back around, he came face to face with a man sitting at his table. It was Ari!

“What the fuck are you doing here?” JC muttered in English.

“I have the same question of you. You were to wait until you were contacted at the café where the radicals frequented.” Ari replied.

JC told him what had occurred to him since he crossed the border. Ari wasn’t pleased that Hezbollah picked him up so soon for questioning. That meant his contact might be compromised if JC was being followed. On the other hand, if they checked him out, things might move a bit faster.

“I will inform your contact of what has transpired so far. Now show me on this map where they took you for questioning.”

"I can't be specific, Ari. The building I was questioned in was about there, about a quarter of a mile from the sea," JC said.

"I know it well. It is an old police building. You were lucky they didn't take you to the basement where they really interrogate suspects. It is a hall of horrors," Ari lamented.

"So, you are quite familiar with the best that Beirut has to offer," JC said with a laugh.

"I spent two months in that place. I didn't find it amusing."

JC's attempt at humor backfired again. What must Ari think of him?

"I don't expect Hezbollah will give you the keys to the city. They may give you some mundane jobs to do to support their missile attacks on Israel. If they ever ask you to enter Israel to spot potential targets, you must insist you can't go because of the price on your head," Ari lectured.

"You think they'll trust me to do that so soon?"

"Perhaps not, the best we can hope for is they ask you to be a military adviser."

"But these terrorists know everything there is to know about asymmetrical warfare," JC countered.

"Just do what they ask without endangering yourself or your mission. Remember you are here to identify specific targets."

"There are some things I won't do, Ari. I won't kill an innocent person."

"And why not; how many innocent civilians did you kill in Afghanistan?"

"But that was war, Ari. Besides civilians weren't targeted though I admit some were killed by my teams."

"For Israel, this is war and you are fighting this war with us," Ari said raising his voice.

"I understand but I will do everything possible to avoid killing an innocent person."

"I won't be seeing you until you return to Israel. I have to leave now, my friend. Keep your head in the game and make sure you return."

With that, Ari stood up and in a second or two he was lost in the crowd. JC felt abandoned.

He returned to his hotel and sat in the lobby sipping a glass of tea. Since he lost his tail, his new friends must be wondering where he went. They'll know soon enough when he returned to his hotel. Before he had a chance to finish his tea, a man in a Hezbollah uniform entered the hotel lobby and sat across from him. He recognized him as one of his tails.

"Where were you today, Canadian?" he said in a brusque tone.

"I thought I was free to go, so I went where I wanted to go," JC retorted.

Black shirt didn't smile. JC ordered him a tea with no comment.

"If your people don't want me to work with you, I will head south to Gaza."

"Why are you in such a rush, Canadian? We have lots of time to consider your offer. Is someone pulling your strings?"

"I work alone. No one is pulling my strings. I will remain in Beirut for three more days and then I'll leave. I might go south or back to Syria, I'm not sure yet."

"You do what you have to do, Canadian. We've survived without you and we will continue to do so."

With that he got up and left. JC figured this wasn't an ordinary foot soldier otherwise he wouldn't have engaged him in conversation. That night JC went to bed convinced he had screwed up the mission.

The next morning JC dutifully went to the café where the radicals congregated. People stared at him like he was from Mars.

All heads followed his movement as he struggled to find an empty table. He finally had to ask a person sitting by himself if he could share his table.

Unbeknownst to JC, the reason the man was sitting alone was because he was one of the leaders of the radical movement. The man nodded so JC sat across from him. Someone from inside the café ran toward JC thinking he was another big shot and asked what he could get for him. He ordered an espresso.

All the while the man just stared at him. After a few minutes of silence, during which time neither of them broke their stare, the radical leader finally spoke to him.

“So, why do you want to kill Israelis?”

JC was taken aback. First, he didn’t expect that question; second, he couldn’t believe the guy knew him.

“I got tired of killing American infidels. I thought a change of scenery was necessary since the Americans and Canadians have put a price on my head,” JC replied without breaking the stare.

“Do you know who I am?” He asked.

“I’m not much of a mind reader.”

“Do you know how many of those men would kill to have a chance to sit at my table?”

You must be a Lebanese movie star or a pop star,” JC quipped.

JC’s foray into a one-liner was met with a cold stare. He was greatly surprised and somewhat startled when the man began to laugh and continued to laugh until tears come to his eyes.

JC waited for the other shoe to drop.

“I think we have a place for you, Canadian. Have you ever tried stand-up comedy?”

With that they both broke out laughing. Was he now in with the A-team?

"Meet me here tomorrow at the same time. I want to introduce you to some people." With that he got up and left the table trailed by about a dozen black-shirted boot lickers. JC remained to finish his espresso. When it came time to pay his bill, he was told not to worry about it.

The next day JC arrived on time only to find the café empty. He was curious so he asked the waiter who shrugged his shoulders. Within a few minutes of his arrival a military vehicle stopped in front of the café. A black shirt jumped out and told JC to get in.

They drove to a series of warehouse buildings and parked. The black shirt motioned for JC to get out and told him to follow him. They were followed by a brace of armed black shirts. Once inside, JC was formally introduced to his companion in the café. Abbas Khalid Hassan extended his hand and greeted him warmly. Inside the building JC noticed hundreds of wooden crates that he assumed held medium range rockets. All the boxes had Persian writing on them.

"What do you think, Canadian?" Abbas asked.

"Very impressive," JC responded.

"This is only one of six buildings, all of which are filled with similar crates and more are on their way."

"I assume these aren't here to protect Beirut. Have you selected your targets yet?" JC asked.

"We are working on it. We'd like to have your input, if you don't mind."

"In whatever combat operation I've been involved in, I always tried to avoid civilian casualties but from your past actions it seems you just want to kill Israelis."

"Yes, so what is the problem?"

"You want me to be candid, Abbas?"

"Of course, we're all friends here. I like a man who isn't afraid to speak his mind."

"I think the more Israeli civilians you kill, the more likely the Israelis will attack you. If that is what you want you will succeed."

"We aren't afraid of the Israelis. If they attack Lebanon, Hezbollah will put up a strong defense. We will be supported by Syria and Iran with weapons, aircraft, and troops."

"Are you not concerned that Israel's western allies will become involved?"

"I am surprised you said that. After having fought in Afghanistan and Iraq were you ever afraid of any coalition forces? Did those infidels accomplish anything in Iraq except to install a weak government? And in Afghanistan, who will eventually win that war? The puppet Karzai will be dead and buried the minute the last American leaves the country."

"I am very impressed by your strong belief in your ability to foresee the future. However, I believe that if there is a war between any Arab state and Israel, the west will want to resolve the whole Middle East situation with a final solution."

Abbas took his time digesting what JC said. He looked perplexed. JC began to worry that he might have pissed him off. Abbas motioned JC to go with him to a small room in the back of the warehouse where there were two tables occupied by black shirts. The men seated at one table got up to leave. Abbas and JC sat done. A young black shirt immediately came over with two glasses of hot tea.

"Canadian, I believe I can use you but not as a fighter. I need to take advantage of your brilliant tactical and hopefully strategic thinking. I need someone like you whose hatred of the Israelis doesn't blind him out of a sense of reality. I'm afraid our army may be too confident of a victory over Israel, especially if their infidel allies get involved."

"I'm flattered you value my opinions. I will do everything I can to help you reach your objectives," JC said with some relief.

“I hope you share those objects, Canadian.”

“Of course, I do, Abbas.”

“Tomorrow, someone will pick you up at your hotel and take you to our military headquarters where you will begin to work with our senior strategists. I want you to be billeted at our military base.”

JC thought he just got himself into a situation that would nullify his mission. His contact couldn’t possibly get to him if he were restricted to the military base.

“Abbas, I would like my freedom to come and go as I please. Would that be possible?”

“If it is a woman you want, we can meet your needs. Why else would you want to leave our hospitality?”

“It’s just that I have to meet my Israeli contact, so I need my freedom.”

Abbas just stared at him and then burst out laughing.

“That’s why I like you Canadian; you make me laugh.”

Then in a blink of an eye he leaned very close to JC.

“If I thought you weren’t kidding, I’d cut your throat in a second.”

JC realized that joking about something that was true could get him killed and that wasn’t part of the mission. He decided then and there to cut out the humor and remain serious. A joke or two got him this far, time to face the music.

On the first opportunity to leave the military compound, JC headed to the Christian section successfully losing his stalkers. He left the information about the location of the missiles in one of the assigned dead drops.

Two weeks passed since JC gave left the note. Was his contact successful in finding the message? If so, would the Americans believe what he wrote?

It was early evening. Everyone was saying their prayers as he walked across the compound to his room. The flash was blinding and the concussion swept him off his feet. He was immediately attacked by flying debris which buried him up to his neck. Pain shot throughout his left leg and he lost consciousness.

Through the darkness, JC heard a lot of noise coming from all directions. People were yelling and running about in panic. Fire trucks entered the compound. The horrendous explosions continued like fireworks both near and far away. People ran over the top of the rubble covering him. No one noticed he was buried there. The hours passed or at least it seemed that way. The explosions and bright flashes continued.

Was it an accident or did the Israelis strike the compound? He never heard the sound of the jet fighters. Drones couldn't have delivered such a powerful payload. Missiles would be too dangerous because they didn't have pinpoint accuracy. It must have been jet aircraft.

JC drifted back into a deep peaceful state. Was I dead, he thought? He heard someone calling him. There was a bright light above his head and faces were staring down at him. He tried to get up but he couldn't move; he passed out again. Suddenly he felt his body moving along a corridor. He watched the tiles in the ceiling as he continued his journey.

"Take him to surgery." someone shouted in Arabic.

"We have too many critical cases to handle first," another answered.

JC was left along a wall in a very hectic corridor. He turned his head to see gurney after gurney racing to the room at the end of the hall. He assumed it was the surgical suite. He picked his head up to see the damage. He moved both hands and his right leg. His left leg was in great pain; he couldn't move it. He tried to wiggle his toes with no success. At least his foot was still attached to his

leg. He propped himself up on his elbows. His lower left leg was bent at nearly a 30-degree angle. It was obviously a very serious break. He didn't see any bones sticking out but his view was obscured by a make shift bandage of torn sheets

He tried to rest but he was having difficulty dealing with the pain. A male nurse stopped by to ask if he needed anything. JC asked for water and some morphine. After a few minutes he got the water, but no morphine. It was the best water he ever tasted.

Another hour passed before JC's gurney was moved inside a makeshift surgical suite. He didn't see any anesthetic equipment or big overhead lights. It was just a small area with a curtain drawn. A man came in to look at his leg. He examined it carefully and then ordered an x-ray. JC was taken to another room where there was considerable medical equipment. Two men lifted him onto a table at which point he was told not to move. They took several x-rays and then moved him back to the area with the curtain.

He remained there for about 30 minutes until the same man who ordered the x-ray came in to examine him. He cut off the makeshift bandage and moved his hands up and down the leg twisting the leg into its proper position. JC almost flew off the gurney he was in so much pain. He began to hyperventilate and became very nauseous.

The man, who by this time JC concluded was a doctor, ordered morphine. He told his assistants to hold JC down while he set the break. First, he reviewed the x-rays to make sure he set the broken bone correctly. He told JC he was lucky the bone didn't penetrate his skin. It was a bad break but he didn't need surgery, at least not at the moment.

Once the morphine took hold of him the doctor set his leg while his assistants wrapped it. Before taking JC to where they would apply the cast, they x-rayed it again. He remained in the room waiting for his turn to be taken care off.

JC looked up behind him to see the bloodied face of Abbas. He was wearing a neck brace and his right hand was in a cast.

"Now how am I going to wipe my ass, Canadian, I'm right-handed.

"I hope you use paper, Abbas," JC fired back.

They both became hysterical with laughter and then Abbas began to sob.

"The Israelis did this, I'm sure. They will pay ten-fold for every life lost."

"How do you know they did it? Have you ruled out sabotage?" JC asked.

"How could one person make so many explosions? It doesn't matter anyway, if it were a saboteur, he was probably an Israeli agent."

"What are you going to do now?" JC asked.

"Start all over. Store the rockets underground. Our friends will be more determined to help us after this."

"What can I do for you, Abbas?" JC asked.

"Get well and rededicate your efforts to destroy the Israeli infidels as we all will."

"Did we lose a lot of people?"

JC was surprised that the word 'we' flew out of his mouth. It was probably a good thing.

"Yes, we lost 56 dead and 190 wounded. In addition, we lost 80 percent of our rockets."

JC calculated that 24,000 of the approximately 30,000 rockets were destroyed. That was one hell of an airstrike. Abbas patted him on the shoulder and left. JC was taken to the plastering room. After it dried, he was handed a pair of crutches and told to leave because others were waiting.

JC had nowhere to go. His building was a pile of rubble. He decided to make it to a decent hotel. He managed to find a taxi and told the driver to take him to a tourist hotel.

After he checked in, he tried to cleanse his body. It was very difficult for him to bathe himself. He gave up, dried himself off and went to sleep. He woke up around eight and ordered room service. He had considerable pain in his leg but was more consumed with hunger.

When room service delivered his food, he asked if there was a doctor he could call. The man said there was a doctor assigned to the hotel and he would call him to come to his room.

JC relished the food which was a hundred times better than the food served in the military compound. Thirty minutes after he finished the last morsel of food, the doctor knocked and entered the room. JC explained what happened to him. The doctor knew all about the explosion because he was asked to come to the hospital to help.

"I need something for pain. There was too much chaos for anyone to think about giving me anything for it. They just wanted me to leave so they could treat the next person."

The doctor looked at him intently. He said he would send something up to his room. He strongly suggested JC remain in bed for at least the next 48 hours. JC didn't take issue with that course of action.

