A coming-of-age story set in the Middle East during the height of the Cold War. A boy - son of a CIA operative - is inspired by grand events and a Greek Cypriot teacher to learn about survival and his art.

Lucky In Cyprus: A True Story About A Boy, A Teacher, An Earthquake, Some Terrorists And The CIA

Lucky In Cyprus

A True Story About A Boy
A Teacher, Some Terrorists
An Earthquake, And The CIA

By Allan “Lucky” Cole

A DISCLAIMER OF SORTS

If Henry Ford actually said “history is bunk,” he probably said it because he couldn’t control, mould, or manufacture it. As a lowly writer, I had no such handicap. I had my way freely with history, changing names, ages, chronological events and anything else that got in the way of how I prefer to remember things.

Allan Cole – Boca Raton, August, 2008.

PROLOGUE

I imagine the child. He's twelve, slender, dark forelock curl against skin paled by weeks of travel. His blue eyes are set in deep hollows. I imagine him sitting on a hard wooden bench. The bench is old and polished by many years of shifting behinds.

It is the only furniture in the long, narrow airport corridor - empty except for his parents, infant brother, and the stern Greek solider standing guard over them. The boy has not moved from that bench for twelve hours. He has a book in his hand - *The Count Of Monte Cristo*.

He's a quiet young man, but do not mistake the silence and tired eyes for melancholy. He's intensely curious, drinking in the sounds of the many strange languages crackling over the hallway speakers. Even the drab walls and small piles of oiled sawdust on the wooden floor seem fascinating. The soldier stares at him coldly as the boy studies his olive drab uniform, webbed harness, and especially the M1 rifle he clutches. The boy is not afraid.

I've met the boy before: On a train steaming west to California, holding his pretty mother's hand as she jostles through the crowd of whistling soldiers and sailors home from war; and at San Diego Harbor, peering at the forest of submarine conning towers bristling out of the mist - the whole harbor ringing with the hoot, hoot of fog horns as he wondered which sub contained his father.

I've seen him in Florida, laughing and running from the Brahma bull calf he's teased into play. And later, by his grandfather's side, as the old man shoots the head off a turtle swimming in the middle of the lake.

There were other times, other places: rattling up the Florida highway in a `36 Dodge, bound for Philadelphia where his father was going to leave them so he could go off and fight – against the Communists this time, instead of the Nazis and Fascists. And I've seen that boy tinkering with a homemade short-wave radio, cats' whiskering up voices from thousands upon thousands of miles away.

Yes, we've met before. But never in so grand an adventure as this - under military guard at Athens Airport; his father accused of conspiring to smuggle gold and the boy knowing the joke was on them because his father was an American spy - a CIA agent - and soon the barred doors would swing open and that blustery, imperious Greek diplomat would come scurrying up to them, hat in hand, streaming a greater flood of apologies than he had threats twelve hours ago. And that young soldier, so imperious before, would bow and scrape and beg Lucky's pardon.

I imagine the child – more than fifty years gone now. I know him well, for that boy is me.

CHAPTER ONE

1

The boy is me, but I'll call him Lucky, for that was the name his family used and I've always been sorry it had to be shed along with childhood. The name had dignity then - and surprise during introductions.

People would ask, "Why do they call you Lucky?" The boy would stop, pretend to think for a moment and then use whatever answer he favored at the time.

"Because Hopalong Cassidy is my cousin and his sidekick's name is Lucky and my mother and father named me after him," was one he prized at a younger, cap-pistol age.

This story was true - the silver-haired cowboy, portrayed by the actor William Boyd, was loosely related to Lucky by marriage - but the boy had dropped that reason because it tended to lead to fights with peers who doubted he could be kin of any sort to such grand royalty.

Before he left the States he'd seen a movie during family day at the Pentagon. It was called "Mr. Lucky," and starred Cary Grant as a canny Greek American matching wits with the rich, the law, and his crooked rivals. As it happened the film was set before America's entry into the war and the boy was so taken by the movie that he now claimed it as the true source of his name. Since this was a complete lie, everyone believed him.

Lies, he'd recently discovered, were curious things that were sinful in some circumstances and praiseworthy in another.

The nuns said lying was always evil and ought to be avoided at all cost. The Hellfires were mentioned in detail as the extreme result. Minor torture for tens of thousands of years in Purgatory were cited for lesser transgressions.

But Mr. Blaines - his CIA family counselor - said there were certain exceptions God took into account. It was no sin to lie to protect your family or your country, Mr. Blaines claimed. He said when anyone asked what his father did the boy must always lie. His father - and other agents like him - were fighting a great war against Stalin and his

Communist hordes and if the boy gave them away America might be endangered and his father could be killed.

"What about confession?" Lucky asked. "Is it a sin if I lie to a priest during confession?"

"It's no sin under the circumstances I described," Mr. Blaines said quite firmly. "And if a priest asks your father's occupation, yes, you still must lie. Even during confession. There are no exceptions."

Lucky didn't worry over the matter much, but he did find it interesting he was being told something that couldn't be tested. What would a priest say to Mr. Blaines' notions about lying? Would he agree? Lucky could never know for certain, because he was forbidden to seek outside expert opinion. Even so, Mr. Blaines would probably have a logical retort. He always did. Later, when Lucky became more experienced at the subtleties of lies, he managed to ask a Jesuit priest about Mr. Blaines' statement without giving anything away. The Jesuit not only confirmed Mr. Blaines' view, but he did so with frightening passion. The priest, a short, powerfully built man, had been a chaplain at a Japanese prisoner of war camp and had experienced such awful things that he'd scared the hell of Lucky explaining in graphic detail what could happen to someone who fell into enemy hands.

But that was later, much later. Now, Lucky was stuck on the bench at Athens airport, his skinny behind bruised from so many hours of sitting. As he looked over at his parents dozing on the far corner of the bench he wondered what Mr. Blaines would say about the current situation. After all, it was a lie of sorts that had gotten them into this predicament.

The incident in Athens had been the only mix-up in their extended journey to his father's first overseas post. They were bound for Cyprus - a Mediterranean island off the coast of Turkey that Lucky hadn't known existed until his father had informed the family of his assignment.

When he'd learned their destination Lucky had been disappointed. Originally his father had been assigned to a post in Africa. Now *that* was exciting news. Lucky got all the *Tarzan* books out of the library and read them from start to finish. Africa was definitely the place to be for a boy seeking adventure. His enthusiasm wasn't lessened when his father started bringing home smeared mimeographed reports about Kenya - the African country they were going to live in. He also brought home books, maps and illustrated articles about the grand life and homes of the British colonial masters who ruled the land.

None of the facts matched Mr. Burroughs' descriptions. However, that didn't make the *Tarzan* tales any less exciting, so Lucky put the stories on one side of truth - on the side of imagination. Which in a way, he came to realize, was also real. The line was infinitely movable if you were a CIA brat. Fact became fiction and fiction became fact as quickly as you could tune in the various news accounts on your radio. When Lucky's father was in his cups and feeling philosophical, he used to say that nothing was actually true. Certain principles worked because everyone agreed to accept them. One plus one equaled two, his father liked to say, only because everybody had decided long ago that it was a usable system. There were other arithmetical methods based on one and one equaling three, or even four. They were also valid, his father said, but not so handy in describing the world they lived in.

That's how Lucky learned to deal with fact and fiction when Africa had been their destination. *Tarzan* was one view of things. The books and reports were another. Anyway you looked at it, Africa was definitely an exciting destination. Then there was something the newspapers called a Mau-Mau uprising. A Kenyan convent was supposedly raided on the outskirts of Nairobi, the capitol city. The news accounts said the nuns had been slain and worse. Whatever worse than dead could be, Lucky was just old enough to start to imagine, before the "yuck' factor cut in.

It was claimed that farms were attacked by rebels demanding independence… rebels who were supposedly in collusion with the loyal black servants Lucky had seen portrayed in the illustrated articles. Some accounts claimed the servants massacred their masters while they slept. A few very weird – KKK type news accounts - compared the uprising to the alleged massacres in the Old South before the American Civil War. When wildly erroneous newspaper accounts claimed that servants and slaves had massacred their masters and mistresses in their beds.

As for the Kenyan atrocities, it was said that Communist agitators were responsible. British authorities were quoted as saying that Stalin's hordes had invaded Africa to turn good, simple people into ravening beasts. Some newspapers dubbed the Mau-Mau transgressors a "red horde," which Lucky found slightly amusing because the Mau-Mau were black, not red.

The main impact on Lucky was that suddenly the assignment to Kenya was deemed too dangerous a posting for a CIA family and so they were left in assignment limbo. His dad's pay was held up – money diverted to the Kenyan

mission had to be booked back to Washington again. This was not an easy thing for any government bureaucracy to handle, but it was doubly difficult when it involved a covert employee.

Basically, as Lucky later came to understand it, when an agent was posted overseas it was usually as an employee of some other branch of the government. That would be his cover – that he was working for the State Department, or as a civilian employee of the Army or the Navy. To further support that cover, the agent would officially resign from the CIA. Then if Agency files were breached by the Enemy – or prying Congressional bureaucrats, who were nearly as bad as the Enemy - it would show that although the person in question once worked for the CIA, this was no longer the case. Not officially, at any rate. This arrangement also gave the Company deniability. If his father's cover was blown the CIA spokesman could say with a perfectly straight face that he (the captured one) didn't work for the Agency.

The downside for regular CIA families, whose fathers had not been captured and held for torture - was that the system made getting paid more than a little tricky. The agent's wages were issued by the department he officially worked for – the State Department, in the case of the Kenyan mission. Any difference in wages was made up by the Agency and paid directly into a Stateside bank account. There was always a significant difference for CIA types because of things like overseas pay, hazardous duty pay – practically the whole world was hazardous duty in 1952 – and cost of living adjustments. On the other hand, many times this tortuous trail meant the family would be borderline destitute waiting for checks to catch up to them. CIA families took care of each other during those times, delivering bags of groceries and necessities to their colleagues and making small, private loans.

After the Kenya assignment fell through, Lucky's dad and other CIA families suddenly found themselves stranded in drab apartments buildings in Langley, – all scrambling like hell to get a new assignment. Things got so bad at Lucky's house that at one point his dad got a part time job as a checker at a local supermarket to fill the gaps between the much delayed Agency paychecks. After all, there was a third mouth to feed – Lucky had a new baby brother, Charlie.

Several months of waiting commenced. His father disappeared for days at a time for more training at "The Pickle Factory," – CIA slang for facilities in the Foggy Bottom area of D.C. – or at "The Farm," which was a secret

base in the Blue Ridge Mountains. The good news here was that he got a per diem allowance that was immediately transmuted into groceries and rent payments. Meanwhile, the old Dodge the family had driven up from Florida fell into disrepair, its doors rusting shut and its tires collapsing like their hopes.

