

The Right Moves

Anita Zelman

A Mystery



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For the first time at an international World Champion chess tournament, the United States is represented by a woman—beautiful but bratty and self-involved—Linda, a grandmaster. The matches are being held on a Caribbean island where chess masters have gathered from all over the world.

But someone is out to prevent Linda from becoming the first female World Champion—potentially lethal accidents shatter her calm, an attempt is made to kidnap her, and a Russian grandmaster disappears during the height of the matches.

The local police seem more interested in hushing up the events and avoiding bad publicity than in discovering what's happening on this politically troubled island, and the magnificent minds of the world's chess masters turn vague when it comes to practical problems. So it's left to two romantically involved on-the-spot journalists, writing an "instant book" about the historic match, to unravel the mystery, keep Linda alive, solve a jewel theft, and discover what's happened to the Russian grandmaster.

(continued on back flap)

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Right Moves

Anita Zelman

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• ONE •

Being packed is one thing, going somewhere another. Everything had looked like "go" in the last few weeks as Debs had happily watched international and local hurdles being overcome. She had hoped to be on the plane leaving Los Angeles tonight, its jumbo nose pointed in the direction of St. Swillens, where she would co-author an "instant" book on the international Chess Match. She needed the money, needed the feeling of doing her job well, needed a change of scene from Los Angeles, as much as she loved the city of her birth.

St. Swillens, a lush, overgrown, neglected island in the Caribbean, had recently used American funds to build a landing strip and airport to accommodate jets. An ambitious Governor didn't want his economy depending on a few tourists belched forth from cruise ships. His goal was serious, stay-overnight tourists.

At one point, Debs thought the location of the Match would have to be changed because the airport

was not quite complete, but a final push from the natives and it was done. St. Swillens eagerly awaited the invasion.

A neighboring Caribbean island, experimenting with socialism and an arms buildup, had a different type of invasion. The United States, behaving like a grown-up, responsible world power, had stepped in.

All those major obstacles had been overcome. It broke Debs's heart when she entered Alethea and Stan's baronial mansion and saw their packed suitcases pathetically, hopefully sitting on the marble floor of the foyer.

"Do you really think the chess brat is going to get on the plane tonight?" Debs was being rhetorical.

Alethea led her to the parlor, waved Debs to a chair, and began pouring rose hip tea into a china cup, saying, "I've got to believe. Otherwise I'd be in a state of hysteria myself. It's Linda's hysteria that needs our undivided attention."

Alethea, one of the best-looking and most charming of Los Angeles's Westside power people, always had a number of projects going, but supporting Linda, the person Alethea was convinced would be the first woman to win the world championship against male competition, was the *passionate* project.

"Is it Linda's pregame nervousness or her rotten character that's causing this last-minute rule change fuss?" Debs asked. "That idiot-savant must know there's no time to resolve it. I can't stand the suspense. Will she go? Won't she? I've got a book at stake. I'm packed, you're packed. Are you sure you aren't too nervous to go ahead with the interview?"

"I'm as jumpy as you are, but I'd just as soon start. I've put you off long enough while I hovered over Linda. It's good having my best friend for company. We can jump out of our skins together when the phone

rings. Come to think of it, I better set it to Announce so we can both hear the good news."

"Optimist. God, Alethea, suppose it rings and it isn't Howard on the line?"

"Bite your tongue! It will not only *have* to be Howard, it will have to be Howard with the news that he's broken Linda down and she's going."

"If she goes to St. Swillens for the Match, Alethea, it won't be because Howard's broken her down. It will be because he's built her up. What a husband. Howard's so patient with Linda, so loving. He's a paragon of male solicitude."

"I'm counting on that. The rest of us decided not to apply pressure today, to let that 'paragon of male solicitude' handle her. I, personally, would like to be at Linda's apartment, right this minute, on my knees, begging, but you know how effective that is. I'm glad Howard's an attorney. Pleading a case is his strength."

Debs pulled a tape recorder out of her purse and said, "Distraction time. I'm going to feel like an idiot interviewing my best friend. But you brought it on yourself. I wouldn't have this chance to do the book covering Linda's road to the championship if you hadn't introduced me to the editor."