He wanted to check in with Abbas but he didn't know where to find him. It was at that moment JC decided he had to leave for Israel. First, his mission was completed; second, he needed proper medical care.

JC hobbled toward the elevator and took it to the lobby. He found a public phone in an obscure corner and called Ari at home. A female voice responded in Hebrew. JC winced at that. He asked

for Ari in Arabic. He waited a few minutes before Ari greeted him in Arabic.

"I must see my wife as soon as possible. I am very ill and I miss her so much. I want to see her tonight if that is possible."

Ari remained silent as if he were planning JC's egress as he spoke.

"Can you travel?" Ari asked.

"No, someone has to take me, I'm too ill to go by myself."

"Where are you?" Ari asked.

JC was afraid to pinpoint his location for fear the call was being monitored.

"I don't know at the moment," he replied.

There was silence at the other end. Ari was obviously trying to figure out what to do. JC didn't wait.

"I'll take a taxi to where I last saw you. I'll be there at seven tonight. Have someone meet me."

"Yes, that's a good solution."

Ari hung up. JC went back to sleep. The pain medication was working. He slept for five hours. It was now 4:30 p.m. JC ordered his last meal in Beirut; at least he hoped it would be his last. While eating he decided to arrive at the square in front of the church a little late so whoever was supposed to meet him would notice a man on crutches. Unfortunately, he would be noticed by others as well. There was no way he could walk without them. JC had to go for it.

At 7:15 p.m. JC carefully slipped out of a taxi. He was certain no one followed him. He hobbled over to the café nearest the church and sat down. He ordered an espresso and waited as the sun dipped down behind him. JC watched as a shadow of someone approached from behind and dropped a coin on his table. JC stood up and followed the man for two blocks. It was difficult and painful but he managed to keep up.

The man rounded a corner and continued down an alley where a small covered pickup truck was parked with the engine running. As the man passed behind the truck, he opened the tailgate and continued walking. JC propped his butt onto the tailgate and swung his legs around and crawled inside. He managed to pull the tailgate shut.

As soon as he did that the truck sped off toward the southeast. JC grabbed a couple of pain pills. It was a hell of a ride to say the least. Even without a broken leg the ride would have been a miserable one. He was pitched from side to side as if he were on a small boat in rough seas. After about two hours they finally stopped at a gas station. At least that's what JC surmised from the conversation going on just a few feet from him.

When the truck started up again, JC cautiously peeked under the tarp and noted they were traveling down a dirt road in the middle of nowhere. He assumed they were still heading south.

About an hour later the truck veered off the dirt road and began a roller coaster ride over rough terrain. JC's guts were being homogenized. The pain in his leg was getting serious so he took two more pain pills. The only things that kept him from being bounced out of the truck were the bars across the back securing the tarp. He hung on to them for dear life.

Soon the truck stopped. He heard a conversation between the driver and another man. JC peeked under the tarp to see a few armed Israeli soldiers standing beside the truck. They were laughing as they waved the truck onto a paved road.

About a mile later they stopped. The driver got out to open the back flap and put the tailgate down. In Arabic he told JC to get in front. Apparently, the driver thought JC was an Arab and was only told to take him to Israel.

"Sorry for the bumpy ride back there, I had to get off the road to avoid Lebanese military patrols," he said in Arabic.

"Where are we heading" JC asked.

"I'm taking you to Haifa. I will turn you over to someone else."

JC hoped he could see an Israeli doctor pretty damn fast before the bone began to set. He visualized having to have his leg broken again and reset.

Ninety minutes later the truck pulled into a covered parking space. The driver went inside for a few minutes and returned with an Israeli army colonel who spoke English.

"Are you Lt. Colonel McKenzie?" He asked.

"Yes. I need to go to a hospital."

JC swung open the truck door and pointed to his cast. The colonel shouted something in Hebrew to the driver.

"He will take you to a hospital. I will be there right behind you. Don't say anything to anyone. Let me do the talking."

Fifteen minutes later they pulled up to the emergency room door of a large and very modern multi-storied hospital. JC swung his body out the door and grabbed his crutches. As he alit from the truck the colonel pulled up alongside him.

"Tell me the extent of your injury," the colonel asked.

"I had a severe break which I believe is my femur. It was hastily set by a Lebanese doctor. I'm not certain it was done correctly."

"I understand. Let me describe what you told me to the doctors but I will omit where you were originally treated."

JC followed the colonel into the emergency room. He carried on a lengthy discussion using a lot of hand gestures. One of the doctors looked at JC and asked JC to follow him. JC didn't understand the request so the colonel repeated in English what he said.

JC was asked to lie on a table so his leg could be x-rayed. He didn't know what the doctor thought of the colonel having to translate for him in English. The doctor finally switched to English.

"Wait here, I'll have these read as soon as possible." The doctor said.

In the meantime, the colonel asked JC whom he should contact. It was apparent he knew nothing of JC's mission or who he worked for. JC gave him Ari's office number. As soon as the colonel read the number, he raised his eyebrows and then glanced at JC.

The colonel pulled out his cell phone. He was smiling as he exchanged pleasantries with whomever he was speaking with. The colonel handed JC the phone.

"Hello stranger, I heard you had a bit of bad luck." Ari said chuckling.

"Not very funny shit head. I was on the receiving end of your fine pilots."

"Yes, I suspected as much. Let's not discuss this over the phone. What did the doctor say?"

"He is going over the x-rays. I hope my leg doesn't have to be reset. If not, I assume I can head for Tel Aviv. I'll have someone call you if I can't leave soon. I'm not looking forward to an operation, but I do want to walk again."

The doctor barged into the room.

"I have good news and some bad news. Your leg has to be reset. The break was not properly aligned. You could probably get by with what was done for you but I wouldn't do it," the doctor said.

"What's the good news? JC asked.

"I can arrange to have it reset tomorrow morning and you can leave in about two days."

"I appreciate that. Let's do it as soon as possible and thank you"

JC asked the colonel for his phone again. He called Ari back and told him the news. Ari was disappointed but understood. He suggested he might come there to drive him back.

An orderly arrived to take JC to his room. He didn't speak English so they traveled the two floors to the orthopedic ward in complete silence. The orderly helped strip off JC's putrid clothes that were covered in dirt and dried blood. JC was completely naked when two nurses came in to give him a sponge bath. One spoke a little English. He apologized for his gross appearance.

Another nurse removed his cast. She was very gentle. Apparently, she was told the break was recent and the patient was still in pain. The two nurses gently washed his blood crusted leg. The Lebanese doctor lied to him when he said the bone didn't break the skin.

After they dried him off, they dressed him in a hospital gown. They brought a wheel chair and took him into the bathroom and washed his hair. He finally felt like a human being again except for the throbbing pain in his leg. He asked for some pain medication. JC was very tired and wanted to sleep for a while. One of the nurses put up a screen around his bed to give him some privacy. It was nearly two in the morning; his surgery was schedule for around six. JC was asleep in a matter of minutes.

JC felt a pull at his left arm. He opened his eyes to see a nurse sticking a needle into his arm.

"What's that for?" He asked.

"This is your sedative. You are going into surgery in a half hour."

"What time is it?"

"Nearly seven in the morning; now just close your eyes and when you wake up everything will be as good as new."

JC couldn't believe he slept for more than five hours. With the sedative he lost control of his body and mind and drifted into a safe place. He felt so peaceful.

JC heard voices calling his name. His first awakening sense was the pain in his leg. His head was slightly raised. He noted his leg was suspended about a foot above the bed. To his right he saw Ari and the CIA station chief. He was told later they were in the operating room to make sure he didn't say anything that shouldn't have been said under anesthesia.

"How are you feeling, JC?" Ari asked.

JC's mouth was very dry. But he managed to mutter okay.

The CIA station chief said he was very proud of him and was going to put him in for an award through the defense attaché.

A nurse stopped by to take his temperature and to give him a sip of water.

"Do you have to go to the bathroom?" She asked.

"How can I do that?" He replied.

She told him to turn on his right side and pee into the bedpan.

"And if I had to use the toilet, how would I accomplish that?"

"I would pull open your hospital gown; you would raise your bottom so I could slip another pan under you. Or, you can sit up if you like."

"I didn't hear anything you said after pull open my gown. I had a wonderful thought."

The nurse blushed.

All JC wanted to do was to sleep but he had one question on his mind.

"Ari, did my contact belong to you or to him?"

"He was my asset," the CIA station chief said.

"I think that was a wise choice considering our track record. We are still looking for the leak. I shudder to think of the outcome of this mission if we used one of our people," Ari explained.

By the time Ari finished speaking, JC was back in his safe place. The two visitors left but before they did, they chatted with the surgeon regarding JC's recovery and his release from hospital.

The surgeon said JC's leg would be as good as new but he might have problems getting through airport security. He had to use a titanium plate to secure the break. The surgeon told them JC could leave in a few days.

Over the next 24 hours, JC had to twist and turn to relieve himself in bed using the bedpans. On the second night his nurse felt sorry for him so she lowered his leg, unhooked it from the lift and helped him hobble to the bathroom. JC was so grateful to do his business without assistance that he ignored the throbbing pain in his leg.

On day three, JC was ready to leave for Tel Aviv. His pain was much more subdued but he still had to take pain pills. The surgeon gave him the name and number of a colleague in Tel Aviv for follow up visits. The last x-ray showed everything was as it should be. JC left the hospital in a wheel chair and was handed a pair of crutches to carry with him.

No one was there to meet him. Apparently, Ari was too busy to drive to Haifa. The American embassy sent a car and a driver. JC didn't know where to go in Tel Aviv except to a hotel. He asked the driver what his instructions were. He said he had an apartment address to take him to.

Thankfully someone was thinking ahead because his apartment was on the first floor of a modern four-story building. Each of the apartments above the first floor had small balconies. He could see bicycles and children's toys on almost every floor.

Just after 1 p.m., someone from the embassy stopped by to give JC some clothes and linens. JC had to split the left trouser leg to get it over the cast. He asked the man for a cell phone.

“Someone will bring a phone to you, sir.”

JC assumed the man was enlisted even though he was wearing civilian clothes because he called him, sir. No civilian working in the embassy would do that.

“I’ve been assigned to you, sir. If you need anything, I’m at your disposal 24/7. I will take you to and from the embassy each day. Here is my cell number.”

“Which branch of the service are you from?” JC asked.

“The Marine Corps sir, I’m with the embassy security detail.”

“What’s your name?”

“Sorry sir, I should have introduced myself when I picked you up. I’m Gunnery Sergeant Jerry Hopkins.”

“Well sergeant, since we are both in civilian attire, I will call you Jerry and when we are alone you can call me JC.”

“With that the sergeant smiled and extended his hand.

“Have you seen combat during the past few years?” JC asked.

“Yes sir, I mean yes, JC. I was in Fallujah during the surge in 2006 and in Helmand province in 2008, just before the surge. What about you, sir?”

“I was in the Bora Bora area chasing ghosts from 2001 to 2002. Then I was inserted into Baghdad before we crossed the berm in 2003. I spent nearly three years in Iraq and Afghanistan. First, I was part of a long-range patrol, then I became a Ranger and later joined the Delta Force. I worked with a lot of fine Marines.”

“Sorry, JC, I don’t recall an officer named McKenzie nor do I recognize you.”

“I can understand that. I had a beard most of the time and I never used my rank and name.”

"I have to get back now, JC. I will follow up on that cell phone for you."

JC was very impressed with Hopkins. He would be sad to leave the service and the great young men he served with. He almost considered staying in for a few more years. But that thought didn't last but a fleeting moment.

JC stumbled around the apartment putting his clothes away and making the bed. He checked the refrigerator and found a bottle of juice a loaf of bread, some butter and a few apples. Suddenly he got very tired and weak, almost to the point of passing out. He managed to make it to the bed and fell asleep.

JC woke up in the dark. He reached for the lamp beside the bed. It was nearly 7 p.m. No one came with the phone. He was hungry for something other than bread and butter. He drank some juice, popped a few pain pills and turned on the television.

He suddenly realized why no one came to see him. Earlier in the day Hezbollah stormed a border check point and kidnapped two Israeli soldiers. There was no sign of them even though it occurred in broad daylight. In the raid on the border post two other Israelis were wounded.

JC searched for an English language station but all he could find was CNN. They devoted some time to the incident but they didn't treat it like the Israeli news stations.

Around 8 p.m., someone knocked on the door. JC 'crutched' his way over to find Jerry standing there full of apologies about not getting the cell phone to him sooner.

"Has the embassy been working the kidnapping incident?"

"I don't know, sir, I wouldn't be privy to anything like that but I noticed the ambassador and other senior staff were still working when I left."

"You know what? I am starving. There's little to eat here. If you don't have other plans, take me to a great restaurant and join me for dinner."

"Thank you, sir. I could use a good meal. I don't get the time to eat out much."

"Are you here with your family?"

"My tour is only for nine months so we can't bring our dependents unless we pay for them and I don't make that much money. Things are quite expensive here."

Jerry drove JC to a Russian restaurant. He mentioned that he loved caviar and Russian cuisine. He obtained his penchant for Russian food when he was assigned to the American embassy in Moscow about 10 years ago. This was his first visit to the restaurant.

The meal was very good. Jerry had his fill of Beluga caviar. It was too salty for JC's palate.

The next day, Jerry arrived at the apartment at 8:30 a.m. JC didn't know when to expect him so he wasn't prepared to leave yet. After trying on some of the ill-fitting clothes the embassy had provided, JC settled for something that would work.

Jerry couldn't stop talking about the food he had the night before. He was anxious to go back. JC knew that Jerry couldn't afford another fifty-dollar meal.