Suddenly, everything changed and the atmosphere was charged with excitement. There was a flurry of activity. Many trips to the Pentagon ensued to get inoculated against foreign diseases. Lucky had already undergone thirty-six shots for the African assignment. He couldn't see how there could possibly be any diseases left to protect him from. But the Middle East, it seemed, was in some ways even more pestilential than Africa. It took six trips to the Pentagon clinic and twenty-three shots to armor him and his family against the dreaded germs they might encounter.

The Agency was new in 1952 and expanding rapidly. A headquarters building was being constructed at Langley, but meanwhile the CIA's many functions were spread all over D.C., Virginia and Maryland. The clinic was housed in the Pentagon and visiting there was an exciting expedition, even though the purpose was ultimately painful. There'd be a grand trip by bus to the Capitol. Lucky never got tired of seeing the White House, with its cherry trees, the Capitol Building and the Washington Monument, which was not only five hundred feet high, but you could take an elevator all the way to the top.

Then there was the reflecting pool and the Lincoln Memorial, Lucky's particular favorite. An old black woman – Mrs. Johnson – who used to help his mother when they lived in Florida said it was her lifelong dream to see the monument for herself.

"Lincoln set the people free," she used to tell Lucky. A woman who had apparently had bad luck with male species, she liked to say that there were "only three men in this old world worth a plugged nickel." She'd tick them off on her fingers – "Jesus Christ, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt."

The Pentagon was so big that it staggered the imagination. Lucky's teacher, a pretty young nun at "Our Lade Of Sorrows," was enthusiastic about the details of what she called the American "fortress for freedom and Christianity." Constructed during World War Two, he learned, it was the largest office building in the world – nearly four million square feet, with seventeen or eighteen miles of hallways. The book Lucky checked out of the school

library said each of its five wedge-shaped sections was big enough to hold the Capitol Building.

Those facts were impressive, but did nothing to convey the feeling of sheer power and pride the complex radiated when he approached the Pentagon for the first time. Each step he took made him feel smaller and smaller until it seemed that he was no more than a flea when he reached the entrance. Inside, he encountered an elaborate warren of olive-drab hallways and offices, with checkpoints at every turn where uniformed Marines stood guard. Along with his mother, he was given a badge, which he pinned to his shirt and at each checkpoint the Marines solemnly examined Lucky's badge and his mother's badge as well, along with the sheaf of documents and passes she clutched in her hand. To the boy's amusement, they even studied baby Charlie closely and the first time they did it he made a joke that maybe the kid was a Communist in baby disguise. The Marines didn't reply, or crack a smile, and Lucky's mom gave him such a pinch that he swore off joking in the Pentagon forever.

Then it was on to the next checkpoint and they went higher and higher until Lucky knew that they were now at a rarified level that few Americans would have the security clearances to enter. Because this floor was so tip-top secret it took a half-an-hour for the three of them to get the final approval. Then they would be ushered into the clinic proper - the strong smell of disinfectant announcing its presence well before they were passed through the last checkpoint -and the big double doors were pushed aside.

Here, everything was hospital white and there were large steel and glass cabinets positioned about the rooms. Waiting for them were doctors and nurses in crisp white uniforms – all wearing high security ID badges. They were CIA medical personnel specially trained to handle agents and their families. Lucky met other CIA brats during those visits. They all looked and behaved like ordinary kids and talked about things that interested typical American youths – their favorite radio shows, movies, games, sports, etc. Thanks to Mr. Blaines' counseling none of them ever mentioned the CIA, much less their fathers' connections to the Agency. The boy took pride in belonging to this new, secret club of young people and he was sure the others felt the same.

The family's departure was set for late May and it seemed the date would never arrive. Then when it did come, it was with such a rush that it didn't seem possible they could get everything done in time. The hardest part for

Lucky was school. He'd be leaving before the end of the semester and wouldn't be returning to classes until the fall so he had to take his final exams early. Fortunately, Lucky was an old hand at transfers - he'd already attended twelve schools. And the school itself – Our Lady Of Sorrows – was experienced in handling the children of military and diplomatic personnel so everything went off without a hitch and his final grades were all "Excellents."

When the big day arrived, Lucky was just as excited about Cyprus as he had been about Kenya. There wasn't much to do except make sure he had a good supply of books to read during their travels and to resist devouring them before the journey began. Most of their belongings had already been packed by professional movers and shipped off to Cyprus. They wouldn't see their things again for many months and would have to make do with the contents of a few suitcases and his mother's two big olive-drab steamer trunks. Those trunks were magical things and his mother boasted that if she were suddenly dropped into an empty apartment she could turn it into a home in a flash. By nightfall there'd be warm, comfortable places to sleep, pictures on the wall, music playing on the radio and a hot meal served on real dishes displayed on a clean linen tablecloth spread over the trunks. So she packed the trunks with great care, tucking small things into crannies and folds of cloth – a little smile on her lips as she imagined the surprised looks on their faces weeks or months from now when she suddenly conjured up a special treat that would turn a grim day into a grand adventure.

They took a train to New York and Lucky was wide-eyed when they exited into the organized chaos that was Grand Central Station. It was the most famous station in America – so famous that it even had its own radio show where dramas unfolded each week. Long silver passenger trains lined the myriad tracks, engines hissing steam that boiled across the platforms. Through the windows of the dining cars he could see the starched white linen and gleaming silverware and dishes. Black men in white waiters' uniforms served the people. The trip up from D.C. had been too short to warrant a meal on board and although Lucky wasn't hungry, he missed the quiet elegance of the dining experience on a really first class train. He'd been on trains many times – including two coast-to-coast journeys – and loved everything about them, from the thrilling sound of their whistles to the constant rocking motion that made you want to sleep and dream forever.

Lucky saw two new diesel engines, looking like enormous bullets and painted bright red and green. Lucky's father said that diesel would soon take the place of all the steam engines. At first he thought that was just wonderful – the trains looked like Buck Rogers' rocket ship. But then he wondered what would happen to all the old steam engines and the thought made him sad. They'd probably be mothballed in huge train graveyards – like all the ships and submarines he'd seen in San Diego Harbor after the war ended. There were hundreds of gray hulks, once brave warships that had confounded the enemy, now slowly dissolving into rust.

Then the plight of abandoned trains and ships and subs was forgotten as Lucky found himself on the verge of being left behind. Redcaps had loaded the family baggage onto to carts and were starting away. The redcaps wore huge smiles – Lucky's father was a believer in large tips when he was flush and he was certainly flush with government travel money. The porters, both large black men in starched uniforms and burnished hats, headed out across the platform in a swift, sure line – the crowd parting before them. Lucky's father strode behind the porters, his head tilted to one side from years of living and moving about the cramped, head-bumping quarters of a submarine. His mother was at his side, little Charlie perched on her round hip, her long fine legs sheathed in silk and shod with stylish high heels, eating up the platform. Soon they'd be lost in the crowd.

Lucky sprinted after them, dodging through the crowd, the great speaker voice calling the arrivals and departures of the trains, sounding just like the man on the radio with the fabulous baritone when he intoned the opening of: **"**Grand Central Station!**"**

2

Lucky didn't realize it at the time, but the moment they'd climbed onto the train they had entered a whole different world of travel. Previously, their travel budget had been limited to a sailor's wartime wages – bolstered by family donations - and, in civilian life, the earnings of a struggling young student couple making do on the GI bill and menial jobs in post-World War II America. His parents were restless people – always on the move whether it was necessary or not. However, up until this time they'd always stayed in drab hotel rooms and ate in dingy cafes with limited menus.

That night, however, they'd checked into the Plaza Hotel in Manhattan – later made famous by Kay Thomas in her Eloise books. It was an elegant place – the first luxury hotel Lucky had ever stayed in thanks to the generosity of the CIA. He was pressed into service as a babysitter while his parents enjoyed a night out, thanks to the generous per diem. Lucky didn't mind. Little Charlie would sleep the night through. Besides, the suite was lavishly furnished, with couches so soft they practically swallowed him whole. Windows looked out over the glittering Manhattan skyline. Also, there were books to read and programs to listen to on the impressively large radio in the main room.

Best of all, there was room service. Raised on the road, Lucky knew all about room service. He also knew he had to be careful about what he ordered, because his parents were young and still struggling financially. But with the CIA per diem dollars burning a hole in his pocket, Lucky's father had told him to order whatever he liked. Already a little tipsy from room service cocktails, he said it with a grand sweeping gesture and a beneficent smile.

Lucky took him at his word. After studying the menu – which was very confusing – he decided to get some help. This was a tactic he'd tried before with great success. He ordered a large Coke from room service and chatted up the waiter, writing in a generous tip to assure immediate friendship. Then he confessed his problem with the menu. The waiter was sympathetic and sat down with the boy, going over the hors D'oeuvres, salads, soups, main courses and deserts. A little later he brought in a tray with a little bit of everything – all arranged on covered dishes. Then he lingered, showing the boy how to use the different utensils, explaining this dish or that.

The waiter was curious, giving Lucky the chance to really try out his story for the first time. Mr. Blaines had advised that it was always best to be open, friendly and talkative with strangers. Instead of evading questions, he said, welcome them. Fill in so much detail that no one would ever suspect anything was being left out – especially the CIA connection. Lucky told the waiter his father worked for the State Department and that they were going to live in. Plaza employees were worldly people who dealt with all manner of international businessmen and diplomats, so although the waiter had never heard of Cyprus, it seemed that there wasn't a thing he didn't know about living abroad.

"You already understand tipping," the waiter laughed, giving Lucky a little mock punch in the shoulder. "But when

you’re in all those foreign places money isn’t always the best way to tip.” The boy frowned, wondering what could be better than money. ““Don’t get me wrong – good old Uncle Sam’s greenbacks are always good,” the waiter said. “Better’n any local money. But the thing is, American stuff is even scarcer than American money these days. Talk to the right guy and you could buy the Taj Mahal with a carton of Lucky Strikes. Things are tough overseas. Everybody wants American candy and cigarettes. Nylon stockings. Coffee… You name it, if it’s American, they’ll most likely want it.

“Wait’ll you hit the road. You’ll see.”

3

In 1952 there were only two kinds of airline travel in the Western world: first class and first class with a berth. Since Lucky and his family were traveling on CIA money, they got the berths.

Lucky loved them. They folded up into the ceiling over the seats. At night the stewards and stewardesses pulled the berths down and made them up fresh. When Lucky climbed the ladder and slipped through the curtains he thought it was a little like entering Tom Sawyer’s secret cave, except the stewardess would bring him hot chocolate if he rang her and an extra pillow to raise his head so he could see through the porthole in comfort. He’d stretch out there for hours as the big propellers drove them onward through the darkness - fingers of many-colored flame shooting across the glistening wings, beguiling him with fantastic visions.