"That's what friends are for," Alethea said.

"The fact that you're good to your friends might be just the place to start the interview as soon as I get this damn recorder going. I hate machines. And they hate me, too. Someday my toaster is going to electrocute me first thing in the morning." Debs clicked something. "Ah, yes, here goes the little bastard. I can see the tape winding. Yoo, hoo, testing. Yes, let's see. Kind to friends. Good place to start. Why are you so kind to Linda when she's difficult, temperamental, and let's face it, somewhat paranoid?"

"I guess it's my *yeshiva bócher* complex."

"Explain. Not for me, honey, but for the tape."

"It's a moral obligation we have to the gifted. In my grandmother's shtetl, no matter how poor you were, you always gave food and shelter to the struggling student, the yeshiva boy. Tradition. As for Linda's being difficult, she could be worse. Think of Jackson Pollack slopping paint all over Peggy Guggenheim's villa. At least Linda isn't messy. Ungrateful, yes, but not messy. These negative things are part of the chance you take when you back someone all the way. That person isn't necessarily going to love you for it but history will remember Linda long after I'm dead and buried."

"Do you find it especially nice," Debs asked, "in the name of Sisterhood, that the yeshiva boy is a girl. Oops, I'll strike that. The women's movement will kill me for calling anyone over thirteen a 'girl.' But do you find it nice, Linda's being a woman?"

"Yes, I do."

"What about women chess players in the past? How come they haven't made it? I'm not too happy about the research I've done on women players. I read things like, oh, women sometimes make it to the point where they can compete with masters, but very few can compete with grandmasters. There are theories it's because the patricidal instinct makes men want to kill the King and women don't have that complex. But to hell with Freud. Something else is wrong." Debs lowered her voice. "Can it be that, God forbid, we don't have the brains for the game?"

"Nope," Alethea said. "God sprinkles down a certain number of high I.Q.s on earth and half go to men and half to women. The brain capacity is there. Chess attitudes are cultural. I'll never forget when Nona Gaprindashvili . . ."

"Can you spell that?"

"It's all I can do to pronounce it, Debs, but I'll look

it up for you in one of my chess books if you decide to use this part of the tape. Anyway, I'll never forget when Nona Gaprindashvili became a national heroine in Georgia. Georgia, Russia, that is. They were so proud of her for winning big in chess that every little girl in the republic wanted to play, and soon one, then another little Georgian became a champ. There's an all-out female-oriented chess community there now. Top male players spend a lot of time coaching little girls."

"I love it."

"Then, too," Alethea went on, "in certain cultures a female chess prodigy will appear, like Jutta Hempel, from West Germany, who at the age of six was giving simultaneous exhibitions on T.V., then we didn't see her around anymore. Was it because her family didn't encourage her, wanted her to have a normal school life or what? Would they have encouraged a boy? Anyway, enough females have appeared on the scene so that we know they're out there somewhere."

"So it's a matter of getting encouragement to them?"

"Sure," Alethea said. "Look at you, Debs, you claim to be a mechanical idiot, but I noticed you learned to move into the electronic age with your word processor. You needed to, in order to compete in your field. Motivation is everything."

"My toaster is still going to kill me someday. It's not user-friendly like my computer. How did you come to chess?"

"Through my understanding father. He believed in encouraging his daughters in every aspect of learning, and chess was a game he loved."

"You're a rated player, right?"

"Let's just say I know the game well enough to be able to appreciate a Linda when she comes along."

"Naughty, naughty, you're fudging on the tape. There's a game you're famous for."

"I don't remember ever telling you about that."

The phone rang. Alethea grabbed it. Debs turned her machine to "off" and willed the caller to be Howard with good news.

"Hello," Alethea said.

"I'm going to sue you," a hostile voice threatened.

"Oh, hello, dear."

"Don't you want to know why I'm going to sue you?" Linda asked.

"It's your nickel."

"My what?"

Apparently, Alethea had forgotten that Linda was twenty-one, younger than Alethea's own daughter. "Just an old expression. Sorry."

"I'm going to sue because you didn't arrange to have strong enough lights sent to St. Swillens, and I won't have my game thrown off by dim lights."