Jerry knew exactly where to take JC once they entered the embassy. After signing in as a visitor and getting a temporary ID badge, they went to a waiting area outside the Defense Attaché's office.

Jerry left JC in the outer office. A few minutes later, Colonel Jeffers came out and asked him to come in.

"Welcome back JC. I heard you suffered a severe injury but you did an outstanding job. I commend you. I wanted to speak with you alone since we are both army officers. You made it known you

wanted to retire as soon as you reached 20 years' service. Your career has certainly been unique, one that any army officer would envy. You've been highly decorated with two silver stars, one bronze star and a purple heart. I am certain you will get something for your efforts in Lebanon."

"I appreciate your kind comments, colonel. I, too, am proud of my service but as you can see, I never had time for a personal life. I think I am entitled to one now."

"Please call me Mike. I'm not here to persuade you to change your mind. I want you to know that I have it on good authority that you might be selected for your next promotion one year early. I also know that with your experience and language skills, and with that promotion you will have a choice of a teaching position at either the Army War College or West Point. You will have an opportunity to give young men and women the benefit of your unique experience."

"I don't know what to say. I might reconsider, if I knew I was selected to teach at one of those schools.

"I understand, JC. I don't think you will be pressed for a decision any time soon. Your name might be on the next promotion list which is due out after you reach 20 years. Why don't you wait a while to see if you get that promotion and the assignment to one of the schools."

"Mike, I think I'll do just that. I feel a sense of relief knowing I might have a normal life without retiring."

"I think that's the best decision for the moment. Now about your mission, other than the participation of Ari, this was a CIA run effort. Mossad didn't want to risk your life after having their operatives killed and captured. The Israelis are absolutely ecstatic about the results of your mission and the performance of the IAF. However, we need a detailed mission report to obtain further

cooperation between Mossad and the CIA. I understand you have details that neither intelligence service might have."

"Yes, I'm sure I have information they couldn't possibly know. How much time do I have to finish my report?"

"We'd like it by the end of the week then you can have a few weeks to recuperate."

"If I can start today, I'm certain I'll have it for you by Friday."

"I'll arrange office space for you. One thing before you go, don't provide any information to Ari until our station chief has a chance to see your report. He will probably want to interview you to ask some additional questions."

"I understand. I want to thank you for lending me Sergeant Hopkins. He is good company. By the way, is there any chance I can sue the Israeli air force for the damages to my leg?"

Colonel Jeffers burst out laughing and waved JC out of the room. Jerry was waiting to take him to his temporary office.

A technician hooked up a desktop computer for his use. He checked the Internet for news and then began to write his report. The account of the first day of his journey to Beirut was much easier to remember than what happened after he was left at the seedy hotel in Lebanon.

After getting a cup of coffee he leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes and thought about the conversations he had that first morning at the hotel when the black shirts showed up.

It wasn't an easy task. He wanted to be as precise as possible so through his words the reader would experience the mission as he did. He worked on the report until noon when he got the munchies. There was a cafeteria somewhere in the building. He followed some employees to the lower level and found a well-stocked cafeteria.

JC received a few odd looks. He thought perhaps it was because he was a new face or the fact he was on crutches. Then

he realized he never shaved his beard. He was certainly out of place; he returned the darted stares with a smile and continued to eat his lunch.

He sat alone until a security guard quietly sat down at his table.

"Sir, do you realize you are wearing visitor's badge which requires an escort wherever you go in this building?" The security officer whispered.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know that. Can I finish my meal?" JC pleaded.

"Yes, of course. I was told to be on the lookout for a bearded man on crutches."

They both laughed.

"Come back to where you got that badge and I'll see to it you get something that allows you to have free access to most of the building."

Now everyone was staring again. The short conversation with the security officer strengthened their suspicions. This time JC didn't smile at them. He was hard pressed from showing them the finger.

JC hobbled up a flight of stairs and found his way to the security office. He was greeted by the same security guy who quickly prepared a proper badge with his name and rank.

"Thank you. I haven't seen my name and rank written for quite a while. I shall treasure this." He said with a broad smile.

"We normally put the badge holder's picture on the badge but I assume you might want to shave before we did that."

"I think that would be a good idea. Thank you."

JC returned to his office and spent the next four hours reliving the first week in Beirut. At 5 p.m., Jerry knocked on the door.

"When will you be ready to go back, sir?"

“I’ll have to transfer this document to a flash drive and secure it in a safe.”

“I can do that for you, sir. I’ll have to delete the original if this is classified.”

“I’m afraid it is. I should have asked for a laptop so I could put the whole thing in a safe.”

“I’ll arrange that for you tomorrow. In the meantime, I’ll put your flash drive in the safe in my office. Meet me in front of the security office and don’t forget to turn in your badge.”

Taking a bath was a difficult task. JC was reluctant to ask Jerry to scrub his back, but it had to be done.

“I sure hope you received a purple heart for these scars, JC.” Jerry remarked.

“Are they that noticeable? I got them for standing in the way of some shrapnel.”

JC’s wardrobe was not much to look at or speak of. He put on the same trousers and a different shirt.

“I’m going to be around here for a month or so. Perhaps we can find something more suitable. Are clothes expensive here?”

“If you buy retail you will pay through the nose. I have a guy who makes my shirts and suits. He is a tailor from the old Soviet Union. He doesn’t speak a word of English but he sure knows how to make clothing.”

The following day the doctor told JC he could probably fit him with a pressure cast which would be a lot lighter and enable him to walk with just a cane.

Buoyed by the good news, JC spent another three hours at his computer and then decided to call it quits.

On a Monday in early June, the first official day of JC’s leave, he received a phone call from Colonel Jeffers. He had something to discuss and didn’t want to do it over the phone.

LONDON; THE WAR ON TERROR

Three days before departure, during a rather boring day in the office, JC was handed two first class tickets on British Airways. He was quite surprised the agency sprung for first class seats on a foreign carrier.

Bella and Eli were quite moved as they said goodbye to their favorite neighbors. Bella had become very close to Sarah and she to her. Tears were shed and promises were made.

The taxi made good time reaching the airport. They checked four bags which cost an additional \$100. He and Sarah went through security without a problem. Because they held first class tickets they were allowed to wait in the British Airways first class lounge. JC ordered a Jack Daniels on the rocks and a coke for Sarah. Fifteen minutes before passenger boarding, they were allowed to take their seats. This was JC's first experience in first class. He hoped everything else waiting for him was first class as well.

Sarah was obviously excited and wouldn't stop talking until sleep overtook her. He too fell asleep and didn't get up until the flight attendant touched his shoulder to tell him to prepare for landing.

They arrived at Heathrow Airport just after seven in the morning. Sarah finished her breakfast and half of what JC had on his plate. She wanted to be the first one off the airplane. JC tried to accommodate her but they were blocked by a rotund man who had trouble getting his bag out of the overhead compartment. They settled for second place.

The walk to and through customs took a while. Sarah was getting antsy. When they passed through customs JC spotted a sign with 'McKenzie' printed on it. He followed the man holding the sign

until they reached the baggage claim area. The man holding the sign never acknowledged JC. He beckoned a baggage handler to walk over to JC to get his claim checks. JC followed him to the baggage carrousel where he pointed out his bags as they tumbled down the conveyor belt.

The man with the sign stood about 30 feet away and was no longer carrying the sign. He started to walk away after the baggage handler had loaded up his cart. They followed him outside to a parked car attended by another man dressed in black. After the bags were unloaded into the trunk, the driver opened the back door for Sarah and JC. The man who held the sign sat in the front seat.

Not a word was exchanged until they departed the airport. Sarah remarked that all the cars were driving on the wrong side of the road. JC reminded her about what they read on the Internet. The man in the front seat introduced himself as Burt Carpenter and apologized for the seemingly cold reception.

"We are very cautious here and I didn't want to appear to be connected to you. There are unfriendly eyes everywhere and some friendly ones as well. Once we drive into London, we will undertake routine procedures to see if we picked up a tail at the airport. Our driver has been trained to spot a tail and to lose it.

JC wondered if Jerry was undergoing similar training. Sarah was glued to the side window. Everything she saw amazed her though she didn't say much. She held JC's hand and squeezed it from time to time.

"You will be put up at one of our better facilities. We thought it would provide added security for you and your daughter. I hope you don't mind not staying at a posh hotel."

"As long as it is comfortable and we have access to a good meal once in a while, I won't complain," JC replied.

Sarah asked what a facility was. JC told her it was a private house just for them until they moved into their own apartment.

"You mean our own flat, papa."

JC smiled with such love in his heart for this precious girl, his daughter.

"Burt, do you know how long we will be staying at the house?"

"I'm not sure. The Brits are wiring the security and communications gear in a two-floor flat near the embassy. It became available just the other day and it was the best flat in the area. You are close to a tube station and to several bus lines. I don't expect you'll want to drive much. Besides, I understand the agency has hired someone to do that for you. He will arrive in early September."

"Are you with the embassy staff, Burt?"

Burt didn't answer right away.

"We aren't in the same organization, Mr. McKenzie. I might see you from time to time, if you ever get a chance to stop by the embassy."

JC had his answer.

The driver made a few unexpected turns and then pulled up to an iron gate that opened as the car approached. JC spotted a camera atop the gate post and two along the top of the carpark. As they walked to the side door, JC spotted two more cameras. Burt handed JC the keys and gave him a quick tour of the house. Sarah was eager to turn on the TV.

"Someone from your side will meet you this evening. You and your daughter should get some rest. Be ready to leave around 6 p.m. You needn't dress up; you'll have dinner at the embassy this evening."

With that, Burt turned and departed. JC took another tour of the house while Sarah watched TV. He located a room that housed several security monitors that provided a 360-degree view of the house from both low and high angles.

"Sarah let's get some rest; we are going out for dinner tonight."

"Just a minute, papa, I want to see this program."

JC carried the bags upstairs in three trips. Luckily there was a TV in the bedroom. He called out to Sarah and told her there was a TV in the bedroom. She eventually came upstairs.

"Are you tired, sweetheart? JC asked.

"I think I could take a nap. Will you stay with me?"

"Of course, I won't leave you."

JC wondered who would take care of Sarah over the summer while he was at work. He still didn't know if she would go to boarding school or would commute. They stayed awake until around noon and then almost at the same time they fell asleep.

They must have been tired because JC didn't wake up until nearly 5 p.m. Sarah was still asleep. JC cleaned up, shaved and changed his shirt. Sarah walked into the bathroom and sat on the commode.

"Do you want me to leave?" JC said.

"It's okay, papa. I want to change my clothes. Where is my bag?"

"I put it in your bedroom. Do you want me to help you?"

"Let me try first, I think I know where my things are."

She ran back to the bathroom to tell JC there was no TV in her room. He told her she could stay in his bedroom and he'd sleep in the other one. It was a small price to pay to make her happy.

Due to heavy traffic the drive to the embassy took more than 30 minutes. Again, Sarah was glued to the window as they passed through the better parts of London.

When they walked into the embassy they were greeted by two women, the ambassador's wife and Leland's wife. The two women took Sarah by the hand and disappeared down a hallway. Leland arrived and greeted JC.

"The last time I saw you, you were up to your ass in a cast. How's the leg?"

"It still bothers me when it's cold out or it rains. I suppose I came to the wrong country."

Leland laughed.

"Hopefully you will be too busy to notice. I'm glad you accepted this position. It's something new and both governments are excited about it. Our friends have a full plate here with a growing radical Muslim population, many of whom are local born. In addition, the laws are rather lax regarding immigrants. It will take a major tragedy to get Parliament to do something about it. We are helping our friends from the shadows, no one knows of our involvement. You are the lynch pin between the two of us."

"Will I be working from here, Leland?"

"Not from here, JC. You will be working from an office building in the Waterloo area. You will have a new identity and a cover job. Let's wait a while before we get into those details. Tonight, we will dine with some of my team members, introduce your beautiful daughter and tomorrow we'll send you to your new flat which should be ready for you."

"Just make sure there's a TV in my daughter's room."

Leland laughed again.

The two of them entered a private dining room where some of Leland's folks were having cocktails. A few of them were accompanied by their wives. Leland explained that some members of his team were involved in covert ops and couldn't attend; in fact, they couldn't be seen entering the embassy.

Leland introduced JC and Sarah to everyone. When the wives were informed JC was a single parent, they became more attentive and offered to help with Sarah if he ever needed it.

None of the team members had any knowledge of JC's role as the liaison to MI-5 and MI-6. It wouldn't be prudent to disclose

that information since Leland's team often competed with the Brits for intelligence sources.

Dinner was pleasant enough for JC. Sarah loved all the attention. They returned to the house around 10 p.m. Sarah was too tired to watch TV. JC decided to go to bed as well.

At 8:30 a.m., JC was jostled out of a deep sleep by the phone. The caller reminded JC he was going to see his new flat and a driver would pick them up in an hour. JC woke Sarah up and said they were going out in an hour. Sarah didn't want to get up.

In exactly one hour a car pulled into the driveway. JC and Sarah were ready to see their new flat. Since JC was unfamiliar with London, he didn't have a clue where his new flat was located. He asked the driver where they were headed. His reply didn't make it any clearer. The driver handed JC a map and told him where to look for St. John's Wood. He located the area just a mile west of Regent's Park. He estimated it to be four to five miles from his new office.

The streets in St. John's Wood were mostly residential with a few restaurants and pubs scattered about. It appeared to be a very green area. They pulled into a gated drive and parked. The semi-detached house was bright white, two stories with a small garden in front. The house was approximately 40 feet wide and about 150 feet deep. The stairwell was a few feet from the front door. There was a long corridor leading from the front door to the kitchen. Along the corridor were several doors that lead to a large closet, a bathroom, a small library, a sitting room and a maid's quarters.