Life was marvelous on those planes. The seats were as big and soft as armchairs. They were arranged in pairs, with a wide aisle separating the two rows and if you put up the padded arm and drew the curtain you had a reclining couch to nest in. It was like having your own small room, with a wide porthole to view the billowing clouds. If he was thirsty or hungry he only had to buzz the galley, where the food was deliciously prepared by a chef wearing a tall white hat and was served fresh and hot at any hour. And all through the day the chefs sent out little delicacies for them sample, just to brighten their moments.

Lucky rarely saw another child traveling, which probably explained the fuss the stewardesses always made over him. On one flight a stewardess sat next to him for awhile. She fell asleep, her head gradually coming to rest on Lucky’s shoulder. Her perfume washed over him, arousing all kinds of delicious sensations. He didn’t move the whole time she napped and when she awoke his arm had lost all

feeling. But he didn't care, especially after she winked at his mother, who was ensconced in the aisle seat across from them. With a knowing smile, the stewardess said Lucky had been a perfect gentleman. Then she rewarded him with a kiss on his cheek. Lucky's mother laughed and said he'd made a conquest, wiping the lipstick off with a lace hanky.

On another plane an old dowager and her poodle occupied two first-class seats. Lucky was astounded that anyone could be so rich that they could afford a seat for their pet. He'd heard that the tickets cost as much as most people made in a year. The old woman was dressed in widow's black and wore a fortune in glittering rings on each of her fat little fingers and her triple-layered chin was set off by a fan-shaped necklace studded with jewels. The poodle was a snooty dog - ignoring any attempts to lure it into play. At mealtimes the chef would braise and slice beef hearts, which were served on a white platter. The woman fed the dog with her bejeweled fingers, wiping the gravy from its jaws with a linen napkin and coaxing the animal with kissing noises when its appetite flagged. Afterwards, when it was time for the dog to do its business, she'd ring for the steward who took the poodle for a walk in the cargo hold.

All that comfort was welcome on those long, slow flights where time seemed suspended by the sounds of deep-throated engines. It was a long and lazy journey, with frequent layovers in Ireland, England, France, Germany and Rome. They were never tired – without jets, there was no jetlag. Just a leisurely transition from one place to another, with few inconveniences along the way.

Wherever Lucky and his family went they were treated with the utmost courtesy, especially in Germany where the scars of war were more than evident and the people ducked their heads and quickened their steps when an Allied jeep went by, the MPs scanning the crowds with cold eyes. Many of the streets were still in rubble and the evidence of bombing was everywhere. It was just as bad in England, where Lucky saw his first bomb craters and rows of fire-blackened flats being pulled down by workmen.

Americans, he soon realized, particularly Americans traveling on diplomatic passports, were looked upon like visiting royalty. It made Lucky feel like a character in a movie. Adding to the feeling of unreality was the constant reminder that his father was engaged in an exotic business rarely experienced by anyone outside a movie house. Every place they stopped the same routine was carried out. Waiting on the other side of the customs' line would be a

gray-suited man from the embassy holding a sign bearing his father’s name. The family would soon be whisked through customs and in a few moments their luggage would be gathered up and off they’d go to the hotel in a chauffeured car. The hotel, always the one with the best accommodations in the city, would be their home for several days and sometimes a few weeks while his father visited the embassy - being briefed, he called it.

While his father worked Lucky and his mother saw the usual tourist marvels - Buckingham Palace, the Eiffel tower, German castles, and the Roman baths. He was introduced to great art in the Louvre and other famous museums; to symphony music and the theater in London; to ancient history at Stonehenge, where he and his mother picnicked while his little brother crawled among the huge mysterious stones.

It was like a fabulous, extended vacation and after awhile Lucky nearly forgot his previous life, where knowledge was a boring thing taught by knuckle-rapping nuns. He was especially looking forward to Greece - their last stop before flying on to Cyprus. Greece was the home of the gods and goddesses; of mighty Hercules and the wily Ulysses.

He was eager to see the white columns of the Parthenon, built, it was said, to honor the wise and beautiful Athena, who was Lucky’s personal favorite. But, as it turned out, it would be several years before he set eyes on such wonders.

4

Everything went terribly wrong when they reached Athens. The moment his father displayed their passports, the Greek customs official turned hostile. As usual there was an embassy man with a sign awaiting the family on the other side of the customs line. Lucky saw his father wave to the man, who smiled and waved back.

Suddenly, the customs official started berating Lucky’s father in barely decipherable English. About what, the boy couldn’t tell. From his father’s reaction Lucky could see that he was just as puzzled. The Greek official was so angry and excited that his English failed him. They did their best to interpret his garbled commands, hoisting up the suitcases for him to examine. But instead of the usual polite, if thorough check of the contents, the man scattered their belongings all over the table, embarrassing Lucky’s mother when the man held up her underwear, waving them about as if they were contraband.

The American embassy official put down the sign and approached. A heated argument ensued and soon the customs agent's superior joined in. All the other passengers were staring at Lucky and his family as the debate raged. Soon other Greek officials gathered to form a knot, pushing Lucky and his mother to the edge.

His baby brother started crying and Helen comforted Charlie, looking worried at first, then indignant when one word in particular was hurled about with increasing frequency. That word was *"smugglers."*

"What a nerve," she said to Lucky. "What would we smuggle? Do they think I've got the Queen of Sheba's jewels hidden in my underwear?"

"I heard them say something about gold," Lucky said. "Do we have any gold?"

Helen's Irish temper flared. Just then one of the Greek officials looked her way. She waved her left hand at the man, displaying her wedding ring. "It's the only gold I own," she said.

The man reached out - as if grabbing for the ring - and Lucky's mother gasped and snatched her hand back. "You just try, Mister," she snarled. "You'll have to cut off my hand."

The official shrugged and turned back to the argument. Finally, some sort of conclusion seemed to be reached and Lucky and his family found themselves being ushered by armed soldiers through big double doors into the narrow security corridor with its uncomfortable bench.

The embassy man came along, assuring them it was just some sort of snafu. Lucky's ears perked up. He was always eager to add color to his vocabulary. He asked his father what that word meant.

"Snafu?" his father said. "Oh, that's slang from the war. It means 'Situation Normal All Fu'" - and Lucky saw his mother elbow his father and his father made a hasty, mid-course correction - "Uh... Fouled Up."

Lucky wasn't fooled. The "F" word had nearly been intended. He muttered it to himself as he got out his book to pass the time. He was many pages into it before the fat little Greek diplomat arrived. He was full of self-importance, puffing out his ill-fitting brown suit as he took command. When he sat, crossing his legs, he displayed sheer red socks that his mother later said were disgusting - all that thick black leg hair showing through. The diplomat informed them that Lucky's father was suspected of committing grave crimes against the government of Greece. Prison was mentioned and Helen said if that was so she'd

refuse to leave the country until her husband, Allan, was released. The diplomat only smiled wickedly and said that Madame would likely find herself in prison as well, since she was obviously an accomplice.

As the heated argument resumed, Lucky - who was coincidentally reading *The Count Of Monte Cristo*, and already considered himself an expert on such matters, having recently devoured *Huckleberry Finn* for the fourth time - began planning their escape from whatever cell they were placed in. All he needed was a sharpened spoon to dig a tunnel and everything would soon be set right. Finally, some sort of temporary agreement was reached. The family would be confined to the security corridor - under military guard - while the diplomat conferred with his minister and the American embassy man consulted his superiors.

And there they remained through several changes of the guard, each soldier seemingly younger and more belligerent than the other.

Lucky's father said they were innocent bystanders, drawn into a dispute between the Greek government and the U.S. State Department. Apparently a gang of former GI's, who'd stayed behind in Europe after the war was over, had been caught smuggling gold out of Greece. For reasons Lucky wouldn't learn until much later, the Greeks considered this the final straw in a long list of alleged wrongs committed by the U.S., whom they believed had conspired with the GIs. Coincidence had drawn the Cole family into that waiting net when they presented the diplomatic passports that were part of his father's cover.

"But what will we do?" Helen asked her husband. "What if they were serious about prison?" She hugged his brother tighter. "What about Charlie?" she said. "And Lucky? Who will take care of them?"

His father smiled. "Don't worry, honey," he said. "Somebody's about to get their pucker string yanked - damned hard."

Lucky was delighted when he heard that. The Greeks obviously thought they were dealing with one of the "fat assed" state department types his father was wont to malign. Very soon a certain mysterious American would make a phone call that would strike fear into the hearts of the Cole family's tormentors. Lucky thought such power was delicious. It was like having Zeus as your personal best friend. A mighty god who'd hurl lightning bolts at your tormentors.

Hours passed. There was no food served, but there were plenty of warm cokes to drink - they'd been sternly warned

about drinking the water in Greece. Helen always kept a good supply of peanuts and raisins in her purse to stave off hunger pangs and so they weren't in danger of starvation. As for his baby brother, there were than enough jars of baby food and bottles of sterilized water and powdered formula in the large baby bag Helen carried. After awhile, however, the diaper situation looked like it was going to get serious. The family's luggage had been confiscated and every request for someone to fetch a fresh supply of diapers had been greeted with that tsking noise that Lucky quickly realized was a sound of rejection.

Using *Monte Cristo* for cover, Lucky shifted in his seat to get a better look at his father. Less than thirty, he was a small man with a gymnast's build. He had a large head, close cropped hair making it seem even larger. His coloring was sallow, like a man who had spent much time in the sun in the past and was now going pale. Lucky's father was a man who rarely smiled and blinked infrequently. He held the world at bay with his moody blue eyes in a piercing, unnerving gaze. Allan was the product of a much-married mother whose habit was to leave her child in the care of relatives for months at a time whenever she'd shed one husband to take another. He was also a submariner, fighting both in the Atlantic and the Pacific during the recent war. His boat had penetrated Tokyo Harbor in one of the most daring exploits in submarine history. Negotiating a maze of mines and sub-catching nets, Allan and his crewmates ran so low on air during that stealthy mission that doctors feared some of them might have suffered brain damage.

Lucky wasn't sure what that meant. But he had noticed that one drink, even a beer, could turn his father's somberness into sudden high humor. Which, after a time of jokes and games, was frequently followed by angry incidents that Lucky didn't like to dwell upon. Those incidents were best thought of as bizarre acts of nature. Like the two hurricanes he'd experienced in Florida. Wild acts of tremendous force and even violence but without seeming cause or reason. Lucky remembered one storm when the powerful winds had lifted up bricks piled beneath his bedroom window. They slammed against the panes - heavy blows, just short of breaking the glass. Knock, knock, knocking like his father's knuckles rapping at his door in the middle of the night, getting him up to play. Or to punish him. He never knew which.