Alethea smiled. Debs, feeling a tingle of happiness, realized Linda was talking as though going to the island for the Match were a possibility.

"I don't call thousand-watt strobes dim, Linda. Can't you wait until we all get there?"

Debs admired her friend for acting as though the possibility were a cheerful given, that they'd all be off to St. Swillens, that Linda's implacable rule-change tantrum weren't hanging over their heads, that the whole chess world weren't waiting for Howard's call.

"Why anticipate trouble?" Alethea asked. "I'm sure, dear, that the tournament director has taken care of everything, and I'm told there's an excellent caretaker in charge of the auditorium."

"You rich witches are all alike. You think because a caretaker is in charge, you can shrug off your role. You

helped sponsor the tournament. You should see to it that strong bulbs are put in."

Debs was pleased that Alethea let "rich witch" go by, even though the wealthy woman had been working her way through college when she was Linda's age.

"Why don't you wait until the airplane takes off," Alethea suggested, "then we can work on your whole list of complaints."

If, God willing, Howard got Linda on the airplane, there would, of course, be a new list. Debs could picture Linda, that lovely, brilliant, unhappy creature, in her small, monastic apartment, where the several chess boards with their pieces set up for games she was studying were the only decor, making just such a list.

Alethea said, "Cheer up, Linda. The lights will be lovely, like you. I'm sure this is just a case of nerves as the games come closer, and I don't blame you for that."

Alethea had recently told Debs that whenever Linda had threatened to sue, it always turned out to be just before a new level of competition. Maybe this was a hopeful sign.

"The games won't come 'closer' if Howard doesn't come back from the grocery store soon and get started on the rule change," Linda said.

Alethea looked as though she wanted to cry. Debs wasn't far behind her. So nothing was resolved. Howard hadn't made progress. Linda was sticking to wanting that dumb, last-minute, minor rule change, and Linda had said she wouldn't go to St. Swillens if it couldn't be changed. Debs might as well go home and unpack. The games would start without Linda. No, damn it, the day wasn't over! Howard had worked minor miracles with his wife before. Maybe he could work this major one.

Linda said, "I'm going to get an attorney to sue you. Not Howard. He'll be working on the rule change."

This was a new development. As far as Debs knew, Linda had threatened Alethea with lawsuits before but had never mentioned hiring a specific attorney.

"You'd better think this over, Linda," Alethea said. "You really don't want to do anything that's tacky."

"Nothing to think over. Bye."

When Alethea put down the phone's receiver, Stan walked in. As usual, he was magnificently tailored, today in a charcoal-grey suit. Dark-eyed and bushy-browed, he had a thick neck that gave the impression of sitting directly on his shoulders. He looked menacing. But then, he always looked menacing. Stan said, "I heard, I heard. Glad you put it on Announce. I'll call Nestor. Let him handle the little shit."

Debs loved the way Stan managed things for his wife. Alethea's husband was a paragon of male solicitude, too. He was a major, unrelenting force in the business community and a steadfast force at home. Perhaps he didn't express himself as gently as Howard, but Stan was a good man to have on one's side. He was sweetly tolerant of Alethea's projects, although he often told her she aimed too high and asked why she couldn't be content to become a docent at the museum like some of their friends' wives. Debs was pleased to see he wasn't bringing that up now.

"I hate to have you call our lawyer," Alethea said. "I dread the thought of anyone getting Linda upset just before the Candidates' Games."

"If she goes to them. Hello, Debs. How are you, Gorgeous? Sorry if I didn't give you a kiss before." He took care of it now. "But listen to my wife, will you? You and I and the rest of us don't even know if we're getting on that plane. Why can't Alethea be a museum docent like other men's wives? Treating Linda like a

poor, troubled genius has only led to that bitch taking advantage of us."

"Geniuses are supposed to take advantage," Alethea said.

"I'm going to take advantage back," Stan said.

"Kill, Stan, Kill!" Debs encouraged. "You're beautiful when you're mad."

"I've kept all the receipts for the money Alethea and I have put out for Linda's chess coach and general upkeep before she got married and for tournament fees after. Let her sue. I'll have Nestor file a countersuit for ingratitude."