Upstairs above the foyer, there was a large master bedroom with a full bathroom and there were two bedrooms in the back. As he walked about, JC noted security cameras throughout the flat. He assumed the cameras were monitored by a security firm. There was an alarm system that was connected directly to the nearest

police station. The flat was fully furnished including linens, towels, dishes and cooking utensils.

JC found an envelope on a table. He and Sarah sat in the library to read its contents. The note explained the security systems and what organization monitored the flat. It also mentioned someone would stop by twice a week to clean the flat. That person would also shop for whatever JC needed each week.

JC discussed the flat with Sarah. She was excited to find a TV in all the bedrooms. She loved the flat but wanted to know if there were any children her age in the neighborhood. Obviously, JC didn't have an answer. He reminded her if she went to boarding school, all her friends would be there with her.

JC was resigned to the fact if she started at a local school before going to high school, he'd have to hire a full-time nanny. He hadn't brought the subject up with anyone in the embassy. He was certain they could find someone reputable and was equally certain she would be fully vetted.

JC decided to call the embassy to obtain some information on the nanny situation. He couldn't bother Leland with such trivial matters. He decided to call Burt. He dialed the embassy operator and asked for Burt Carpenter.

"Burt, this is JC. I need some assistance."

"I don't know if I'm the right person but I will certainly get the person that can help you."

"I have two concerns. First, what do I do with my daughter during the summer and second, how do I find a full-time live-in nanny?"

"Let me transfer you to Miss Breeden, she manages embassy family support services."

JC waited for a few seconds for the phone to ring. It rang six times before someone answered.

"I'd like to speak with Miss Breeden, please."

“This is Miss Breeden; how might I help you?”

“I’ve just arrived and will be working for an agency assigned to the embassy. I am a single parent and need your assistance.”

“Are you able to give me your name over the phone?”

“I’m afraid not but the ambassador’s wife knows of my situation.”

“Thank you, I will speak with her. What is it I can do for you, sir?”

“My daughter is 12 years old. She won’t go to school for about 12 weeks. I need either a full-time live-in nanny or something for my daughter to do during the summer.”

“I understand your needs and we have been advised of your arrival. Let me pull your file.”

JC was surprised to learn they had made some arrangements for him.

“Sir, we have two options for you. The embassy has a contract with a summer camp for its children from ages 5 to 14. They leave in two days and return on August 28th. If you want a nanny when she returns, we will arrange it for you.”

“I assume the children are safe wherever this camp is located. Can I get some reading material about it?”

“When you come to the embassy make a right as soon as you enter the main lobby and continue down the corridor until you reach the third door on the right. There is a sign on the door.”

“Thank you very much. If I decide not to send my daughter to this camp, how soon should I expect to wait for a nanny?”

“It depends on where she comes from. An Irish or British nanny, after being fully vetted, could take at least ten days. Anyone from a Scandinavian country would take a week longer. We have bios on all vetted nannies but we would start fresh if none please you. You did say live in, didn’t you?”

"Yes, I did and I don't want anyone under 25 or over 50 years of age."

"Are you looking for a nanny or a partner?" She said laughing.

"I want someone who is mature but agile for reasons I can't disclose."

"Whenever you are in the embassy, stop by and check out our files."

"Thank you, Miss Breeden."

"Call me Sally and welcome to you and your daughter."

JC had no choice other than to take his daughter to the embassy. The next morning, they went to the family support office where a bright-eyed red-haired woman greeted them.

"So, this must be Sarah and her father."

She extended her hand and introduced herself as Sally Breeden. She led them to a desk and pulled out a slim binder. It contained 12 resumes with photos inserted in individual page protectors.

"I hope you don't mind but my daughter is always part of our decision-making process."

Sally smiled and told them to take their time. JC and Sarah read each page carefully. Four of the women were English and available right away. They were all in their late mid to late forties. One was from Wales and needed a week's notice, she was 38 years old. There were three Irish nannies, ages 28, 39 and 44. JC was surprised to find two women, both under 30 from Iceland. They were beautiful. Sarah looked at JC and giggled.

The final two were Swedish, again quite attractive and under 40 years old.

"Are we looking for a wife for you?" Sarah asked.

"I don't think this is the best way to do that do you, sweetheart?" He responded.

"Why not, papa, look at their skills, it tells you everything they can do."

"Unfortunately, it doesn't say if they are married or have children."

"I don't understand. How can they live with us if they have a husband and children?"

"That's a very good question, sweetheart. We'll have to ask."

Sally returned with a few documents. She told JC all expenses had to be paid by him and he had to pay for their visits home twice a year for a week each time. In addition to their salaries, there were also costs associated with health insurance and other benefits.

"This won't be cheap but you don't have a choice. Depending on whom you select, the monthly costs are between 1,000 and 1,500 euros. Obviously, the English nannies are less expensive because of travel costs."

JC and Sarah passed on the four English women. He told Sally he wanted to know the availability of the remaining eight women and to make sure they knew he was a single father. He thought they might not feel comfortable sharing a flat with a single man. Perhaps JC might have been naïve since these women probably had similar situations before. He also wanted to know if any were married and or had children.

Sally promised to get back to him with answers to his questions. She said as far as she knew, none were married but didn't know about any children.

JC returned to his new flat. He was curious as to whether the maid's quarters were suitable enough. He was a bit disappointed. There was barely room for a double bed.

JC and Sarah sat on their overstuffed divan and looked over the material provided about summer camp. They had two days to

prepare for Sarah's departure. He gave her the pamphlets to read and allowed her to make the final decision.

"It looks nice, papa. What if I don't like it, would you come and get me?"

"Of course, I'd take you home, sweetheart."

"That would be okay with me. Do you think you can manage alone with a nanny? Sarah said giggling as hard as she could.

"I'll manage somehow, sweetheart. If I don't like her, I'll have time to find someone else."

The two of them were excited about the coming few weeks. The next day they returned to the embassy to meet with the head masters of two schools that reviewed Sarah's academic records and invited her to enroll.

Both of the schools were close to St. John's Wood and they were affiliated with a number of secondary schools including a very well-known international high school. JC again permitted his daughter to meet with the headmasters and conduct her own interviews as he listened intently. The headmasters were quite impressed with her maturity. After the interviews were complete, Sarah stood up and shook their hands and told them she would get back with them before the end of the week. JC was so proud of her.

When they left, Sarah asked the support staff whether her flat had Internet connectivity. One of the clerks left to obtain the information.

The clerk returned to inform Sarah she had internet connections in her flat and provided her with the connectors she needed.

They went home to pack for the summer camp. The only things Sarah packed that weren't on the list were a few books she wanted to read. JC had a list of other books to bring her when he visited.

Before she went to bed, Sarah told her father which school she wanted to attend for the coming year. He too, agreed with her choice.

On Friday, JC was beside himself. He did everything he could to hold back tears when Sarah boarded the bus for camp. This would be the first time since he became her father that she would be away without him.

“Don’t worry, papa, I will be fine. If I’m not happy, I will let you know.”

“Call me when are you happy as well.”

JC chatted with the adult camp counselors for a few minutes. Most were the older children of the embassy staff, many attended college on both sides of the Atlantic. Each one gave JC his or her cell phone number. The head counselor assured JC he was briefed on Sarah’s security requirements.

Later that morning, JC approached his meeting with Leland with a heavy heart. Leland met him in his office and then escorted him to a secure area in the building. Very few of Leland’s staff worked out of the embassy, many were on covert assignments somewhere in the United Kingdom. Others, like JC, had cover assignments where their jobs wouldn’t result in a big uproar if their respective roles were compromised.

“Our first priority is to deal with what you will be doing to support the Brits. We have been asked to support MI-5 on at least four local operations and one on the continent involving MI-6. The local operations involve you taking part in the planning process of each operation and to understand when we need to back them up or provide direct support with our assets.”

JC let the words ricochet inside his scull for a second or two until he comprehended what he was hearing.

“In any domestic operation you will be dealing with different MI-5 teams, each one compartmented from the other so only you

will know what each team is doing. The offshore operation is very complicated and may require you to become directly involved but that's not been decided yet," Leland said.

JC listened with commenting.

"I don't have all the details of the MI-5 operations we've been asked to support. They will brief you next week. By the way, how is your search for a nanny coming along?"

"I've narrowed it down to four or five. The family support office is working on the list for me; in fact, I'm headed that way when we finish."

Leland invited JC to lunch after his meeting with Sally's staff. JC approached Sally with an expectation she had answers to his questions.

"Hello, Mr. McKenzie. I just finished getting the last bit of information for you. You weren't interest in the British nannies, so I only made inquiries of the others."

She handed one resume of each nanny before she continued.

"The candidate from Wales is no longer available, sorry. None of the three Irish nannies are married or have children. The two from Iceland are single, no children but I have my suspicions."

"About what exactly, Sally?"

"I've seen this type before. Very attractive, wanting to work for a well-to-do family with as few children as possible. Their primary goal is to connect with the respective family's acquaintances to find husbands."

"Do you think they can take proper care of my daughter?"

"I wouldn't risk it, however, on second thought they wouldn't have too far to look if they were looking for a husband, would they?"

"You've just made me very nervous," JC said.

"Not to worry, they wouldn't be in our book if they didn't have the proper education and experience. I'm just not sure of their motives. Do you understand?"

"Yes, fully, Sally. Let me keep their resumes until you can set up the interviews. How will that occur if they don't live in England?"

"All our candidates have access to Skype. You could also email them if you want to follow up with specific questions."

"Who pays for their initial trip to London?"

"Once you make your decision, we arrange the trip, after that travel costs become your responsibility. If you are dissatisfied in any way, we won't foot the bill to send them back."

"Okay, what about the last two?"

"The ladies from Sweden have both worked in London on several occasions. One has worked for someone on our staff on two occasions and the other once. We've had very good evaluations on them. Their expenses would probably be the highest because of travel costs. Neither is married; one has a 10-year-old daughter who would remain in Sweden. The other has no children."

"Why has the one with a daughter not brought her child with her?"

"Let me look at her employment file. She claimed it would interfere with her job of taking care of her employer's children. Also, the child has some special needs and lives with her grandparents. There is no mention of a father."

"Do you know the circumstances of her special needs?"

"If I remember correctly, I believe she has Downs Syndrome. Is that a problem?"

"I don't understand how a mother could leave her daughter especially if she had a physical or mental health disability. Do you know why she works so far away? Aren't there similar jobs in Sweden?"

"I can only surmise, Mr. McKenzie that she needs the money and the pay is better in England. I don't have any direct knowledge to answer your question. You can ask her yourself. Do you have access to Skype, Mr. McKenzie?"

"Unfortunately, I don't have access."

"You can use our office. I will give you at least 48 hours' notice and I will try to schedule at least two interviews back-to-back."

JC went out to lunch with Leland. They talked about living and working in London. The lunch ended with a few added drinks that took them into the late afternoon. Leland called for an embassy staff car for JC.

JC sat in his living room alone, missing his daughter and wondering about the woman from Sweden with the special needs child. Could he ever leave such a child? He would have trouble leaving Sarah for several weeks in the hands of a nanny and she didn't need special care.

He laid out the resumes on the coffee table. Each seemed to have adequate training and experience. The resumes provided quite a bit of information including physical characteristics like color of hair and eyes, weight and height, and any physical limitations with respect to lifting heavy objects, etc.

The 39-year-old Irish women seemed to be the one he kept returning to. The cost of travel to Ireland was far less than the other locations. He was anxious to Skype with her.

JC was restless so he walked to Regent's Park. Along the way he stopped at a pub and had a few beers and a sandwich. It was dark when he returned to his flat. His phone was vibrating in his pocket. When he finally managed to get his keys into the stubborn door lock, he answered. It was Sarah letting him know she arrived safely and was making new friends. She seemed quite pleased and then rang off.

JC turned on the TV, undressed where he stood and crashed on his bed. His daughter's face flashed before him; he smiled. The phone woke him. It was eight in the morning; the driver was waiting at his door. He stumbled down the narrow stairway, opened the door to let the driver in and went back upstairs to take a shower. He told himself if Sarah were here, things would've been different.

"Where are we headed this morning, Phil?"

"I was told to bring you to the embassy, sir."

"I don't have an appointment with anyone, today."

As JC was about to leave, his phone vibrated. He first thought it was his daughter but to his surprise it was Sally with the date and time of his first interviews.

He was to Skype with the two women from Sweden from one to three in the afternoon.

"Do you want me to sit in with you on these two initial interviews, Mr. McKenzie?"

"Yes, I need help digging for gold, Sally." They both laughed.

JC had a sandwich in the embassy cafeteria and then met with Sally. They went to an office with a large monitor with a camera affixed to the top.

Sally typed in some information and the screen came alive with a fuzzy picture.

"Hello, Cristina, can you hear me?" Sally said.

From the fuzzy screen came a reply in the affirmative. Sally made some adjustments and then a beautiful face came into focus. JC stared at her and then looked down at her resume. She was prettier on the screen.

"Hello, Sally, it's nice to see you again. Is your client ready to speak with me?"

JC didn't open his mouth. He couldn't think of the first question. Sally nudged him and whispered he should introduce himself.

"Hello, Cristina, my name is James but please call me JC. I know you have done this before but I am new at it so please forgive me."

"That okay JC, I will make it easy for you. You probably have some information about me. I have been a nanny in England and France for the past 10 years. I really enjoy children and I like to travel. I know it is very difficult to come to such an important decision without seeing me in person."

"You are right. I am a single father but I've only been with my daughter for three years".

"But I thought she was 12 years old?"

"Yes, she is, but it's a long story and I don't want to get into it now, Cristina."

The name Cristina fell off his tongue like butter.