Mr. Blaines routinely asked Lucky about his home life, wanting to know if everyone was happy and well-treated. It

was a question, the boy suspected, that was best not answered honestly. And so he lied. To be more accurate, he avoided the truth - which was one of Mr. Blaines' favorite phrases – "Sometimes it's best to avoid the truth at all costs," he used to say. Lucky always answered his queries about the family by telling hero-worshipping stories about the great fun he had with his father: the games they played when Allan was off duty; the books and poetry his father read to him, like Edgar Alan Poe's "The Raven," which was Lucky's favorite poem of all time.

Mr. Blaines had taught Lucky well. Before he left for Cyprus the boy could dodge the truth at will by giving overly detailed accounts of a few true things. Secrets and lies. Lies and secrets. Two very necessary things in a time when the atom had only recently been split and the whole world was poised at the edge of destruction.

Lucky shifted his attention to his mother. Helen was curled up asleep between Lucky's father and the baby carrier that held his brother. She was a city girl from a large, warm South Philadelphia family. Raised in an Irish working class neighborhood, she was usually full of laughter and humorous stories. She could turn the smallest incident into a hilarious tale that was frequently longer than the incident itself. In her late twenties, she was remarkably pretty - as were all the Guinan women. Her oldest sister had been Miss Philadelphia and it was family lore that she probably would have won the Miss America title if her father hadn't forbidden her from entering a contest that he believed exploited women. Another sister, Rita, was a famous ballroom dancer in style of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Helen had a long, delicate face with startling blue eyes set deep and framed by long lashes. Ever since he could remember, Lucky had noticed the way that men watched her when she walked by – even though she didn't wiggle like Marilyn Monroe. She had a brisk, business-like walk that never seemed to tire as she moved from one task to another with swift efficiency. Even so, the men watched her just the same.

Lucky suddenly noticed that his mother's skirt had ridden up, exposing her legs to the stocking tops. She wouldn't have liked that. Why, his mother wouldn't even stand in front of an open doorway on a sunny day for fear that the bright light shining through her dress would be too revealing. Then the boy caught the guard staring at his mother's legs. It made him angry. He glared at the guard but the young soldier ignored him. Lucky saw the man's eyes

glitter as his mother shifted in her sleep and the skirt rode higher.

“I have to go to the bathroom,” Lucky announced to the guard.

Annoyed at being interrupted, the guard shifted his look to the boy. He shrugged an elaborate shoulder-lifting shrug that was insulting in every way and manner. He muttered something in Greek - pretending he didn’t understand. Lucky knew better: earlier he’d noted the interest the soldier shown in his parents’ conversation.

“I *said*,” Lucky repeated, “that I have to go to the bathroom.” He added a rude, schoolyard gesture, whose meaning could not be mistaken.

The soldier grunted, getting it. Then his eyes turned mean. He shook his head - no.

Lucky stood up. “Well, I’m going anyway.”

He started to walk toward the far door where the foul-smelling facilities were located. The guard hissed something that sounded like a curse. His heavy hand fell on the boy’s shoulder. Lucky tried to pull away, but the guard tightened his grip.

Then his mother’s voice snapped out - “Keep your hands off him.”

Lucky craned his neck and saw his mother was very much awake now and very angry. “He won’t let me go to the bathroom,” he complained. The soldier snarled another Greek curse, his fingers biting into Lucky’s shoulder. “Ouch,” he said, more surprised than hurt.

His mother shot to her feet. Behind her, he could see his father jolting awake. Helen stormed over to the soldier, who was so alarmed at the menacing figure - all of five foot one, if she stood on her tip-toes, and perhaps 100 pounds - that he let go of Lucky’s shoulder and stepped back, bringing his rifle up like a horizontal bar.

And then all of Helen’s anger at the Greek bureaucracy and the injustices she had been forced to endure poured out, scalding the young guard. “Get that - that - THING out of my face,” his mother railed. She shook her finger at the tall soldier, who cowered as if it were a pistol. “I’ve had just about enough of your rudeness,” she said. “First you accuse us of this smuggling nonsense, then you make us sit here all night. You don’t feed us, don’t let me wash out the baby’s dirty diapers. And now... and now... you have the nerve to tell MY son he can’t go to the bathroom. Well, you’d better watch out, Mr. Big Shot with your big fat rifle, or we’ll tell the Germans they can have your damned country back.”

“Helen,” his father called. “Helen...”

“Don’t Helen me,” his mother snarled, whipping about. “This... this.... *soldier* had better learn some manners or I’ll give him *such a sock.*”

Lucky would’ve like to have seen that. Despite her small size and Catholic academy polish, she had a powerful punch - taught to her by his grandfather, a former champion boxer who said he was blessed with more beautiful daughters than the Good Lord had given him strength to protect and so he’d taught them all to box.

“He’s only doing his job,” Lucky’s father said.

The soldier looked suddenly mournful. He waved at the drab hallway, and nodded. “Job,” he said. “Demitris’ job.”

“Oh, ho, ho!” his mother crowed. “So you’re a liar as well as a bully. You *do* speak English.”

The soldier fought for control. “No speak,” he said. “Demitris no speak Anglika.”

Helen stamped her small foot. The guard jumped as if it had been the foot of a giant. “Either my boy goes to toilet,” she said, “or you’ll be seeing the back of my hand, sir.” Lucky had noticed that the angrier she became, the more pronounced was her South Philadelphia Irish lilt.

But the guard seemed honestly stumped. “Toi-let?” he said, puzzled. “Toi-let?”

“Try WC,” Lucky’s father advised.

“What’s WC?” his mother asked.

“Water Closet,” his father said. “That’s what the English call it.”

His mother snorted. Her own grandfather had come over from Ireland during the famine and Helen shared his bitter views of all things smacking of John Bull. But it wasn’t necessary for her to use the euphemism of the oppressors, because the soldier was nodding - smiling sudden understanding.

“WC,” he said. “WC. Good. I take boy WC.”

Lucky grinned, making sure the guard knew he hadn’t been fooled, then marched off. The guard followed, rifle at ready in case the twelve-year-old should make a dash for it. In the bathroom, Lucky stayed in the stall for a long time. Despite filth that would gag a maggot - as his grandfather might’ve put it - he was enjoying the situation immensely. What an odd world this was turning out to be. A soldier guarding a kid while he went to the bathroom. And the biggest joke of all, was... he didn’t even have to go.

Chaos erupted the moment he returned to the bench. And out of that chaos things began to work themselves out. Flanked by abashed aides, the Greek diplomat suddenly

returned, wringing his hands and spouting apologies. A moment later the embassy man, accompanied by a tall, imperious American who never spoke, but turned cold eyes on anyone who said something he did not favor.

One thing became quite plain. Although mistakes were admitted, the Greeks were determined to save face by barring Lucky's father and the family from officially entering the country. His mother muttered something about, who'd want to visit such a Fascist place anyway, but everyone pretended not to hear.

By happenstance a Cypriot Airlines plane was departing within minutes and the family was rushed out of the security corridor and through crowds of travelers - wearing everything from suits to Arab robes to Indian turbans – all babbling excitedly in many languages.

Then Lucky and his family were being hurried across the tarmac, trailed by customs men carrying their luggage - including his mother's all-important trunks. The plane's propellers were already turning when they reached it and somebody had to shout for the wheeled stairway to be rolled back in place so they could enter. The airplane was ancient and smelled of aviation gas, mixed with garlic and onion and a peculiar, not entirely unpleasant, odor that reminded Lucky of a barnyard. It was packed with people, most with dark Mediterranean complexions and they were all smiling and laughing and chattering loudly with their neighbors.

The crowding was made worse by all the things the passengers were carrying. There were cardboard boxes tied with twine and stacked in the aisle; string bags reeking of strong cheese, dried fish and black sausage; and duffel bags bulging with gifts for friends and relations at home. Children ran up and down the aisle - leaping over the boxes - and squealing with excitement. Somewhere in the back of the plane Lucky swore he heard a rooster crow.

There were few seats left, so Lucky sat in the pull-down chair next to the exit door, while his father and mother found a place back where the rooster had crowed. Charlie was awake, laughing and waving plump baby fists at the crowd.

Then the airplane jolted forward and everyone cheered as it lumbered down the runway.

CHAPTER TWO

1

The plane rattled like a wagon full of scrap metal and broken glass. A great weight bore down on Lucky and his throat constricted as the plane strained to get off the ground. The rattling grew louder and Lucky felt wind against his cheeks. He swore he could see daylight gleaming through empty rivet sockets in the plane's sides.

Lucky looked out the window and saw that they were rushing toward the end of the runway - rocky ground and stunted trees lay just beyond. Unconsciously, he braced his feet on the floor and strained up against his seat belt, as if he were lifting the plane himself. Suddenly he was flung back as the nose tilted crazily, there was a sharp bump and the crowd cheered again as the plane rumbled up and up and then they were in the air and the passengers burst into even louder cheers and applauded the pilot as if he had just performed a miracle.

Wedged next to Lucky, so close his knees nearly touched the boy's pull-down seat, was a big, broad shouldered man with a thick shock of black hair, heavy brows over dark eyes, a grand Greek nose and a white-toothed smile.

"The pilot is the cousin of my wife," the man said proudly. "The best in all of Cyprus!"

Lucky opened his mouth to compliment the pilot, but then passengers began to sing, clapping their hands to mark time. The man clapped with them, nodding to Lucky to join in. So he did, listening intently to the strange words for something he could pronounce. Then he caught a phrase - as each verse ended, the people would sing the refrain, "O, stok-ah-lo. O, stok-ah-lo." He sang that part with them, mumbling over the rest as if it were a Latin prayer at Mass that he didn't remember. The man laughed in delight and clapped louder, shouting "O, stok-ah-lo" with Lucky. When the song was done, there was more applause and then the passengers returned to their gossiping.

"What does that word men?" Lucky asked the man. "You know – stok-ah-lo?" The word rolled off his tongue as if

he’d always known how to pronounce it. His companion was impressed. He leaned closer, most serious. He introduced himself, saying his name was Paul - *Paulo*, in Cypriot.

“Stokahlo is a most wondrous word,” Paul said. “But there is no good translation that fits all of its meanings. It means hello and good-bye at the same time. As for the song, it’s one the villagers sing to the fisherman when they sail away to who knows what God intends. Maybe their nets will be filled quickly and everyone in the village can rejoice. Or, perhaps a storm will kill them and then church bells will ring and women will cry and tear their hair because there is nothing and no one to bury in the graves. In Cyprus, it is bad luck to say goodbye. So we say stokahlo, for one of its meanings is we’ll see you again, God willing.” Paul tapped his head with a thick forefinger. “You will soon learn, my young friend, that there are many such mysteries awaiting you in Cyprus.” He hesitated, then added, “Although we pronounce the name of our country as, ‘Kyp-ray-ya!”