"Good," Debs said.

"Please, Stan," Alethea said. "Let's not let it get to suits and countersuits. Linda usually forgets about you and me and begins concentrating on sending out hate waves to her opponents by the day of a game."

"If we get to the games," Stan said. "Don't worry, hon. We'll see what Nestor says. For all I know, maybe he'll advise us to capitulate and take over a planeload of giant strobe lights to St. Swillens."

Debs began to put her tape recorder away, saying the day was probably becoming too much of a strain for Alethea, but her friend insisted that it was better to do the interview now and keep the photographer's appointment than wait until St. Swillens because they'd be busy there. What could one say in the face of such optimism?

"Where did we leave off?" was what Debs did think of asking as she fumbled to get her machine going. "Oh, yes, a game you're famous for. Stan mentioned it to me recently when I was doing a mini-interview with him."

"It's sweet of him to remember. It happened a long time ago. The game is kind of an embarrassment to me in a way because I did something brilliant and didn't know I was doing it at the time, or why, for that matter. I set a magnificent trap, I didn't want my partner to

obtain a passed pawn on the King's Bishop file, and I was trading off reserves when I used a pawn wedge to pry open my opponent's defenses, and then . . . but, I'll be happy to give you the game to read. It's been printed up in U.S. chess books and Soviet ones. You wouldn't recognize the game because it appears under my maiden name, Kaminsky."

"Alethea, precious, I won't understand it when you do show it to me. I'm a rotten player. You've tried over the years but it's a waste. I'm going to be very dependent on my co-author. He sounds ideal with his chess background and his ability to speak Russian."

"I'm glad your editor found him. You can keep yourself happy doing the human interest angle."

"If Linda goes. Do you think she has any consciousness of what it will mean to this country, and to the women's movement, if she does go to the tournament and makes it all the way to the top?"

Alethea laughed. "That loner? Come on, you know better than that."

"Damn, the tape needs changing."

Debs fumbled her way through the tape reversal, then asked to move on to the den where they'd be posing Alethea for her picture.

Alethea led her down the marbled hall and opened the double doors to the den. The room was filled with deep couches and chairs covered in silk and loaded with cushions. But the chief feature of the room was the collection of chess pieces that sat on tables and glass shelves. The architect had arranged for dramatic lighting to highlight these masterpieces, and Alethea was so fond of the effect that household staff had been instructed to leave the lights on day and night. No matter how often Debs had seen these chess pieces in her friend's home, they had not lost their ability to impress her. She'd never asked details before, but since she'd be the one to write

all picture captions for the book, she asked Alethea to tell her what the pieces were made from. Debs recognized ivory when she saw it. But the others?

Alethea picked up an ancient Arabic-Egyptian piece. "This is a rock crystal lion. The mounting is gilded copper and depicts the castle the piece represents. The mounting was added two centuries later. And the Nordic pieces over here are made of hartshorn."

Debs said, "Ah, here's a set we must absolutely use as foreground when the photographer takes your picture. Where do these photogenic pieces come from?"

"They're South German. Made from Majolica, semiprecious stones, pearls, and mother-of-pearl."

"No wonder they're so colorful. I love the Queen. The artist must have, too. He's given her some wonderful detailing in her clothes and jewelry. Do you ever play with these pieces?"

"Never. I play with the plain Staunton set over there in the corner. There's enough confusion in the game without getting mixed up by fancy pieces."

"Speaking of fancy, we've got to have the photographer make use of this family portrait. It's the opposite of fancy. It's so down-to-earth and wonderful, and it'll make for contrast."

Debs had picked up a framed sepia-toned picture of a Russian family: a mother in babushka and long dress, a father in cap and Russian clothing surrounded by their children. Debs knew the importance this must have for Alethea, who'd been so moved by Alex Haley's *Roots* that she'd tried tracing her own and had come across a second cousin, who owned the family portrait and was willing to let Alethea have copies made of it.

"The photographer can fit it in," Debs said. "Antique chess pieces, antique portrait. It'll be fine."

Alethea smiled. "The ghosts of the Kaminskys will

be pleased. As poor as they were, there were two who made time to play chess."