"I hate to get too personal so fast but have you ever been married?" JC hesitantly asked.

"I have been engaged twice but both times we broke up for various reasons. I don't want to go into that right now, JC." They both laughed.

"May I ask if you have any children?"

Cristina looked down and then turned her head as if she were unsure of her response.

"I think Sally can answer that question in more detail. I just want to tell you that I will be totally devoted to your daughter."

JC wanted to ask about her daughter but decided if he spoke with Cristina again, he would discuss it.

"Cristina, may I phone you later? I think I would feel more comfortable with that though I'd prefer to meet you in person."

"I understand. I suspect my having a child is a concern for you but let me assure you it won't interfere with my work. If you want to call me tonight here is my number."

"Cristina, my situation is not your typical nanny position. As I said before, I am a single father. My daughter will be living with me for only a year unless she goes to high school in London. My requirements beyond taking care of her would include cooking, laundry and light housekeeping. I am embarrassed to say that if my daughter leaves, the nanny I hire will eventually become my nanny, so to speak."

JC was embarrassed and started to sweat.

"It sounds like you need a wife, JC. I am not a mail order bride," she laughed.

JC felt like an idiot.

"I'll have to think about it. We can discuss it on the phone if you want to consider me further," she continued

JC thanked her. Sally said a few words and hung up.

"I blew it didn't I, Sally?"

"Well, you were honest and it would be better if she knew up front this is more than a nanny position. I just want to let you know if any of them accepts the position as you have described it, they will probably charge about 500 euros more per month whether Sarah is living with you or not."

"I understand. Perhaps we can reschedule all of them after you let them know what I really need."

"Yes, that's a great idea. I'm sure you will lose most of them right away. I doubt the two women from Iceland would consider anything but were normally acceptable nanny duties. I'll contact all of them. I suggest you speak with Cristina this evening or tomorrow at the latest. After all, she didn't turn you down after learning more about your requirements."

JC left the embassy very disappointed. He should have given all his requirements to Sally when they first met. Perhaps there were women who wanted to do all those duties. Could he afford to hire someone else to cook, clean and do laundry on a part time basis? Maybe those extra 500 euros could cover a second person.

Then he thought about the following year. All he would need would be part time help. Why in the world did he even say to Cristina that she would become his nanny next year? What a stupid thing to say. He was trying to be funny but he was far from it. He wondered what she must have thought of him.

If he called her later, he would have to apologize right away. She might accept the position for the extra money. The last thing he had to do was to address her position if Sarah went to boarding school. Perhaps she'd stay if her daughter was with her. She would be paid for practically doing nothing. What the hell was he thinking? Why would he want to have her and her daughter in his house and pay her more than 1,000 euros a month? On the other hand, Sarah would come back from school on holiday or in the summer so he'd need her for some part of the year. He realized he didn't really think things through. He hoped most of the women would turn him down.

He didn't bother Sally while he was in the embassy. He felt like such a schmuck. On Friday, Sally left a note for him to see her.

He expected all of the women to turn down the job.

"How was your conversation with Cristina, JC?"

"I didn't call her because I thought it best if I waited to see what you found out. Perhaps we shouldn't have moved so fast. I just forgot all the other things that I took for granted. You know, the things wives do and husbands don't give them credit for."

"You'd be surprised how many nannies have to cook and do light housework. I looked through our files again and didn't find anyone suitable for you unless you wanted a few "babushkas."

"Maybe that's what I deserve."

"I contacted the remaining six women and just as I thought the two from Iceland turned us down. I had some interest from two of the three Irish women. They also used the term mail order bride. If I had to guess, I'd have to say they might audition for that job. The other Swedish woman also turned us down. That leaves us with Cristina, and the two from Ireland. I made a tentative appointment to speak with them this afternoon."

"I need to speak with Cristina again. May I use an office? I'll use my cell phone."

"You won't get any cell reception around here with all the electronic devices in various parts of the building. You can use the telephone in the office where the Skype is set up. Good luck."

JC carefully dialed the number. He was very nervous. He wasn't good with apologies but he needed to make this right. The phone rang three times before a man answered in Swedish.

"Hello, I'd like to speak with Cristina, this is James."

He heard bits and pieces of a conversation between the man who answered and at least two other women.

"Hello, JC. I never expected to hear from you again."

"Hello, Cristina. I must apologize for what I said and how I said it. I didn't want to sound as if I needed anyone but a loving person to take care of my daughter. It didn't come to my attention until after we spoke that everything else, I expected from you were things a wife would do."

"It appears as though you are not used to being a parent, especially a single parent. I would consider a trial with you for perhaps the first year. I don't want to think beyond that. I'm sure you know about my situation."

"I know that you love your daughter very much and it must be very difficult to leave her with your parents. If I offer you this position, I feel I'd have to pay you for the additional work, that's fair, isn't it?"

"I wanted to mention that. I'm glad you thought of it."

"Let's leave those details for when I make a final decision. I still have two other women to interview. May I call you on the weekend or would I be disturbing your parents?"

"Thank you for being so considerate. I think Sunday afternoon around two or three would be a good time."

"Until Sunday, and please accept my numerous apologies."

The first thing JC thought when he pried the phone out of his sweaty hand was to realize he was in the process of making a date and not a business arrangement. Perhaps his expectations had been misplaced. He wasn't looking for a mail order bride, or was he? What if they didn't get along, or what if the opposite occurred? Sarah had to be his focus. He had to keep her in the front of his mind during the next two interviews.

After lunch, JC reluctantly returned for the next two interviews. Although a bit shaken by the first one, he was better prepared as were his two potential nannies. Sally advised he not discuss anything but the first year. The job would be vastly different without Sarah. JC agreed.

The screen came alive with the appearance of a pretty blue-eyed, dark haired woman named Bridget. For some reason her camera was set to show only her head and the tops of her shoulders. JC reminded himself this wasn't a beauty contest.

He went through the few first obvious questions. Then Bridget bore in on the non-nanny requirements. JC was a bit on the defensive, though he didn't want to minimize what needed to be done. He de-emphasized the cooking since he could do that for himself. He made it clear she would prepare meals for Sarah in the evening and on the weekends. He told her he'd do his own laundry. But he drew the line at keeping the entire house clean.

Sally felt JC had some misgivings with Bridget. She jumped in with some of her own terse comments and ended the call.

"Sorry, JC, she wasn't so beastly when I spoke with her. You did the right thing by clarifying her responsibilities. Did you tell Cristina what you mentioned to Bridget about those extra requirements?"

"I'm speaking with her on Sunday and I will certainly mention it again. By the way, we had a good conversation and she even mentioned her daughter but not her disability."

When the second interview began. JC was more confident. The third time might be the charm

Again, the screen opened with another similar looking woman but this time he was able to see most of her since she was seated without anything blocking her. The interview progressed as expected. JC covered his revised requirements. Kathleen didn't appear to be too concerned about non-nanny related duties. She mentioned she'd require an increase in her fee.

Since she seemed to accept what he required of her, JC focused on her nanny skills. In the back of his mind, he had a suspicion that Kathleen, though totally competent, loving and sweet, would be no match for Sarah's intellect. She wouldn't be able to get down into the weeds with his gifted daughter. She was the babushka Sally referred to but a younger version.

JC also realized Sarah should have experienced this interview process with him. Her instincts would have been the right ones. Maybe she'd prefer a babushka; after all she had great relationships with her grandmother and with Bella. Certainly, their conversations didn't rival the level of his. On the other hand, perhaps Sarah just enjoyed the company of Bella and Leah.

JC politely ended the interview with no commitment of a further discussion.

"I just realized something, JC. From the outset, even before we started the interview process you focused on the woman with the disabled child. I don't know if you intentionally withdrew your

interest from the other two who were willing to do the extra work but she is the last one standing," Sally observed.

"What can I say Sally? My heart went out to her before we started this process and so far, she hasn't disappointed me. What about her references, I forgot to ask you for them?"

"I usually keep them in a separate file until we are ready to make a decision. We must keep our staff members' names confidential, especially those who are assigned to Leland and a few other non-diplomats assigned to the ambassador's staff."

"What do you have on Cristina?"

Sally handed JC two evaluations that were provided to her over the past four years. Both were exemplary. One even mentioned that on a trip to Sweden they met Cristina's parents and her daughter. In fact, they all spent the weekend together.

JC was nearly sold. He looked forward to Sunday's conversation. He was excited. He even had an urge to get on a plane and meet with her. Why not? He had several weeks to make those arrangements. Maybe he could go on a weekend. He had to discuss it with Leland.

JC's second weekend without Sarah was boring. Since the weather was unseasonably warm, he decided to take the tube and ride to the far reaches of the system.

Back at the flat he turned on the TV and watched the news programs. Later, he called Sarah and brought her up to date. He described each of the three women whom he interviewed.

"I already know which one you picked, papa. You took the one in Sweden who has a child around my age."

"Why do you think you know so much?"

"Because, papa I am smarter than you are. Will she be there when I come back?"

"Not so fast young lady. I have a lot more questions before I can make a decision. If I don't like her, I'll have to start all over

again. I really have only one other choice and she is somewhat like Bella. Would that make you happy?"

"Is she Jewish?" Sarah said with excitement.

"She is Irish and probably Catholic. Is being Jewish important to you?"

"There are no Jewish kids at the camp. One of the counselors is Jewish but he takes care of the boys. By the way, if she is like Bella, you wouldn't have much fun."

"What do you mean by fun? She will be taking care of you, not me."

"You know what I mean, papa. There wouldn't be any romance in your life."

Now how in the world does a 12-year-old know about romance? If she really knew what that meant then she certainly knew about sex. She was growing up too fast.

"Sweetheart, I can find romance in other places, I mean your nanny doesn't have to be the one person in my life. Do you understand that?"

"I understand everything, papa. You think romance with the nanny would interfere with what she is supposed to do."

"Something like that, sweetheart."

"What if I like her so much that I want her to be my mommy?"

JC started to choke up. His little girl wanted to have a mother in her life.

"Sarah, your nanny will be your full-time babysitter although you are no longer a baby, I can't leave you alone. I need to have someone take care of you when I'm not home. We talked about that before we came to London, remember? If I ever meet someone for romance, I won't do anything before I introduced you to her. That's a promise. If you didn't like her, I would let her go, okay, sweetheart?"

They spoke for a few more minutes about camp activities and what she thought about some of her friends. JC made sure he got the correct dates when he could visit her.

Sunday afternoon came very fast. JC's phone call was extremely important. It could result in a major impact on his and Sarah's lives. He decided to follow Cristina's lead and just ask a few follow-up questions.

Cristina answered the phone on the second ring. There was a hint of excitement in her voice.

"I was worried you wouldn't call. I don't think we communicated very well the other day," she said.

"I had every intention of calling you just because of that fact. I'm afraid I did a lousy job. I might have said some things I shouldn't have said," JC said

She tried to interrupt but he insisted on finishing his thought.

"I'm not looking for someone to take care of me. I can cook for myself and I can do my own laundry but the flat is quite large and I need some help. Do you think I'm doing a better job this time, Cristina?"

"I understood exactly what you said. I know how hard it is to be a single parent. Thank God I have my parents to help with my daughter. I am considering your situation but I have so many questions, some personal ones if you don't mind."

"There are some questions I can't answer, especially over the phone. If we decide this is a good opportunity for both us and my daughter, I'd like to come to Sweden to meet you in person. I want to meet your family to let them get to know me. After all, I'm not married and they might have some concerns."

"I don't think you know the Swedish people. They don't jump to conclusions, if you know what I mean."

"Look, I will be responsible for you. I want them to know you are in a safe home. Besides I want to meet your daughter."

Cristina didn't respond for a few seconds. He seemed to have disarmed her a bit.

"What do you know about my Maria?"

"I was told she has Down Syndrome. I know she is very precious to you and to your parents. I worked with hundreds of children who had similar disabilities when I volunteered with the Special Olympics. Have you ever heard of it?"

"Yes, of course, we have it in Sweden as well."

He thought he detected a snivel, perhaps she was holding back tears.

"I had a feeling you were someone special. You had such a kind face on the screen, James. I never had any concerns about my safety or welfare unless you are secretly Jack the Ripper," She laughed.

"I think he has been dead for at least a hundred years, Cristina. What about my visit, can I meet you and your family?"

"I'll have to think about it and discuss it with them. They are very overprotective of my daughter. She has lived with them since birth as have I. Her father left me when we found out about Maria's disability. I am a very private person. I usually work for a few years with one family and then I come home to spend time with my daughter. By the way, how long would you need me?"

"At least until next summer, my daughter might go to boarding school after that. Did you want something longer?"

"That sounds just about right at the moment. Depending on how much my daughter's new school will cost, I might have to find another family in England."

"I thought education was free in Sweden."

"It is for almost everyone but I have to pay part of the cost for the specialists that augment her regular teachers. My parents are retired now and they are living on a pension so it is up to me to pay."

"I understand why you have to work. I have personal questions as well so I think we should see each other soon, maybe before the first of August, if you are comfortable with that."

"Call me on Wednesday evening and I'll have an answer for you. In the meantime, we should agree to our arrangement. Your embassy will take care of all the financial matters but you and I have to be sure this will work. I really enjoyed speaking with you, James."

"I did too. Expect my call around 7 p.m. your time, if that's okay."

"Yes, I will be waiting for you. Good bye."

JC was perspiring from tension and excitement. Whether or not anything would happen between them, such as Sarah's idea of romance, Cristina would be a joy to be around.

On Monday night he called Sarah to give her a progress report. He didn't want to bring up Cristina's daughter but he had to address her disability so she would understand why Cristina, if hired, would come alone.