Lucky whispered the word to himself – “Kyp-ray-ya.” Making it his own. This was a word, he sensed, that might open many secret doors, like Aladdin winning his way into the bandit’s cave when he cried, “Open Sesame!” As for the story behind “stokahlo,” he thought he’d never heard such a wonderful tale.

Paul studied the boy as he digested all these new things. Then, he asked: “You are American, yes?”

Lucky said he was. Paul beamed, gold teeth sparkling. “In Cyprus,” he said, “we love all Amerikhanos. You must tell everyone who you are when you meet them so they will be your friend.” Lucky said he’d be sure to do that. “You don’t want them to think you are English,” Paul advised. “If they do, they might not be so friendly.”

The boy’s interest deepened. He’d read that Cyprus was a British colony. That term - colony - roused his inbred mistrust of the British, and all his young patriotism boiled up. “We threw the British out,” he told his new friend. “During the Revolution. Maybe you should do the same.”

Paul grew quiet, gravely looking this way and that to see if anyone was listening. Then he said: “We should talk of other things.” He shrugged a sad and dramatic shrug. “It’s not that I don’t trust you, my young friend,” he said. “But you might relate our conversation to your father, or someone else. And they, perhaps, might accidentally pass my words on to unfriendly people.”

Lucky shook his head, very firm. “I won’t tell,” he said. Although his new friend couldn’t know it, from a CIA brat like Lucky that was a promise as good as gold. He asked, “Why are you so worried? Do the Brits punish people for saying things they don’t like?”

“Sometimes,” the man admitted - very somber. Another dramatic shrug. “Men have been imprisoned, even shot, for saying the wrong thing to the wrong person.”

“I won’t tell,” Lucky promised again. Then he shrugged, unconsciously aping the man’s gesture. “In America,” Lucky said, “you can say anything you like. Against anyone you like.” As he said this, he knew it wasn’t entirely true and for a moment we worried that Paul might call him on it.

But, to the boy’s relief, a broad smile returned to his companion’s face. “That’s why we love Americans,” he said. “They are the greatest people in the whole world. Look at your president, Abraham Lincoln. He set men free.”

Lucky tried to look wise. “The slaves,” he said fervently. “Lincoln freed the slaves.”

“Perhaps, someday when you return to your country,” Paul said, “you will tell someone important about Cyprus. We are only a small place, but we have a great history. And we wish to be free - like America.”

Lucky solemnly promised he’d do so, wondering if maybe the CIA could help. Fighting for freedom, after all, was the Agency’s purpose. At least that’s what his father and all his CIA pals said. As did Mr. Blaines.

Then Paul yawned, eased back in his seat, and closed his eyes. Soon he was asleep. Lucky stared out the window, wondering how long it would be before they reached Cyprus. His mother came up to see if he was okay. He said he was, except he was hungry and asked when would they get to eat.

“How can you think about food?” his mother said, clutching her stomach. “This plane’s so old and creaky it feels like it’s going to fall out of the sky. I hope I don’t get sick!”

She had a right to worry. Not only did the plane rattle and creak, but the engines smoked worse than the old pre-war Dodge that had once been the family car. Also, there was that constant current of cold air he’d noticed before and the light beaming through cracks in the metal. But then it came to the boy that it was foolish to worry. He just could not envision himself dying in a plane. From that flicker grew a conviction that would last as long as Lucky lived, no matter how many miles he traveled, or how

many continents he visited. Airplanes would not be the death of him.

“You’ll be okay, Mom,” he said. “As long as you’re with me.”

His mother almost laughed at his sober tones, but when he told her why, she hugged him instead. In her Irish heart-of-hearts she was certain he spoke true. She took comfort in his words and returned to her seat. She must have told his father what he’d said, because Allan suddenly turned those wintry blue eyes on the boy. He wondered if somehow he’d gotten himself in trouble, but then his father shrugged and turned away.

The boy peered out the window again. Below was the Mediterranean and it was the bluest, clearest water he’d ever seen. Bluer than the Gulf Of Mexico. Clearer even than Crystal Springs, Florida, where they had glass-bottomed boats that let you see the fish and the turtles and the alligators swimming below. The blue of the sea filled his eyes and mind and he felt a great peace wash over him. He began to hum, “Far Away Places,” the song that had been so popular before he left the states.

The song went:

“Far away places with strange sounding names,
Far away over the sea.
Those far away places with the strange sounding names
Are calling, calling me.

Goin’ to China or maybe Siam,
I want to see for myself
Those far away places I’ve been readin’ about
In a book that I took from a shelf.”

The song had captured Lucky’s whole imagination the moment he first heard it. It was as if it had been written especially for a boy such as he. A dreamer, who would soon be flying to far away places. It even anticipated Lucky’s search for knowledge about those far places and finding them in “… a book that I took from a shelf.” When he first heard the song he thought “Or Maybe Siam” was one word - “Ormebesiam” - and until he learned better, he sang it that way, figuring it was a country he’d never heard of before. He wasn’t embarrassed when he was finally corrected. The person who told him - a nun - was never likely to see such things herself.

Already he’d sworn to himself that before his life was done he’d visit all the countries in the world - except,

maybe the places where the Communists wouldn't let you in. But, certainly, he'd set foot in all the continents. Well, perhaps not *all*. Antarctica was a continent, but so cold that not even Sergeant Preston of the Yukon and his mighty dog, King, would dare to venture to such a place.

A gentle tap on his arm interrupted his reverie. A cheery stewardess was handing him a tray. Lucky's stomach grumbled with pleasure. On the tray was a plate containing a tomato, red and ripe, cut in quarters; there were cucumber slices as well and a boiled egg with a hunk of buttered black bread thick and heavy as rich cake. The whole thing was sprinkled with green bits of rosemary and olive oil and a tangy vinegar whose like he'd never tasted before. In a cup was pile of black olives. Greek olives, his seating companion – who'd awakened at the sound of the rattling tray - told him.

Lucky popped one in his mouth, savoring it.

"Try the fetah," Paul said, suddenly awake and alert again. Lucky frowned, wondering what he meant. "The cheese," Paul said, pointing at the thick white slices under the tomatoes. "Fetah is goat's cheese," he explained.

Although Lucky had never tasted goat's cheese, he'd read about it several years before in a book called *Heidi*. It sounded delicious then and now that he was looking at the delicate white color of the cheese and smelled the sharp scent rising up, he was sure he wouldn't be disappointed. Following Paul's lead, he broke off a piece and put it on a hunk of bread and wolfed it down. It was glorious: light and sharp at the same time, and the taste lingered at the back of the tongue.

"Now the tomato and cucumber," Paul instructed him.

Lucky did as he was told, and the mixture of tastes made him think of hot suns and clear skies. Next, he ate some egg, then more olives, and back to the cheese again.

"If you eat like this every day," Paul said, "you will never get sick. Especially the olives. It is a fact. The only time I have ever been ill was when I was forced to do without olives because of unfortunate necessity."

Paul suddenly sat straight and pointed out the window. "Cyprus," he cried, voice full of emotion.

The boy peered through the porthole. First he saw a thick blue shimmering line; which became craggy peaked mountains, studded with green forests. And then the plane was sweeping over those mountains and coming down and down. He saw brown plains stretching in every direction.

"It's summer, now," Paul apologized. "The drought, you know, makes the great Nicosia plain quite brown. But soon

it will rain and everything will be green. I tell you, my young friend, there is no place in this world so beautiful as Cyprus when it rains."

Lucky didn't mind the brown at all. As they descended, he saw villages with adobe homes with gleaming, white washed walls. He saw sprawling farms and people plowing with horse drawn machines. He saw a man driving a herd of goats across a field and nearby, on a dusty road, was another man riding a camel.

And wasn't it all a wonder. And wasn't it all that a Far Away Place should be?

As the plane approached the runway it slowed, then it began to rattle more furiously than before. Lucky was thrown about so much that if he'd been without a seat belt he would have been hurled to the floor. They slammed down on the runway with a mighty crash, bouncing high and crashing down once, twice, three more times. The engines howled like banshees and the brakes squealed in protest as the pilot fought to bring the plane to a halt. Finally, with one last loud backfire, the plane stopped.

The passengers cheered and applauded, but when Lucky looked at his new friend he saw that the man's face was pale and his clapping was definitely subdued.

After several long minutes the doors creaked open and light streamed in, along with the sharp smell of aviation fuel. A Cypriot woman in a khaki uniform boarded, flanked by two big uniformed men. The woman stood at the head of the aisle. She raised something in her hand. It looked like a big insect sprayer.

"Welcome to Cyprus," the woman intoned quite solemnly.

Then she advanced down the aisle and to Lucky's supreme amazement, she was spraying everyone with DDT.

Lucky closed his eyes just before he got a blast full in the face. He heard his mother cry out in horror and he got his eyes open in time to see her cover his baby brother's head with a blanket to keep the DDT from settling on him. No one seemed to be bothered by this. The passengers were all laughing and climbing out of their seats to gather up their packages and bundles.

Paul clapped Lucky on the back and wished him good fortune, then exited the plane. The boy held back to wait for his parents. A few moments later they stumbled down the steps. Just ahead, waiting on the tarmac, was a long black Lincoln with a small American flag fluttering on the antennae. Standing next to the car was a man in a suit holding up a sign that bore his father's name.

A balmy wind blew out of the mountains, stirring up dust, and bringing with it the magical smells of high places, as well as the scent of the sea, all mingled with spices and citrus and roses.

For as long as Lucky lived he would remember that scent.

It was the perfume of Cyprus.

2

"Dad," Lucky whispered urgently. "Look at that man!"

His father looked, swiveling slightly on his bar stool. Walking out of the bright sunlight into the dim coolness of the Empire Room was a portly, middle-aged man with a shock of white hair, ruddy cheeks and the drooping mustache of a British colonel "just out of Indja, you know." The Colonel – and he really was a retired colonel as it turned out - was dressed in a starched white suit, a red bow tie, and in one hand he held a straw boater. In the other was an ivory-tipped walking stick made of a heavy, black wood.

"What about him?" his father asked, turning back to the beer he was enjoying while he waited for a fellow agent to join him for lunch.

When the agent arrived Lucky would have to make himself scarce, but just now he was drinking a lemon squash while his father taught him the queen's pawn opening on a battered chess set the bartender had put out for them.