"Back to the questions. Has supporting the game brought you satisfaction?"

"Yes. We're all just passing through in this life. It's nice to hold out a hand."

"Even if it gets bitten? Sorry, I couldn't resist. I keep writing that Linda's 'assertive' or else 'confident of her genius' when I really want to write 'bitch, bitch, bitch' in my interviews with her. God, are they difficult, those taping sessions. She's not one of your verbal, articulate people."

"Few great chess players are, except when complaining about what other chess players are doing to them."

"Do you think, Alethea, that it's because your own kids are perfect that you need the aggravation of a Linda?"

Alethea laughed. "I haven't adopted her forever. Just until the championship."

Stan was back, with his phone report. "Nestor's legal opinion is that No Good Deed Goes Unpunished. Says we've been suckers. He also said it would be fun, would give him a permanent erection, if Linda doesn't go to St. Swillens to do a 'bite the hand that feeds you' case. Says the Governor of St. Swillens should sue her, too, after building the bitch an airport. He asked why you don't drop the little shit, and I explained after we get through with the Candidates' Tournament, the little shit will go on to be the world champion."

Alethea grinned, obviously appreciating Stan's use of "we."

Debs could only wish some last-minute miracle would make the "future world champion" learn the meaning of the word "we."

• TWO •

On the other side of town, if anyplace as sprawled out as Los Angeles can be said to have a side, Linda's husband, Howard, that "paragon of male solicitude," was screaming at his wife, ventilating venom stored during the past week. The cords of his neck stood out as he yelled, "I've had it with you, you miserable monomaniac. Either you get in the car right now and then get your ass on that airplane or I'm walking out on this lopsided, idiotic marriage."

Linda, his spoiled-rotten-brat ice princess, sat on the couch as he stood across from her, the chess table between them. The princess was silent.

He wasn't. "The injustice of it, the goddamn injustice, when I've worked my butt off to change plans at the office so I could go to St. Swillens! And you want to stay home and fight the Chess Federation over one last piddling rule. I worked hard on the first rule, Linda, because right was right. But this piddling rule is . . . is . . . piddling."

More silence. Not from him. "I've petted you, pampered you. I've put up with your singlemindedness, your goddamn obsession."

He paused to slow his breathing. There was lots more he could add. When she'd played the tournaments this last year, he'd always been there, taking care of having the referee change "too tall" or "too short" chairs while his wife fretted that the lighting was too dim or too bright. When she gave exhibition tours, he'd been with her all the way. Last month, when she wrote her article on an aspect of the Opening Theory, he'd corrected her spelling errors, and there had been many because Linda did not believe in spelling the way she believed in chess. He could go on and on with the list.

"You knew I had this obsession when you married me. Why did you marry me, Howard?"

Ah, the princess could speak. But now he'd worked himself into such a choked-up, aggravated state he could barely manage to say, "Because, unlike you, I'm human and entitled to a mistake."

He walked out of the living room and into the bedroom, slamming the door. He sat on the edge of the bed, put his head in his hands, wished his parents hadn't programmed him not to cry, and remembered very well why he'd married her.

Fresh out of law school and ready to widen his horizons, he'd dropped in at the Herman Steiner Chess Club. He'd spotted the lovely young woman the minute he'd entered the room. She was playing chess, her dark hair, shiny and alive, falling forward over the sides of her serious, beautiful face. He'd walked over and played the role of kibitzer. She'd ignored him. When her opponent resigned and made some foolish remark about not minding being beaten by a girl, she'd said, "But you do mind or you wouldn't have mentioned it."

Beautiful voice. Dangerous but beautiful. Was there anything about this girl he couldn't adore? Howard asked to have the next game. She had asked for his rating and then offered to spot him a Knight and a Castle. Insultingly, she'd removed those two pieces from her side of the board. Her manners—that was the one thing about this girl that he couldn't adore. When the game was over, he'd told her, "I didn't mind being beaten by a champion"—a kibitzer had informed him during the game who she was—"but did you have to make it happen so fast?"

She hadn't answered but got up and walked over to one of the couches in the room and sat down. He'd followed her.