"I know all about it, papa. We had a girl like her in our class in Brooklyn. We all loved her very much. She was very smart but she had trouble communicating. We were very patient with her."

JC's chest swelled with love for this precious human being. She was 12 going on 30, or maybe she was 30 in a 12-year-old body.

"I didn't know that, sweetheart. Thank you for sharing with me. I'll speak with you on Thursday after Cristina and I make our decision."

"I think you like her, papa," she said with a giggle.

"I'm not sure yet. I am more interested in what she can do for you and not for me, sweetheart."

On Wednesday morning, JC headed for Leland's office. On the way Sally stopped him.

“Hello stranger, have you made any decisions yet?”

“I am following up with Cristina. We’ve had two serious discussions. Tonight, we will decide on whether she is right for Sarah.”

“What about you, how do you feel about her?”

“My feelings are less important. As long as she is pleasant to be around and we stay out of each other’s way, I think we will be okay. I spoke to her about her daughter. I think she was surprised that I knew about her situation. I shared my experience with Down Syndrome children and she opened up about her daughter’s special education needs and the reason why she needs money.”

“I can’t wait to be invited to your engagement party. This is certainly getting off to more than a business arrangement.”

“Why do you say that? Don’t all parents that hire a nanny want to know as much about that person as possible?”

“Perhaps they do, but that usually comes after they’ve been together a while. You are working as fast as if you were on a dating game show. You know Cristina never worked for a single father before though she has had several jobs working for single moms. I spoke with her yesterday. She seems to be conflicted because she thinks you are someone special and she can’t afford to have a relationship with her employer,” Sally observed.

“Well, if she thinks something like that might occur and it would cause a problem with her being our nanny, please tell her I will guarantee her salary for a year if she wants to leave for any reason. I think that’s fair and appropriate.”

“I don’t think she is afraid of something happening. It’s her daughter. As with you, her daughter comes first. She has avoided any lasting relationships with any man since the day her daughter was born. She knows her parents won’t be there for her daughter in the future, so it would be just the two of them.”

"Do you think she ever considered someone that might love her might love Maria as much?" JC asked.

"She's never met anyone like that. Those are things I can't discuss with her. If you agree to hire her, those are things you should consider only if you think one or both of you are getting involved. You might become the best of friends with little or no physical attraction to each other, although after speaking with both of you I have my doubts."

"So, she is afraid of us having a relationship."

"Hey, JC she will be living under your roof 24/7 and your daughter won't always be home. Do the math, genius. She can't just ditch you and walk away. She will be working for you. She knows it and now you do too."

"I must confess, Sally my career in the army left me no time for romantic engagements. I have a very weak batting average with women. I have a better relationship with my daughter. I actually understand her and enjoy her company. If I ever found someone like her, I'd marry her in a minute. By the way Sally, does the embassy do any business with the Jewish community?"

"What do you need, JC?"

"You might not know it but Sarah is Jewish and wants to continue her religious studies."

"I understand. I'll get back to you with a few useful contacts."

Leland wanted JC to begin his assignment with MI-5. He set up a meeting with some of the senior Brits to get briefed on the operations he would support.

"I know you aren't settled in yet and are still searching for the right person to take care of your daughter but I have to introduce you to our friends as soon as possible."

"I understand, Leland tomorrow will be fine with me."

"Your driver will pick you up at eight in the morning and take you to MI-5 headquarters."

"Where will I be situated, with them?"

"For now, until I decide whether you really need a cover, I'm not in favor of doing anything that's not essential. I will be meeting with the director of MI-5 on Friday and that subject will be on the agenda. In the meantime, I will find an office for you here."

JC was feeling like an outcast. He wasn't part of any CIA operations and would only be called upon when needed to support the Brits. He felt as though he was the sixth man on a basketball team.

He was ready at the appointed time, unlike the other day. This driver was a man of few words. He dropped JC off in front of the building and drove off with no arrangements for a return trip.

JC gave his name to the security folks. They promptly gave him a visitor's badge and led him to a small conference room. Fifteen minutes later people wandered into the room. Each one politely introduced themselves to JC. The last man in the door was obviously the boss since he sat at the head of the table.

He introduced himself to JC and told the rest of them the reason why JC was there. He mentioned four operations by code name and pointed out the person heading each operation.

"You have all read Mr. McKenzie's resume and have been advised he is the CIA liaison supporting your operation. Use him, no, take advantage of him and his agency.

"We were told you didn't play by the rules during your military career, so perhaps you can continue bucking the political head winds," one of them said.

JC smiled when he realized they selected him because he had a history of braking people's balls to get things done. Unfortunately, he didn't have the opportunity to do it as a CIA employee. He was curious how they knew so much about him.

One of them, Kevin Dorsal offered to take JC on a quick tour of the premises and then to his favorite watering hole. The MI-5

operations center was similar to the one at CIA headquarters. There were lots of monitors showing status reports, live photo feeds and other information pertinent to on-going operations.

The watering hole was a pub that catered to government wonks. A spy could find a treasure trove of information there, if he or she waited until people consumed three or four drinks. Unbeknownst to JC, only certain people were allowed in the pub during the noon time drink fest. The owner of the pub was ex-MI-5 and knew most of his patrons. Others had to be vouched for.

Kevin confided to JC they were counting on him to bridge the gap between both agencies. He recounted several stories of how things went into the shitter because of poor coordination and communication. He admitted some of CIA's ops that focused on U.S. interests in the U.K. might overlap their domestic ops. They needed a guy like JC to direct traffic, so to speak. JC knew he wouldn't be briefed on his agency's ops in the U.K.; he didn't have the need to know.

The following day, JC found a secure computer in a vacant office in his embassy and drafted a report on what he learned during his visit and added his unsolicited comments at the end.

On Wednesday, JC returned to the embassy to chat with Sally. She told him the Irish nanny had found employment but she would find other suitable replacements if Cristina didn't pan out. She handed JC a note from Leland to meet him when he arrived.

Leland greeted him warmly and then provided the facts of life. He said the Brits always want the fruits of American intelligence operations, especially in their country.

"The U.S. must protect its sources. Some are well placed Brits inside and outside the government. Every time we give them something the first thing they try to do is to ascertain the source."

"I can see that, Leland but if these threats are serious and we have something that can help, can't we still protect our sources?"

"I am briefed on every threat the U.K. faces, at least the ones they want me to know about. It is up to me to determine whether we should assist them. I am aware of the operations you were briefed on and I can assure you I will find something for you to give them. However, there are certain threats that I am not made aware of because their sources are our sources as well."

"I assume we don't share sources. So, when do we cooperate with them?"

"We cooperate when it's in our best interest."

"So, my job is to hand out tidbits of information to make them think we are cooperating, is that it"?

"Those are your words, not mine. You are the official channel of communication and will provide things that must not be traced back to me."

"If they can't verify where I got it from, why would the Brits believe me when I give them information?"

"That's how the game is played. They know who you work for, they just can't confirm it, nor do they care to. There is someone like you working for them who provides information to us. We know he works for them but we can't trace him back to MI-5. As long as the information is good, we don't care who provides it."

JC began to see the big picture and eventually the little picture with respect to his role. He was an errand boy. His value was to provide his boss with information about the Brits in trade for a tidbit or two of something the CIA should routinely share with the Brits.

As long as his life wasn't in jeopardy, he was resolved to play the part of a conduit. By this time JC wanted to get some fresh air. He didn't want to be in a bad mood for his call to Cristina. JC left

Leland's office a bit disheartened with what he heard. He had a better job in New York but left there thinking this was a step up the ladder.

After fortifying himself with a few drinks, JC dialed Cristina. Her cheerful voice made him forget his disappointment. She told him her parents would be happy to meet him, if she was serious about the position.

"That's good news, Cristina. What do you want me to say to convince you to take the position?"

"I don't know, James. I usually have good instincts. I only quit one job that I misjudged. In your case I understand what you need as far as your daughter is concerned and some of the additional duties. I am still concerned about your needs. We have to have an understanding that there can be no personal expectations. You understand what I am saying?"

"Yes, of course, you are my daughter's nanny and nothing else. Now please don't be concerned about me, whatever I may need I will find outside my home. Is that what you want to hear?"

"That's quite crass but you made your point. I think I'd like you to meet my parents and get to know me better. You can still back out if you want to when you return to London."

"That seems fair. When is it convenient for me to visit? Please give me some options."

JC didn't know if he would be allowed to travel outside of the U.K.

"I'll send you an email. I have to go now. Good-bye."

JC checked the price of tickets. He assumed Cristina lived in Stockholm but he could be wrong. He never asked. The fares to Stockholm were reasonable.

He received an email from Cristina with a few dates she would be available. She wrote she would pick him up at the airport so they could get acquainted during the 60-minute drive. She said

she reserved the right not to take him to her parents' house if she didn't get good vibes.

If she was this cautious about meeting a stranger, perhaps she would be the right person for his daughter. As President Reagan said, 'trust, but verify'.

He wrote back he was pleased with the arrangements and he wanted a recommendation for a hotel not too far from her house. He waited 15 minutes for a reply before he turned his computer off.

JC went to work the next day not knowing where he would be working in the embassy. Leland invited JC into his office. Before Leland spoke, JC had to tell him about his proposed visit.

"I want to go to Sweden to interview a prospective nanny. Considering the situation, I need to see her for myself."

"When do you plan on going?"

"Within the next two weeks. I'll only be away overnight."

"I don't have a problem with that. Keep me in the loop."

On his way out, Sally caught up with him and handed him an envelope. JC returned to his flat via the local pub. After a few drinks and some small talk with a few lads, he returned home and made himself comfortable on his couch. He opened the envelope and found the names of four rabbis with their addresses and contact numbers.

He checked their addresses on the Internet to determine how far they lived from him. He realized he'd have to tell Cristina about Sarah's continued Hebrew education since she'd probably have to take her to a rabbi.

JC called each rabbi on the list. They were all amenable to working with Sarah. Only one would provide lessons without a charge, unfortunately he was a reform rabbi. JC made an appointment with the only orthodox rabbi on the list. JC wanted to meet with him before introducing him to Sarah.

On Sunday, JC called Cristina to make the final arrangements for his visit. He also asked her again to find a hotel near her home. She seemed to be excited as he was about his visit.

On Monday, he reported to Leland to get whatever he had from him to deliver to MI-5. Before he left, Leland insisted he become familiar with the contents of the envelope before his meeting. JC spent about an hour reviewing the material and committing it to memory. Basically, it was a compilation of names of a few terrorists the CIA kept under surveillance while they were in Britain. There was an ongoing effort to tie them to various terrorist networks. JC didn't know how much of this information was already known to MI-5.

The meeting with MI-5 went well. They seemed pleased with the information. JC couldn't tell how helpful he was to their operations. After discussing the information with him, MI-5 gave him some follow up questions for the CIA. Though JC didn't want to seem overly aggressive, he asked how this information aided their operations. JC noted some hesitancy before Kevin responded.

"We were aware of many of these names but until now we didn't know to which terrorist cells they belonged to. We will be able to connect the dots and create a hierarchy tracing them to their respective country of origin."

"I am pleased we've been able to help. Is there anything I can do to assist you?"

"As a matter of fact, JC, there is. Would you be willing to listen to some phone intercepts and give us the nuggets, if any?"

"Don't you have your own translators?" JC asked.

"We do and have used them for low level targets but we can't trust them when we are dealing with these targets. Though our translators are British born and have been vetted, they are Muslims with families that could be susceptible to pressure by those who know who employs them. I'm sure you share our concerns."

"Of course, and I agree. I'll do whatever I can to help you. There is only one caveat; I must inform my colleagues of what I learn without restriction. Any threats to your national security are also threats to our national security."

They all looked at each other because they didn't expect his request. Kevin said he'd have to run it up his chain of command. They agreed to meet at the end of the week.

The following day, JC advised Leland of MI-5's reaction to the information he provided. He also discussed what they wanted him to do for them. Leland had no objections. Then JC mentioned his request. Leland winced.

"You are really a ball breaker, JC. I'm sure you've heard that before. You can't hit the Brits head on, or on the head as you've done. Everything has to be nuanced. They don't like ultimatums which is basically what you gave them."

"I am not a politician, Leland. If both our nations are fighting terrorists and both our nations have suffered loss of life by their hands, I can't understand why we aren't working with each other in full cooperation. I don't expect them to share their nation's secrets but nothing having to do with terrorists should be withheld. I realize we do it too but that's wrong."

"In an ideal world your views would prevail, JC. Unfortunately, this isn't an ideal world. If the Brits agree to your caveat, I will be the first to congratulate you. As a realist, I think the best you will get from the Brits is a watered-down version of what you can tell us. They will probably offer a counter-proposal that will require you to accede to their prior approval before you can share information with us. You will probably have to sign some kind of secrets agreement."

"If I share information with you, I would be in violation of the agreement. What's the worst that could happen to me? I assume I would be sent home."

"In disgrace I might add and your career with the agency may very well end on that note."

JC felt like a child being schooled on the basics of life. He had to respect Leland, a 30-year veteran of the spy game, because he was never sent home by a host government. JC tried to rationalize his own point of view. He wasn't a spy; he wasn't trying to obtain secret information from any British government entity; he was a civilian warrior fighting global terrorism.

Leland cautioned JC to be careful with their allies; his actions could have consequences beyond relations with MI-5.

The next morning, JC met with the orthodox rabbi, an immigrant from Tunisia. JC learned an hour into their meeting the rabbi also spoke Arabic. They both hit it off well. The rabbi even offered to coach JC with his Hebrew studies. JC decided to make arrangements for his daughter to continue her studies. Once Sarah got settled in her new school, the rabbi would see her every Sunday. The rabbi offered to come to JC's flat but that would've been unwise for both of them. Perhaps Sarah and he would go together and give the nanny a day off.