"Look what he's got in his coat pocket," Lucky said. His father frowned. Lucky was exasperated. "Can't you see it?" he demanded.

Lucky's father looked again and as he did the old gentleman advanced to the bar and ordered up a double gin, saying loudly, "Don't spare the bitters, my boy. A touch of malaria, don't you know."

Now Lucky's father could plainly see the object poking rudely from the Colonel's breast pocket: it was a very large, very yellow banana. And speared into that banana was a long bright green feather. The boy's father snickered, but turned quickly away when the Colonel's bushy brows shot up and his pale washed-out eyes glanced about to see if anyone was laughing. There were other groups of men scattered about the room, but they all turned away as well, burying humor.

"It's a banana with a feather in it," Lucky's father whispered.

Lucky snorted. He *knew* that. It was the *why*, he wanted the answer to, not the *what*. He could see the banana for

himself. Had seen it every day for a week, along with the feather speared through the skin.

"What's it for?" Lucky whispered.

His father shrugged. "I don't know," he said. "I guess it's just that kind of place."

He was speaking of the hotel - their home the first few months they spent in Cyprus. The hotel was a sprawling jumble of casual luxury with wide verandahs looking out on overgrown gardens fed by buckets that gardeners carried from three stone wells. It was a famous Mediterranean hotel that had for decades been the gathering place for spies, smugglers, rich refugees and other quick-witted hustlers who fed in these waters.

The hotel had been built, rebuilt, decorated and redecorated by many owners from many lands over the years and had come to resemble a freebooter's hideaway, with forgotten treasures scattered about its rooms and corridors. Spread over the thick carpets were wondrous rugs woven years ago by nomadic women who plied their craft while perched on camels traversing mountains and deserts. The white-washed walls were hung with tapestries from Burma and Thailand, and yes, even from *Ormaybesiam*. There were vases from the Orient, small statues of exotic gods looted from pagan temples, leather sofas and chairs from Argentina, colorful Rajah couches from India, and the shields and spears of African warriors who'd fallen long ago. There was a hunt room deep in the bowels of the place, where the walls were decorated with the heads and skins of animals from all over the world. Lucky had never seen anyone in there – the bottles behind the small bar were covered with dust – and it was too spooky to investigate very long with all those dead animal eyes looking at you.

A cranky elevator serviced the several floors and on the landing outside each elevator door was an enormous elephant's foot filled with sand so it could serve as an ashtray. At first Lucky thought they were fakes, but when he examined them closely he could tell they were indeed real. It depressed him to think that a noble creature like an elephant had been turned into receptacles for Gauloises, Players and Lucky Strike cigarettes. Even so, the hotel was a wondrous place – a whole secret world within a world – full of surprises and eccentric people.

Lucky's favorite spot was the Empire Room, where no one questioned his presence - even when his father wasn't there. It was located near the entrance of the hotel and had verandahs on two sides and a long, curving rattan bar on the other. Mostly men frequented the Empire Room, except

at four o’clock when tables were set up on the verandah and women in summer dresses and jaunty hats and white gloves would venture in for tea. The hotel was noted for its high tea - especially its Sunday cream tea - when people would come from all over the island to nibble on sandwiches with the crusts cut off; racks of buttered toast and pots of French pate and thick jams; thin-sliced meat, thick-cut bread right out of the oven and three-tiered trolleys ladened with every sort of desert imaginable. Most of the takers of high tea were Europeans or rich Egyptians, Armenians, Lebanese and Turks. They came with their wives and mistresses, laughing a little louder than necessary and all the while their eyes darted into the dark corners of the Empire Room, looking to see who was really about. The regulars, however, usually vanished at tea time, then returned to resume their places when the last snoopers with their perfumed women had vanished. And it was time again to exchange secrets or make quiet deals involving everything from smuggled guns to black market penicillin.

The Empire Room was a mysterious place, with wide-bladed fly fans that slowly swiveled in the ceilings, wafting the rich odors of tobacco, spirits and musty ice bins. It was an immense room, divided into many nooks of privacy by folding screens with Indian designs and large colorful pots holding palms with wide branches that hid all sorts of goings-on. Instead of chairs, there were rattan couches and love seats with soft, colorful pillows and the tables were glass-topped and were perched on hourglass-shaped supports made of woven strips of bamboo. The stools surrounding the long, curved bar were high and fan-backed and if you were a boy who knew the wisdom of silence and were very still, you could peer through the cane to see and hear all that went on without being noticed.

The corner stool, tucked near the big brass espresso machine, was Lucky’s favorite watching place. From there he could peer into nearly every nook, as well keep an eye on the comings and goings of the strange men who frequented the place. If he needed his lemon or orange squash refreshed he merely had to lift the glass when the bartender was operating the coffee machine and the man would amble over to splash in more syrup and refill the glass with soda water from a siphon bottle that was nestled in a basket made of silver wire. It was from this vantage point that he’d first spotted the Colonel.

Now, he watched in growing amazement as the old fellow finished his drink, ordered another, and then wandered about the room, stopping here and there to address the many

men he knew by first name. He had a loud, parade ground voice and had an air of importance about him that somehow stood in stark contrast to someone who wore such an eccentric accessory. The Colonel spoke of the state of the currency: “The pound sterling’s as sound as ever, sir. Sound as ever. But gold’s the ticket for those with a nervous view.” Of taxes: “Confiscatory, old man. They’re making expatriates of us all.” And the state of the world: “Parlous times, chaps. We must mind our backs, what with that fellow Stalin and his red minions.”

As Lucky listened, noting words he’d need to look up later, he kept thinking about that banana with its stupid feather. The fruit and feather had been placed with such care he didn’t think it could have been accidental, such as absently tucking your breakfast banana away, instead of cutting it up into your cereal and milk. Even if this was somehow true, and the banana had been a forgotten breakfast item, where did the feather come from? Even in Cyprus they didn’t serve green feathers with breakfast. He waited for someone to remark on it, but the men the Colonel addressed become crazy-eyed in his presence, staring madly and fixedly at his face - never lowering their gaze to take in the offending fruit and feather. Finally, the Colonel hoisted out a watch from his vest pocket, deplored the lateness of the hour and departed, once again leaving the mystery unsolved.

At that moment his father’s luncheon companion arrived and Lucky had to make himself scarce. But as he left he heard men laughing and whispering to one another.

He heard his father say to his friend: “I just saw the oddest thing. There was a guy in here with a banana in his coat pocket.”

“What the hell for?” his friend asked.

“Beats me,” his father said. “It was pretty damned strange. Especially with that feather sticking out of it.”

“Out of what?” the man goggled.

“Out of the banana,” his father answered. “A big green feather stuck right in the banana. Looked like a parrot’s feather to me.”

“Jesus, Allan,” his father’s companion said. “It’s a little early to be hitting the sauce, don’t you think?”

3

As exotic as his surroundings were, Lucky was experienced in the ways of hotels, so he fit in with little trouble. His parents were nomadic people at heart and he’d

moved with them about the country since he was six months old. Lucky knew to leave his shoes outside the door every night so they'd be taken away for cleaning and polishing to be returned early the next morning. He knew that a boy who smiled and said "yes, sir," and "no, ma'm," to the staff would be rewarded with small favors, extra treats, and easily bent rules in return for his politeness. He was also generous with tips, spreading his allowance around as far as it would go. He took care to learn all the polite Greek words he could, such as "efharistoh," for thank you, and "parakalo," which meant both you're welcome and please.

Even more important was Lucky's confirmed commitment to the CIA kid's central creed: "Never tell." It was a creed that served him well in the "below the stairs" world of hotel employees. It was a world not just of tips, but of many small favors that could quickly add up to a big favor. It was a world where a quick eye and a closed mouth could gain the kind of respect that would be bestowed on few adults in the "up the stairs" world. Even then, the downstairs guys would always trust a kid like Lucky more than an adult.

With no other children to play with, and nothing to do all day, he wandered the hotel, poking into everybody's business. By now he was a master of the art of getting anything he wanted by hotel phone. He'd dined with all the splendors of white linen and china and silver, complete with lit candles and a "leetle wine, monsieur" disguised on the bill as soft drinks or milk by knowing waiters who shook their heads at the barbarity of Americans who would not allow their children such necessary drink. He'd ordered up big console radios so he could spin the dial, searching for entertainment. He'd had cards and games delivered, a record player with a stack of platters to play on it. And once he'd even ordered up a baby sitter to watch his brother while he slipped out to tour the city by taxi.

Lucky had seen liquor delivered to rooms, as well as poker chips and had spotted mysterious packages delivered by the white-gloved concierge himself, so it must have been something *very special, sir*. He'd even seen women delivered - "party girls," the head bellman had called them with a leer and knowing laugh, so the boy was pretty sure what kind of parties he meant.

You never made the mistake of mentioning such things to your mother, who learned the dangers of room service in Paris when she was taking a nice hot bath in a most luxurious suite. She'd thought the velvet rope dangling on the wall next to the tub was an ingenious device to help

people step out of the water. And wasn't she surprised when she pulled on the rope and a French waiter rushed in to see what madam wanted and there she was, standing in her altogether screaming in alarm for her wounded modesty. While the waiter wrung his hands wondering what was troubling madam, was there perhaps a bug in the bath she'd like him to fetch out?

The staff gave him complete freedom of the hotel and protected him during emergencies. When he fell off the verandah wall while tightrope walking and ripped his best trousers, he avoided a scolding by getting them mended on the sly. A shilling to the bellman won him a false identity when the fellow was called before a British boy's mother who wanted to know who it was who'd stripped her son of all his marbles in an illicit match, where the stakes were for "keepers." The British family was just passing through, so Lucky only had to keep his head low for a day or two.

Sometimes he helped the maids on their rounds, so he could investigate rooms where particularly interesting things seemed to be going on. These were always very adult, and therefor sinful, such as packets of rubbers, or small black and white cards with naked women and men on them "*doing it*," and cast off lingerie much more revealing than anything his mother would ever dream of wearing. Once he saw a pistol left on a night stand and was amazed that the maid seemed untroubled and merely dusted around it. She reacted with much disapproval, however, to the charred contents of an ashtray in another suite, tsking and wrinkling her nose at the odor, which was powerful and certainly not tobacco. Lucky asked what it was, but she either didn't have the English to explain - or thought it best he not know. Later he learned it was hashish, as plentiful in the Middle East as corn in Iowa.

The hotel was as thick with different languages as it was intrigue. Groups of men of every nationality would gather in small knots for whispered exchanges that leaped from one tongue to another with bewildering speed. Harsh Arabic would mingle with nasal French, musical Italian, staccato German, and heavily-accented English. Meanwhile, their women would engage each other in nervous small talk, with much casting of quick looks at their men as if they were expecting a signal.