During the important meeting with MI-5 about JC's proposal, JC was preoccupied with his trip to Sweden the following day and thought about what he would discover in a mere 24 hours.

The Brits were polite but direct. They insisted they must have final approval over what JC could discuss with his employer. In fact, they had an agreement prepared for him to sign, exactly as Leland predicted. JC was good with that and signed it without comment. His Brit colleagues seemed to take in a collective sigh of relief; or was it his imagination? Would they have backed down if he refused to sign the document? It wasn't an issue to fight about now. He also knew they needed him more than he needed them. They parted on a high note after showing JC to a workplace where he would translate some intercepts. They promised him as soon as he

completed the backlog of recordings he could sit in on the live conversations.

When he returned to his flat, he called Cristina to discuss where they would meet.

"I have to be honest with you JC, I feel as nervous as a school girl about tomorrow. I want you to be sincere about your feelings regarding my ability to care for your daughter but deep down I also want you to like me."

He stopped her before she finished. JC didn't want to seem rude but he realized she was having a difficult time with her choice of words.

"Cristina, I will be candid with you before I leave on Sunday. I have to like you as a person first because we have to get along. Our living arrangements will force us to become good friends. The rest I won't worry about because if I like you, my daughter will like you. Finally, I have every confidence in your ability to take care of my daughter. Does that make sense to you?"

"Yes, of course. I realize the adults have to get along first but I'm still nervous about meeting you. I've never worked for a single father before. We Swedes are quite open about, well you know, but if I have to draw some lines in the sand for whatever reason, I want you to understand. I'm no different than an American woman. And you must remember I'm also a single parent."

JC was convinced before he took the wrapping off the package, he was going to like what was inside.

"Yes of course I remember and I am anxious to meet your daughter as well."

"I will meet you at your hotel because it's a difficult trip from my home to the airport. Take a taxi from the airport and call me when you arrive at the hotel. By the time you check in, I will be there."

"I'm really looking forward to meeting all of you."

JC was stoked. He opened her folder to look at her picture again. He also rechecked her personal information. She was five foot seven and weighed 125 pounds. She was 38 years old. He was pleased, but he tempered his expectations. Something about her could turn him off.

The flight to Sweden seemed to take forever. He dozed off and fantasized about her. That wasn't good. He woke up abruptly when the flight attendant reminded him to buckle his seat belt. He went through customs fairly fast he called Cristina and then hailed a taxi. The ride was nearly an hour and cost him 50 euros including the tip. Cristina was right about the drive, one hour each way would have been an imposition.

He entered the hotel lobby and approached the desk clerk. Out of the corner of his eye he spotted a drop-dead gorgeous blond. Were all Swedish women as beautiful, he thought? After he gave his name, JC dialed Cristina's cell. The blond woman stood up and approached him.

"There's no need to call, JC, it's me, Cristina."

JC felt his knees buckle a bit. He turned to face her. There were no words to express how he felt.

"I checked with the airlines and since you were on time, I decided not to have you wait, so here I am," she said through a beautiful smile.

The only words to pass his lips were, "Thank God I have a daughter."

Cristina laughed and extended her hand.

"I'm Cristina and you must be JC. I'm pleased to meet you; I've heard so much about you."

"I'm so glad you didn't make me wait. You are so kind. I couldn't stand the suspense."

"Why don't you take your bag to your room and we can leave now so we won't miss the great meal my mother has prepared."

"She didn't need to make such a fuss."

"I think she is helping to close the deal," Cristina said with a beautiful broad smile"

JC quickly departed for his room. He brushed his teeth and squirted some cologne in all the obvious places. He was so damned scared to say something stupid that he didn't want to speak.

Cristina hooked her arm through his and led him to her car. During the 15-minute drive they exchanged a few short sentences. JC realized by his apparent reticence to speak Cristina might have thought he was disappointed with her.

Her family home was a modest two-story house with an egg shell façade and terracotta colored roof. Her father greeted them at the door. He was a tall handsome man with a strong handshake. He had a laborer's hand. Cristina's mother was in the kitchen. She wiped her hands on her apron and shook JC's hand.

Her mother showed JC what she had prepared and said it first in Swedish and then in English.

"Come with me JC, I want you to meet my daughter."

JC was very nervous. He wanted to make a good impression on her.

"I must warn you; my daughter only knows a few words in English. We thought it best if we concentrated on Swedish."

Maria was sitting at a table in her bedroom coloring in a book.

"Maria, please stop what you are doing, there is someone here to meet you," Cristina said in Swedish.

"Please don't interrupt her. Let me introduce myself."

JC knelt down beside Maria.

"Hej, Maria, jag är James. Hur står det till?"

Maria turned her head around to look at her mother.

"Did she understand me, Cristina?"

With tears in her eyes, she shook her head yes.

"Where did you learn to speak Swedish, JC?" She blubbered.

"I memorized a few things in a phrase book I bought at the airport in London."

Cristina ripped off a few words in Swedish to her daughter. JC heard Cristina referred to him as JC. Maria got off her chair and put her arms around him.

"Hello, JC. I am Maria," she said in English with a beautiful smile.

JC hugged her and felt tears in his eyes.

When he stood up Maria didn't want to let him go, so he picked her up.

"Would you mind telling me about her? She seems quite advanced in her ability to communicate. You and your parents have done a great job with her."

"Thank you, JC. She has some cognitive disabilities and she sometimes gets so frustrated she acts out like a two-year-old."

"I think she is doing great and I hope to see more of her."

JC was speaking from the heart and Cristina knew it.

"You must be a terrific father, JC. Sarah must be a very happy child."

"I think she will be as happy with you but let's not get ahead of ourselves."

The three of them went to the dining room. During the meal, which featured several varieties of fish, Maria kept staring at JC. Both grandparents noticed it and apparently had a discussion about it.

Cristina was quiet. JC thought she was assessing what occurred in her daughter's room. JC had that happen to him before with children like Maria so it wasn't a super unusual reaction. After lunch, Maria's grandparents took her outside to play. Cristina cleared the table. When JC offered to help, she protested but he did it anyway.

Finally, the two of them had an opportunity to be alone to discuss what JC came to Sweden for. They took a walk to a nearby park and found an empty bench.

"You are someone special, JC. If you offer me the opportunity to care for Sarah, I would accept it."

"I don't have any doubts that you would be a terrific influence on my daughter but I feel very guilty taking you away from your daughter."

"I've done this before, JC. My parents are terrific with her. I never fear for her welfare though I do miss her very much. I know I get one trip home a year at your expense but I'd like to go a second time at my own expense."

"What else can I do for you?"

"I'll let you know after you hire me," she said laughing.

God she is beautiful, JC thought. How can I possibly avoid falling for her while she is under my roof?

"Do you have any questions for me, Cristina?"

"What do you do for a living in London?"

"Do you mind if I tell you when you come to London?"

"Does that mean I have the job?"

"You probably had the job before I left London. Do you accept?"

"Yes, I will be honored to take care of your daughter. Now tell me where you live and all about your flat."

"Are you familiar with London?"

"Yes, I lived there on and off for five years."

"I live in St. John's Wood near Regent's Park. I have a two-story home with three bedrooms on the upper floor and one on the ground floor with a private bath. I think it best if you live there until we see how things go."

She smiled and seemingly understood exactly what he meant.

"That's a wonderful part of London. I am getting very excited about it. I've had a few jobs outside London that had great accommodations but they were too far from the center of London. I could only walk to a few shops in the local village."

"Unfortunately, I don't have a car but, in a few weeks, I'll have my own car and driver."

"How did you manage that? Are you a very important man?"

"I've hired a friend who worked with me while we served in the military. He recently retired and is going through a divorce. He will be here as soon as he takes care of his personal affairs."

"Will he live with you?"

"If I have to leave for business for more than one night, I might ask him to stay over. Would you be comfortable with that, Cristina?"

She didn't answer right away. JC gave her time to think about it.

"As long as it is temporary and he understands the ground rules pertaining to me."

"You mean the lines in the sand?"

"Yes, exactly that. For the moment I feel very comfortable and safe with you. I hope I can feel the same with him. What's his name?"

"Jerry Hopkins, he has a daughter and a son and he is two years younger than I am."

"I just want you to know if anything happens that is an affront to me, though there is a contract between us, I will leave and you will be obligated to pay the entire contract."

"I would fulfill my obligation regardless of the reason you left so long as you gave me enough time to find a replacement."

She extended her hand to shake on it. JC held it for longer than she expected. She didn't withdraw her hand until he let go.

Her gaze upon him remained as if she wanted him to read her mind, or perhaps she was trying to read his.

“Let’s go back to be with Maria and my parents.”

JC followed closely behind her scrutinizing her body under a thin cotton dress. So far JC could find no flaws with her, she seemed quite pleasant and easy going. Could he live under the same roof and not want to change the scope of their contracted relationship? What would he do if she came on to him? On second thought, that would be unlikely and a high risk on her part. If anything occurred, it would have to come from him.

Maria was sitting on a swing; her grandfather was pushing her and her grandmother sat at table holding a pitcher of what appeared to be lemonade. Cristina’s mother offered a glass to JC. Maria said something in Swedish that JC assumed was a request for lemonade as well. As soon as she jumped off the swing she ran to JC and hugged him.

In English she said, “Hello, JC”.

“That rarely happens, JC. She is usually very shy around strangers. Do you cast magic spells around young girls?”

“Young girls and older ones too and there is no known antidote,” he said laughing.

Cristina blushed and turned away from him.

Cristina’s father said something to her. Cristina translated for JC and said her father wants to take them all out to a restaurant. She replied that Maria wouldn’t sit still that long. She reminded him that they hadn’t taken Maria to a restaurant at night since she was a baby.

In English her father said, “She will behave, if she sits next to JC.”

“Is that alright with you, JC?”

“Have you forgotten my magic spell?”

"James, you have a way with young girls, I can see that," her father said in English.

"I told you so, Cristina," JC quipped.

She didn't reply. She picked up her daughter and told her mother she was going to find something pretty for her daughter to wear to please James."

"Mr. Nilsson, I insist on taking your family out. I don't know when I'll have this opportunity again."

"That's very kind of you, James. I have a feeling we will see you again in the near future. I believe my daughter has fallen under your magic spell as well but don't ever tell her I said that," her father whispered.

"Is that something you want to happen?"

"I'm afraid I don't have any say in the matter. Cristina has always been a cautious woman, at least with men. I've not seen my daughter this happy in a long time."

"I'm very cautious as well especially because I have a daughter to protect. "I know she will like your daughter very much," he said.

He shook JC's hand and said something quite startling.

"Take care of my daughter and my granddaughter as well."

Is what JC thought about bringing Maria to England something her grandparents would support? Did they want to enjoy their retirement by cutting loose the young girl they practically raised as surrogate parents?

Things were going too fast. He had only been in Sweden for about six hours and his future was coming into focus, not only in his mind but in Cristina's father's mind as well.

Mr. Nilsson excused himself to get dressed for the evening out. JC was left alone in the backyard with a pitcher of lemonade that he so wanted to be laced with vodka. He examined his creased

pants and his wrinkled shirt. He wasn't dressed to go anywhere except back to his hotel.

There wasn't much conversation on the way to the restaurant. JC thought they were all assessing the damage he wrought by his presence and his so-called magic spells. What he said and what he did wasn't anything special. Was the Nilsson family able to read minds and control his?

JC was pretty sure Cristina's parents wished she would have a life of her own. Perhaps they wanted more grandchildren. Other than her older brother, who was married but childless, there weren't many opportunities for more grandchildren as Cristina approached her 39th birthday.

Though JC wanted Cristina to come to England as soon as possible, he had to wait until just before Sarah returned from summer camp. The less time he had alone with Cristina, the better. Cristina had to bond with Sarah and vice versa before things got serious with Cristina.

Dinner was very interesting and delicious. Cristina had to order for JC and explain what she ordered. Maria sat between the two of them and behaved like a lady. I think everyone was very proud of her. Maria kept putting her hand on JC's leg. Cristina noticed it but made no comment. JC thought she said something to her parents about it but he wasn't sure.

JC excused himself and walked over to the waiter out of view of the Nilsson's and gave the waiter his credit card. The waiter nodded. The choice of desserts was fabulous. JC pointed to each one on the menu for Maria to pick one out. He ordered the same one.

The Nilsson's drove directly home because it was getting past Maria's bedtime. She insisted on kissing JC goodnight. Cristina took the keys and drove JC back to the hotel.

Above all things, JC was determined not to make this evening something both he and Cristina might regret. Under no circumstances would he sleep with her. He had to make it a brief goodnight. Perhaps a kiss on the cheek would give her an indication he didn't want anything to happen.

When they arrived at the hotel, JC didn't get out of the car until their conversation concluded.

"I don't know what to say, JC. I was amazed at my daughter's reaction to you. My parents noticed everything."

"I came here to find out if you would be the right person for my daughter and now, I'm apparently the right person for yours. First, I want to say you are just the person to take care of Sarah. I am convinced the two of us will get along quite well. I want this arrangement to work, so for the time being we have to focus on Sarah."

"Are you implying that perhaps the focus might be elsewhere?"

"That's up to you and me. I want you to bond with Sarah and her with you. I'm a very perceptive person and someday I might tell you why that is true. I'm also a man that has had to be very cautious trusting others and you will soon know why that is also true. So, whether or not you have any thoughts that may be off the plan, so to speak, you and I have time to deal with it and what has happened today."

"I understand everything you just said. I have trust issues as well. I just hope we become good friends; that's my goal for now."

JC reminded her of his flight time. She said she would pick him up in the morning and perhaps they could have breakfast before he left for the airport.