These women invariably deferred to the men, which disgusted Lucky's mother who said no American woman worth her salt would put up with such behavior. Lucky heard her discussing it with an Egyptian she'd befriended. The woman was dark and petite and wore a slender gold chain on one

ankle. Her husband was a Lebanese architect who said he was building a luxury hotel in Beirut. He carried the plans under his arm and upon introduction to anyone he thought had money, would immediately roll them out for display.

"I've even seen wives walking three paces behind their husbands," his mother said in tones of heavy disapproval. "Don't they know this is the Twentieth Century?"

She thought her new friend would agree with the criticism – the woman had lived in New York for several years, after all. And she was openly critical of her husband when he behaved foolishly in public.

Her answer, however, surprised Helen. "But this is how it should be, my dear," the Egyptian said in her excellent Empire English. "Of course, walking behind a man *is* ridiculous. I have a modern marriage and my husband values my opinion. However, it is my own view is that American men are too weak. I like a man with a firm hand. It's much more exciting, don't you think? Sometimes I test my husband… telling him that I plan to do some ridiculous thing or another. We fight about it, and then I give in and tell him what a big strong man he is, and oo-la-la, we have such a time afterwards, Helen. Such a time." The woman winked at Lucky. "When you marry, you should always tell your wife what to do," she advised. "If you don't, my sweet, she won't know how much you care for her."

Lucky's mother was shocked and quickly changed the subject. Later she said he was to pay no attention to her friend's opinion and that if most women in the world knew how American women expected to be treated they'd soon be demanding the same. The boy promised to do as she said, but found himself fantasizing about the Egyptian woman's comments about having "such a time" with her husband. Whenever he saw her, it was all he could do to keep himself from staring at those knowing cat's eyes and the gold chain about her tiny ankle which disturbed him powerfully, although he couldn't say why.

Sometimes Lucky grew lonely - he rarely had other children to play with. Even so, he treasured those long weeks he spent at the hotel. He sat in the Empire Room, day after day, eavesdropping on conversations he didn't quite understand, but teasing his imagination with more possibilities than a radio drama.

However the biggest, most intriguing question during this period was the daily appearance of the red faced Colonel. Each day there was a fresh banana poking out of his coat pocket, with a big green feather stabbed into it - standing up like some kind of flag, or call to arms.

It was an eccentric mystery to contemplate during the lazy summer in the Empire Room of that fine hotel that sat near the ancient gates of Nicosia.

4

Several weeks after Lucky arrived in Cyprus he ventured out of the hotel to investigates the mysteries of the streets. At first he was disappointed. The hotel was situated on the edge of a wealthy old neighborhood of mansions and elegant gardens. It was hot and the streets were usually deserted by mid-afternoon. The people who lived there were mostly Europeans - predominantly British - with a few rich Middle-Easterners. Like the hotel, the only Cypriots he saw were servants and gardeners and never any other children, since the inhabitants seemed to be past child-rearing age.

Then one day he came upon two Cypriot boys trying to fix a flat rear tire on their battered bicycle. The tallest boy was about his age. The other, much smaller, was about five or six. Lucky watched them wrestle with the wheel for awhile. It was stubborn thing with many rusted parts and refused to separate from the axle.

“Want some help?” Lucky asked. Without thinking, he’d spoken in English. Although he’d later learn to speak and act like a Cypriot native, he only knew how to say “please” and “thank you” at this point.

Smiling, the oldest looked up at him and said, “Yes.”

Lucky was pleased. “Do you speak English?” he asked.

The boy nodded. “Yes,” he replied.

Finally! Two kids to talk to about important things, like flat bicycle tires and wheels that wouldn’t come off. Lucky crouched down with them and slowly spun the offending wheel, casting an experienced eye over it. The tire had almost no tread, which is how things usually were with his own bike back home. He saw a little flaw in the black rubber and a tiny glint of metal.

“A nail,” he announced to his two new friends. “That’s your trouble. You picked up a nail.”

“Yes,” the oldest boy replied.

Then he started messing with the rusted axle nut again, trying to break it loose with his fingers. Lucky stopped him.

“Wait a minute,” he said. “We need some tools.”

Now the little brother spoke up. “Yes,” he said.

Lucky jumped to his feet. He knew just what to do. “Stay here, okay?” he said. “I’ll be right back!”

“Yes,” both boys chorused.

Lucky rushed off to find his friend, Peter, the head hotel maintenance man, who spoke excellent English. He was also such a nice guy that he used to let Lucky help him trim the hedges and mow the grass - Peter lounging under a tree, smoking cigarettes and regaling Lucky with his boyhood adventures in the mountains, while Lucky happily toiled in the garden. But when Lucky found Peter and explained the problem, his friend was reluctant to lend him the necessary tools.

“They are gypsy boys, Mister Lucky,” he said. “Thieves.”

Lucky was outraged in behalf of his new friends. “They’re not gypsies,” he scoffed. Although, other than Hollywood movie images, he had no idea what a real gypsy looked like. “They’re just ordinary kids.”

Still, Peter refused. Lucky was at a momentary loss. Then his face brightened as he got an idea. He dug into his pocket and pulled out a silver shilling.

“Maybe you could fix it for us, Peter,” he said, holding up the coin. “You’re good at that stuff, right? You told me how you used to be an engineer at Cyprus Mines.”

Cyprus was known throughout the world for the quality of its copper mine – in fact, Lucky learned, Cyprus meant copper.

“Of course, I was an engineer,” Peter said, squaring his shoulders. “The best mining engineer in all of Cyprus. But the boss, he didn’t like me, you know? On account of his ugly daughter, who I wouldn’t marry.”

“You told me about that,” Lucky said. “And I don’t blame you. Who wants to marry an ugly girl, even if her father is rich?”

Peter eyed the shilling, considering the bargain. “It’s not very much to fix a tire, Mister Lucky,” he said. “There is not only my work - but patches and glue cost money.” He rubbed two fingers together. “Common things cost too much these days. It’s because of the English, you know. So many taxes, so many rules.” He spit in the dust. “Those damned English!”

Lucky was sympathetic - but only to a point. As a much traveled young man he knew the value of things. He’d been cheated before and knew how to stand up for himself.

“I know what you mean,” he said. He spit into the spot Peter had marked. “Stupid English.” He held up the shilling. “But this is more than twenty five cents in American money,” he said. “For twenty five cents I could buy two comic books and a Coke in the States. But this is

closer to thirty five cents and for thirty five cents I could buy three comic books and a Coke. Or, two comic books and some peanuts to put into my Coke."

Peter laughed, shaking his head in admiration. "You are almost a Cypriot, Mister Lucky," he said. "You have a Greek's warm heart and a Turk's tight fist to make a bargain."

Lucky didn't have the faintest idea what Peter was talking about, but he took it as a compliment. "So, you'll fix the tire?" he asked. "For a shilling?" Then he became a little embarrassed. Peter was a poor man and Lucky had been raised to sympathize with the poor. "That's all I've got, honest," he said. Lucky had a sudden thought and fished into his pocket and pulled out an oversize marble. "Except this cat's eye," he said, very reluctant. It was one of his most prized possessions. "I could let you have that if you needed it for anything."

Although Peter's oldest son would have been overjoyed to have such a prize, after a moment's hesitation, the man waved it away. "No, no, Mister Lucky," he said. "We can fix the tire for a shilling. I just remembered that I have a whole tin of patches my good friend Demitrios gave me. For nothing."

Peter titled his head back and made a tsking sound. "For nothing!" he repeated. "A whole tin of tire patches - fifty or more. And the glue as well. He did this just to show his friendship. He's that kind of a man, my Demitrios. He found a broken crate of tire patches in the English army supply house. They were of no use to anyone - since the crate was broken how could they easily transport it without much work and expense to repair the crate? So Demitrios kindly took the crate off their hands and saved them the trouble. And although he sold a few tins to some Turks - which is no sin because they are Turks and may they eat the Devil's shit in Hell - he gave the rest away to good friends like me. The man who stood at the baptism of his oldest son." Peter patted Lucky on the back, white teeth gleaming in his dark face. Friendly eyes shining. "And so it is only right that I now help my new friend - Mister Lucky. Who generously wants to help some gypsy boys with their problem."

"They're not gypsies," Lucky insisted.

Peter shrugged. "We shall see," he replied. Then he lifted a warning finger. "But just in case, do not show them the marble in your pocket, Mister Lucky. Gypsy boys like to gamble - even for marbles. And they will cheat you of everything you have."

Lucky was intrigued. “I don’t think they’re gypsies,” he said. “But if they are, I’m pretty good at playing keepers.”

The back garden gate of the hotel was rather large and made of heavy wrought iron bars, painted white. When it came open the hinges made a loud shriek and the two Cypriot boys jolted up in surprise. They saw Lucky, but then they saw Peter towering over him and took fright. The oldest boy grabbed his brother by the collar and they ran down the street, leaving the injured bicycle behind.

Lucky cried after them: “Wait! Wait!”

About fifty yards off, the two boys stopped beneath a large rose tree, whose pink and white blossoms littered the cobblestone street. The oldest boy shouted something in Greek and made defiant, obscene gestures. His little brother shrilled defiance as well - hoisting a middle finger at Lucky and Peter.

Lucky shouted back: “Yo, there’s nothing wrong! Peter’s just going fix the bike, okay?”

“They’re gypsies, that’s for certain,” Peter said glumly. “Never mind their bicycle. Keep your shilling.”

“No, please, Peter” Lucky said, realizing that there’d been a misunderstanding. “Fix it anyway, okay?” And he shoved the silver coin into Peter’s hand.

Now that he noticed it, the two kids were dressed in rags. But that hadn’t meant anything to him before. He’d recently lived outside Clearwater, Florida - just down the highway from a two-story clapboard house crammed with poor folks. “Florida crackers,” his parents had called them. And they’d told him not to play with the many kids who scrambled all around the house - all bare-footed and dressed in rags. Some of the kids had big, running sores on their heads and extremities, which his mother identified as “Florida sores” and said they were infectious.

“They’ve probably got cooties, too,” she’d warned him.

Lucky, who was experienced in finding fun on the road wherever it presented itself - ignored his parents warnings and soon his mother had taken pity on the kids and had dragged them into the house to feed them and scrub them down with strong soap and bleach. And so it was that Lucky looked past the smelly rags the gypsy boys wore and saw two playmates. A valuable thing to have when you are all alone in a big hotel. Once more he pointed to the bike. “Fix it, Peter,” he urged. “Please!”

Grumbling, Peter crouched down to examine the tire. Turning the creaky wheel and muttering many Greek

deprecations. Finally, he said, “Let’s take it into the garden.”

He came to his feet, picking the bike up, and walked back toward the hotel’s garden gate. Immediately, the two gypsy kids started howling. Lucky saw them run forward, stooping down to pick up large stones from the street.

He lifted both hands, trying to reassure them. “Don’t worry,” he cried. “We’re just fixing’ the bike.”

Lucky had to duck fast the biggest boy hurled a stone straight for his head. He didn’t bother arguing, but beat a hasty retreat with Peter, slamming the gate behind him. Big pieces of broken cobblestone sailed over the stone fence after them.

Peter laughed. “They’re angry with you,” he said. “The gypsy boys think you stole their bicycle, which is a great insult for little thieves like that.”

“Never mind,” Lucky said. “They won’t be mad once get their bike back.”

Still laughing, Peter got to work. Squirting oil here and there, quickly freeing the main axle nut and doing all the other things that were necessary to remove the wheel. First he extracted the nail, then he peeled the tire from the rim and extracted the red rubber tube. Quickly, he pumped it up with a little foot pump and then he carried it to a large marble cistern that gathered the overflow from the main hotel well. The cistern sat beneath a rose trellis and Peter had to scoop pink blossoms off the water before he immersed the inner tube. The cistern had been hollowed out by hand to make a perfectly rectangular receptacle. The workmanship for such a lowly object didn’t impress Lucky – he was too young to realize the amount of labor and care that went into such a thing. Instead, he admired the many little oily rainbows bubbling around the streaked marble sides as Peter spun the inner tube, looking for the leak.

Peter knew all the hotel gossip and so while they were working Lucky asked him, “Did you ever see the Colonel with the banana in his pocket, with the feather in it? You must have. He comes in every day.”

The gardener laughed. “Of course I have seen it, Mister Lucky. Everyone has. The Colonel is quite the joke, you know.” Peter shook his head. “Damned English. Just to make our lives miserable, they send all their crazy ones to Cyprus when they are too old and weak in the head to live on their own island.”

Lucky asked, “But who is he?”

Peter snorted. “Only an old spy,” he said. “Of no use to anybody.”

The gardener waved his hand, indicating the back end of the hotel, dripping in bougainvillea, citrus and rose blossoms. “They’re all spies, here,” he said of the hotel residents. “Cyprus has much experience with spies, you know. They have afflicted us since Aphrodite was a girl of no importance. In our history, we’ve suffered spies from the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, Romans, Syrians, Turkish - and now the damned English!” Peter lifted his hand from the cistern and dramatically smote his forehead. “The spies in Cyprus are worst than locusts, Mister Lucky,” he cried. “Or even gypsies. Give me a gypsy thief before you give us all these damned spies!”

Lucky was getting worried about all this talk of the hotel being infested with spies. It was true, of course. A quiet boy with big ears could hear and see many things from his post at the Empire Room coffee machine. And he’d already picked out several men he was certain were involved in “the great game” as Mr. Kipling described the spying business in “Kim” - a novel that was a new favorite of his. He’d read it before, of course, but the book had revealed many new levels now that Lucky’s father was part of “the great game” as well.

To draw any possible suspicion away from his father, Lucky openly - and a little rudely - mocked Peter. “Come on, the Colonel can’t be a spy! That’s… that’s… well, as stupid as saying my mother or my little brother were spies. Besides, who ever heard of a spy with a banana in his coat pocket with a dumb feather stuck in it?”

Peter took no offense. “Listen, Mister Lucky,” he said. “I have a nose for such things.” He tapped a long forefinger against his classically Greek nose. “I can smell a spy a mile away. You’re too young and innocent to know of such things. You come from too good a family. A gracious family. Your father is a diplomat. I know this. Everyone does. He’s a good man. A man who sees and wants only the best of things for this world. So how could a son of his know about such a dirty business as spying? But I have seen many things in my life, Mister Lucky. And I know a spy when I see one. Like I said, I can smell them. Although it does not take a good nose to suspect the Colonel. Why, it’s well known to everyone in Cyprus that he’s a spy. He’s crazy, of course. And a little foolish. He was an English spy in India for many years. And then he retired - on a very small pension. Too small to return to his home in England again. So now he lives in Cyprus, where things are very cheap for Europeans, but quite dear for us. Even so, his pension is too small to pay for all the gin and tonics he likes to

drink. And so the Colonel has returned to his old business, selling little secrets that he picks up at bars and tavernas."

"Who does he sell them to?" Lucky asked.

Peter shrugged. "To anyone who feels sorry for him," he said. "His secrets are of little use to real spies. But they buy him drinks and give him a few pounds for unimportant errands."

Lucky immediately understood. The Colonel was not just a double, but a triple and maybe even quadruple agent. Working for everyone and anyone. But in spying history those sorts of agents were usually romantic figures. Like the spy in the movie, "Five Fingers," who worked for both the Germans and the Allies. Playing one against the other in a very elaborate and dangerous game. But the Colonel was far from a romantic figure. And he certainly wasn't very clever. Just someone to feel sorry for.

"What about the banana?" Lucky asked Peter. "Is that some sort of secret message?"

Peter only smiled and tapped his temple. "The Colonel is crazy, that's all," he said. "There's no mystery, Mister Lucky. Only an old fool doing foolish things because he's lived too long, drinks too much and his mind is weak."

"I don't know…" Lucky said hesitantly. This was a most unsatisfactory answer. But to say so would be an insult to Peter. So he shrugged, saying, "You're probably right. He's just an old crazy man."

Soon, the repair on the bicycle was finished. Peter gave the bike a few extra licks, oiling the chain and replacing some spokes. Then he held the gate open for Lucky as the boy wheeled the bike out into the street. The two gypsy kids were squatting next to a sign post about twenty yards away and the minute they spotted Lucky and Peter they scooped up more stones. But when they saw the bike, its tire pumped up and ready to go, they hesitated.

Lucky motioned for Peter to stay back and wheeled the bike forward. The boys watched him, faces expressionless, their arms raised, hands full of stones ready to throw. Lucky snapped out the kick stand and leaned the bike on its support and stepped away.

"There's your bike," he said. "Good as new."

"Yes," the older boy said, suddenly breaking into a smile.

He leaped onto the bike, pulled his little brother up so that sat astride the handlebars and pedaled down the street. Both boys laughed and shouted gleeful things in

Greek. Then they turned back, riding up to Lucky. They both climbed off. The oldest boy indicated the bike to Lucky.

“Yes?” he asked.

Lucky’s eyes widened with delight. “I can ride it?” he asked.

Both boys nodded. “Yes,” they chorused.

Immediately Lucky jumped on the bicycle and pedaled furiously down the street. He squeezed the handle bar brakes, leaning over so that he could skid around in a dramatic turn, then raced back to his friends.

He jumped off the bike before it came to a halt. “Wow!” he shouted. “Peter fixed that real good, didn’t he?”

“Yes,” the older boy said, bobbing his head.

It was then that Lucky was suddenly struck with the oddest of notions. “You speak English, right?” he asked the oldest boy.

“Yes,” the boy said.

“Then, what’s your name?” he asked.

“Yes,” the boy replied.

“And your little brother’s name?” Lucky prodded.

“Yes,” the oldest boy replied.

Lucky was mortified. “Neither of you really do speak English, do you?”

“Yes,” the older boy said.

“And the only word you know is yes?” Lucky said.

The boy nodded. “Yes.”

And then his brother shouted, “Yes, yes. Amerikhanos, yes!”

Both boys started jumping up and down, crying, “Yes, yes, yes! Amerikhanos! Yes, yes, yes!”

Then they both jumped onto the bike and pedaled away, laughing and shouting at the top of their lungs.

Peter looked up from his work as Lucky opened the big gate and walked into the garden. “I was so stupid,” Lucky said. “I thought they spoke English. But all the could say was, ‘yes, yes, yes!’”

Peter laughed. “Themperaze, Mister Lucky,” he said. “Themperaze. You’ve made new friends, even if they are gypsy boys.”

Lucky was intrigued. “What’s that word?” he wanted to know. “Thempe - something or other.”

Peter grinned a huge grin. “Themperaze,” he said again. “It’s good Cypriot word. It means, ‘never mind.’ But not exactly, ‘never mind.’ It’s impossible to translate for it is a word stuffed with much meaning.

“Say it like this - “ and Peter’s face became imperious and he made a tsking sound before saying, “Themperaze!

“That way means never mind, you stupid person. I am too important and you are too small to bother me with such nonsense.

“Another way to say it is like this - “ Peter made an elaborate shrug, saying, lazily, “Them-pe-razi.

“That way, you are saying that the incident is minor and life is so important and cruel and we must take pleasure where we can find it. So never mind - them-pe-razi - the thing that troubles you and gets in the way of real life.

“You can also forgive a friend who made a big mistake. You can throw your arms around him and kiss his cheeks and say, ‘Themperaze.’ It is not important, my good friend. Not so important as you.”

Lucky nodded understanding. Themperaze was a word like stokahlo, with many shades of meaning.

“And so I say to you, Mister Lucky,” Peter continued, “that you met some gypsy boys - against my advice. And they made you feel foolish, because you thought they could speak English only because they knew the English word, ‘yes.’ Well, those boys are blushing even more than you. They felt stupid because they didn’t know English. And they wanted to impress a big shot American kid. So they said the only word they knew ‘yes,’ ‘yes,’ ‘yes.’ No matter what you said, they said ‘yes.’ And in the end they were bigger fools. Because you have a good heart and they didn’t know that and were angry with you until you returned their bicycle and then they knew. So I say ‘Themperaze,’ my young friend. Life is sweet when you make friends. Even if they are only gypsy boys. Never mind if you feel foolish. Never mind you spent a whole shilling in your foolishness. I swear to you when my work is done today I will go to the taverna and spend that shilling like an offering to the gods.

“I will buy my friends some ouzo and good Greek coffee. And maybe I will spend more than just that shilling and hire a pipe to smoke all around. And we will toast, ‘Themperaze!’ New words and new friends made, even though they are gypsies. I confess to you, Mister Lucky, that I secretly have a friend who is an old Turk. Cypriots hate Turks. And Turks hate Cypriots. But what can a man do when the Turk is such pleasant guy that you must make him your friend? What can a man say?”

Getting it, Lucky grinned. And he replied: “Themperaze! That’s what you say.”

Delighted, Peter clapped him on the back. “I will make you into a Cypriot yet, Mister Lucky,” he said. “You just wait and see.”

A coming-of-age story set in the Middle East during the height of the Cold War. A boy - son of a CIA operative - is inspired by grand events and a Greek Cypriot teacher to learn about survival and his art.

Lucky In Cyprus: A True Story About A Boy, A Teacher, An Earthquake, Some Terrorists And The CIA