"I think that's a good idea. Tomorrow, I hope to have things sorted out. By that I mean, when you should come to England. Sarah won't be home for another month. I will visit her next

weekend and tell her all about you and Maria. Perhaps you could speak with her on the phone."

"I would love that. Thank you."

JC opened the car door, stopped for a second and turned to kiss Cristina on the cheek. She smelled wonderful.

JC was pleased with himself, especially since his instincts about Cristina were correct. He fantasized about her until he fell asleep. Six hours later he was jolted out of sleep by the sharp sound of the ringing phone.

"Sorry to bother you Mr. McKenzie, but you have a visitor in the lobby."

"Is it a beautiful blonde woman?"

"Yes, and she wants to come up to your room."

"Tell her I will be down in 10 minutes and thank you."

The last thing JC wanted was to have Cristina come to his room because if she did, he knew what would happen. He was convinced that she knew as well.

JC took the fastest shower of his life and managed to dress and toss his dirty clothes in his bag. He tried to make himself presentable but he was certain he looked a bit disheveled.

"Good morning sleepy head did you forget about our breakfast and your flight," she said in a playful sounding scolding voice.

"I'm sorry, I overslept."

"I've done that a few times but not while working."

They drove to a fashionable café. While eating he checked his watch several times. When he looked up, he realized he was indicating he was anxious to leave.

"Do you want to leave now?" she said coldly.

"It's just a habit. I really wish I had more time to get to know you better."

Her response floored him.

"You had your chance on two occasions," she responded with a smile.

He couldn't find the words to respond. On the ride to the airport Cristina wanted to know when she should come to London. JC knew he had to give her an answer at that moment rather than later.

"I want to give you time to settle in and to get familiar with the neighborhood. Let's make it the week before Sarah comes home."

He could see her calculating the days of the next month.

"How about August 20th?" She asked.

JC really didn't care when she arrived as long as it occurred with as little time as possible before Sarah's arrival. He agreed to her suggestion. The few minutes he spent with Cristina before he got out of his car were awkward. He realized the time they just spent together was strained, though he didn't mean it to be. He wanted to hug her but she remained seated behind the steering wheel. He wasn't in a position to lean over to kiss her on the cheek because he had his bag in his lap. He offered his hand, which she took.

"I will call you when I make my flight reservations. I'd like you to meet me at the airport. I will have a lot of luggage."

"I will be anxious to meet you but don't be upset if I can't spend a lot of time with you. I'll be there as much as possible. By the way what do you like to do for enjoyment? Do you like the theater, concerts or perhaps the cinema?"

"Thank you for asking. I'm easy to please. To tell the truth, I like to watch movies on television or read a good book. Whatever pleases you will please me."

With that she let go of his hand. As JC started to walk toward the terminal, Cristina got out of the car ran after him; she hugged

him and kissed him on the cheek. They gazed into each other's eyes for a few seconds until he broke it off.

When he finally settled into his seat, he knew he could fall in love with Cristina but he had to wait for Sarah's input.

On Monday morning, JC was ensconced in his new office at MI-5 listening to hours of telephone intercepts. He took notes when something noteworthy was mentioned. After nearly seven hours, he only had three pages of notes. He discovered that three of the intercepts, all with different speakers, referred to the "doctor" coming to London in September. JC could only speculate what that was in reference to and informed his new friends he suspected whoever the doctor was; he was coming to London near the anniversary of 9/11. He also suggested the doctor may not be a person but rather a package.

JC spent the rest of the week listening to intercepts and providing his notes to MI-5. It was boring work but it had to be done. He was looking forward to visiting Sarah on Saturday. He was surprised that during his first week with MI-5 he didn't think of Cristina,

On Saturday morning he took the train to visit Sarah. He was grateful for the fresh air and the exercise. He was becoming too sedentary. At the entrance there were security folks who asked for his identification. Once he passed through that gauntlet he was taken for a ride in a golf cart along with two other parents.

Sarah was engaged in a competitive activity. It was too intense for her to stop and search for him in the gaggle of parents that lined the pitch; a new word JC had to add to his Brit vocabulary. Once the game was over, she ran into his arms and jumped up on his upper body. They walked to an area where there were long tables set for lunch. She looked for her new friend. It was nice for JC to see her with someone her own age.

"Papa, this is Rachael, she is British."

"Hello, Rachel are your parents here?"

"I only have my mum and she is speaking with my counselor."

"Go fetch her, Rachael and bring her here. We will save two seats for you," JC said.

JC and Sarah sat near the end of one of the tables and saved two seats for Rachael. The counselors served the food and drinks. Rachael and her mother arrived and joined JC and Sarah.

"This is my mum, Helen. Mum this is JC, Sarah's father."

"I'm pleased to meet you, Helen. Is this Rachael's first year here?"

"Heavens no, my children have been coming here for years. This is the only place in Britain where children can get out in the country in a safe environment."

"Is Rachael your youngest child?" JC asked.

"Her two older brothers are counselors on the boys' side of the camp."

JC noted Rachael's mom was a bit snooty and cold. She must come from money, he thought.

"Is Rachael's father here as well?"

JC knew he was being nosey but she wasn't very talkative.

"He's too busy for his children. He works all the time. Before you ask, he is an international lawyer for Barclay's Bank."

JC decided to shut his mouth, at least with her and speak with the girls.

"Will I get a chance to meet your counselor, Sarah?"

"She said to meet her in our area after lunch."

"Sorry to interrupt but my oldest son is engaged to their counselor. They've known each other since their first day here seven years ago," Helen said.

"She comes from a very good family. Her father is a high-level official in the government."

"That's nice, a marriage of politics to money," JC said.

Helen shot a glance at him that could have melted an iceberg. He hoped she wouldn't ask him what he did because his cover story wasn't prepared yet. After a few minutes of silence, she didn't ask.

"Sarah, we have to make time to talk about my trip to Sweden," JC said.

"Sweden, oh I always wanted to visit there," Rachael said.

"What's so great about Sweden? You've been to the south of France and to Spain. Why would you want to go somewhere that was cold all the time?" Helen admonished her daughter.

JC sensed an urge to punch Helen in the mouth. Instead, he stood up and told her it was nice meeting her and Rachael. He took Sarah by the hand and practically dragged her away.

"What the matter, papa? Are you angry with me?"

"No, not at all, sweetheart. I had to get away from Rachael's mother; she isn't a very nice person."

"I know, Rachael is very unhappy. She rarely sees her father and her mother is always out. She has a nanny even though she has a mother."

"Where is her nanny now?"

"She goes home for the summer. She lives in Belfast."

"Where can we go to talk about your new nanny?"

"We can go to the lake there are benches there and it is quiet."

JC took out his cell phone to show Sarah some photos of Cristina and her family.

"She is very pretty, papa. When is she coming?"

"About a week before you come home. I want her to settle in and get used to the area."

"Can I trust you to be alone with my nanny for a week without me?" She said teasingly.

"I don't know but I will be on my best behavior, I promise."

"I don't plan on sharing my nanny with you, papa. I think you should get your own nanny."

"I don't think that would be possible, sweetheart. Besides she is supposed to take care of you, not me."

"What if you like each other? What will happen to me?"

JC sensed his daughter was feeling very insecure. He had to nip this in the bud.

"Sarah, what I want the most is for you to like Cristina and for her to like you. Though she will be living with us, she won't be family. If the day comes that you begin to have feelings for her, I mean feelings like you had for your mother, I want to be the first to know."

Then the smartest 12-year-old in the world said an amazing thing.

"Papa, if you have feelings for Cristina like you had for my mother, I want to be the first to know."

JC didn't know what to say. He just stared at her and all of a sudden, they both laughed out loud. JC kissed her on the top of her head and held her close to him.

"So, what do we do now? Are there any other activities?" JC asked.

"There's a talent show in an hour. I don't want to go. It's stupid anyway. My counselor said we didn't have to go since we saw it already."

For the next couple of hours Sarah took JC around the camp area. Every once in a while, she would stop and introduce him to her friends and their parents. They ran into the couple JC met on the golf cart. They reminded him to call next week, as if he had the time.

"What do you think of your new friends, sweetheart?"

"I like a few of the girls but I really like the boys. They are nicer to me."

"What do you mean nicer to you?"

JC suddenly got very upset.

"They like to hold my hand and hug me a lot. They tell me how beautiful I am."

"How old are these boys, are they your age?"

"No, they are older boys. I think they are 14 or 15."

JC decided to pay the camp director a visit before he left. When he had the opportunity, he took Mr. Groom aside and gave him a piece of his mind. He wanted to know how and when his 12-year-old daughter was allowed to be with boys two and three years older than she without supervision.

Mr. Groom was taken aback. He couldn't provide JC with a satisfactory answer.

"They never have activities together. The boys' side is about a mile away and there are always adults in between. In fact, our counselors live in cabins between the two camps."

"My daughter doesn't make up stories. I understand they take their meals together, is that true?"

JC felt his blood pressure build up.

"It's true but they eat on different sides of the dining room until they are at least 14 years old. Perhaps your daughter strayed over to their side of the room."

That was it. JC dragged Mr. Groom away from view and told him if anything happened to his daughter, there would be a price to pay. He made sure Mr. Groom understood what he meant.

"Sir, I can assure you nothing will happen. I have been the camp director for 10 years and we never had an incident involving any underage girls."

"Does that mean there have been so called incidents between older boys and girls and perhaps between counselors and campers?"

He saw sweat bead up on Groom's head. As a trained interrogator he knew the signs of a liar. JC felt like grabbing Groom by the throat and choking the life out of him. Instead, he stormed off looking for his daughter.

"Sarah, I want to ask you something and please be honest with me. Do you like it here?" JC asked trying to hold back his ire.

She looked at her father as if she did something wrong.

"I'd rather be home with you but I realize there is no one there to look after me."

"If I took you back with me now, would you be upset with me?"

"I was afraid to ask you to bring me home. Yes, please let's leave now."

They walked hand in hand to her cabin. She took her suitcase from under the bed and packed all her stuff. JC made sure she didn't forget anything.

"Are you ready, sweetheart?"

"Yes, but first I want to say goodbye to my counselor."

They walked to the counselors' cabins. People starred at them because JC was toting a suitcase and Sarah was wearing her backpack. When they reached her counselor's cabin, JC heard something that surprised him; the sound of two people making love. JC knocked on the door.

"Just a minute," one of them said.

JC heard a lot of whispering going on and a rustle of clothes. He also heard someone attempting to climb out a window. JC dropped the suitcase and ran to the rear of the cabin just in time to nail a young boy halfway out the window. JC dragged him by the leg to the front of the cabin. By the time he got there, Mr. Groom and two security guys were waiting.

"Please explain what's going on, Mr. McKenzie," Groom demanded.

JC grabbed the young boy by the hair and stood him up. He began to cry.

"Tell them lover boy what you were doing in the girl counselor's cabin."

"I was just visiting," he stuttered.

JC put the kid's arm in a tight lock behind his back. The security guys started to approach. JC told them to stand back.

Finally, the boy admitted they were having sex.

"Mr. Groom, I'm taking my daughter home now. You will be hearing from my attorney as soon as I bring charges against you. I don't think you will enjoy an 11th year at this camp."

By the time the ruckus was over several parents gathered around them. Some saw and heard what went on. Others heard it second hand. JC left with his daughter in tow. He grabbed one of the golf carts and started for the train station. He stopped after a few feet and beckoned one of the security guys to accompany him if he wanted to see the cart again.

"I'm sorry sir, I didn't have any idea that sort of thing was going on around here," the guard said as he climbed into the cart.

"Well, when you put teenage boys and girls together without proper supervision, things like that will happen. They do it here at camp and they do it at home under their parents' noses. Privilege doesn't necessarily build strong character."

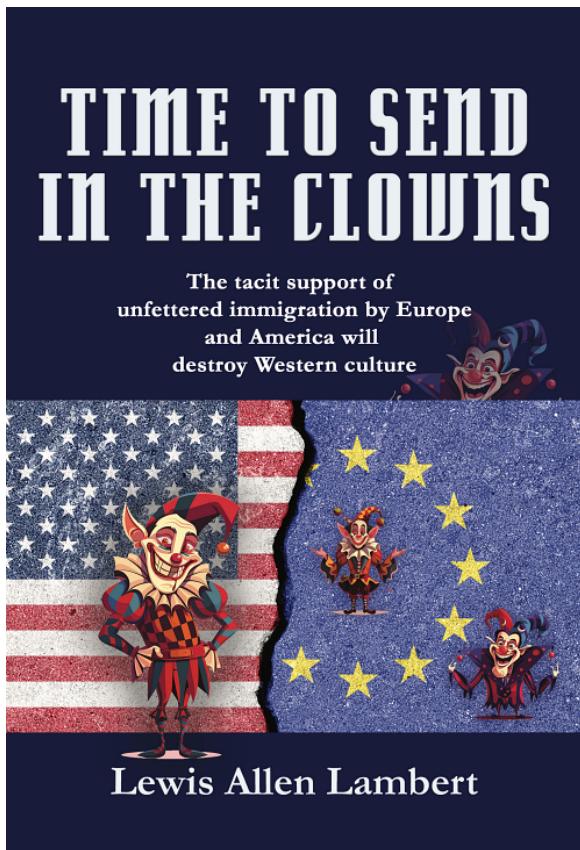
Neither JC nor his daughter said much on the train back to London.

"Do you know why I was so angry and why I had to take you back home?" He asked.

"Yes, papa, I knew what they were doing. All the older girls in camp knew about what the counselors did at night. I heard them talking."

"Well, I'm glad you are so grown up about it."

With that he cradled her in his lap; she fell asleep right away. He knew he had only one choice left; to send for Cristina as soon as possible.



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