"Did you start to play chess when you were a kid?" Howard had asked.

"When I was five and a half. But I didn't begin to take it seriously until I was seven."

Howard laughed. Linda didn't; she withdrew into herself and looked unhappy. It was then that he discovered this lovely person, who was so haughty and arrogant, reigning like a queen at the chess table, was acutely shy and uncomfortable away from it. Of course, he fell in love with her the minute it became obvious that she needed all the protection she could get.

And then he'd moved here, into Linda's apartment, over her protests at breaking the isolation she thought was good for her game, had moved to hers, even though his was so obviously superior, because Linda claimed his had all sorts of hideous distractions: television, stereo, and books on subjects other than chess. God, how he hated this apartment today. So damn monastic. But he'd loved it then, had even been happy to go without movies and concerts. She was his, all his, and he'd figured that the next step of trying to make a

well-rounded human being out of her could come later.

When the zonal tournaments ended, she had played the games with such passionate intensity that her clothes were hanging on her. Like other chess players, she'd sweated pounds away over the chess table as forehead spoke to forehead. There was a lot of sheer nervous energy that sparked in the air above tournament players. When Howard noticed how thin and pale Linda had become, he resolved to get her out in the air. He'd teach her how to bicycle.

"All the Russian champions exercise," he'd told her. "Gets oxygen to the brain. Botslimik is probably out there in the snows of Siberia, stripped to his shorts and lifting weights to the tune of balalaika music."

Then he'd warned her, after the success they'd had with bicycling, that he was going to try for more, saying, "You'll thank me for rounding out your life. Someday your chess playing days will come to an end."

"I know." Linda had looked sad. "All great chess careers, like all great love affairs, eventually die. You aren't capable of being a champion when you're older."

He'd barely heard the last part of her remark, only catching echoes from what she had said about terminal love affairs. He talked her into marrying him. This marriage had been good for her. She'd mellowed. Of course, marriage had been good for her. He'd put a lot into it. No more, no way, no how! As of today, he was not going to play the role of protector.

The phone rang. Howard picked it up in the middle of the first ring, as he always tried to do, to protect Linda from the noise. Idiot.

After Howard's "hello," the first words to come back over the line were, "Is she going or isn't she?"

"Hi, Mike," Howard said. He had spent so much

time fending off the press so Linda could have peace of mind that he was beginning to know reporters by name and voice. Mike was one of the most persistent.

"Your guess is as good as mine," was the honest information he gave the reporter.

"Jesus Christ," Mike said. "There goes America's hope if the plane takes off without her. I'm getting sore. You know, I've been a hell of a lot kinder to her than other reporters. They focus on her brattiness outweighing her beauty and brains. I've gone more for the insecure childhood stuff, her years of self-imposed isolation while other kids were playing with toys."

"Yes. You should have been an analyst."

"Do I detect bitterness? You fed me half the arguments in her defense. But I guess you're entitled to feel pissed today. What the hell's wrong with her? Doesn't she know she's magnificent? Is she afraid of losing?"

"No. She expects to win and as for going on to become world champion, she's felt destined for that from childhood on."

"Then maybe she's afraid for her life?"

"Her life?"

"Sure," Mike said. "St. Swillens can be a dangerous place, what with agents from unfriendly countries there and I heard today that purple-robed cult people are starting to gather outside the hotel. Linda could be just plain scared."

"Do me a favor, Mike."

"Yes."

"Stop analyzing. Focus on her brattiness, like the other reporters."

As soon as Howard hung the phone up, it rang again. In a "Frankly, Scarlett, I don't give a damn" mood, he let it ring. It became persistent. Howard gave in and picked it up. Linda could have this petty victory.

But the call was for him, personally, an honest-to-God call for him.

"I thought I'd pass on the good news, catch you before you catch your plane." It was Zeke, Howard's colleague at work. "The F.I.S.H. tuna conglomerate called the firm. Said they love what you did with your last case. Crazy about the way you showed that although those salmon clients might have broken a minor maritime law, they had obeyed a higher ecological law by assuring the fishes' continuing adaptability. They want you to represent them."

"Great."

"It'll all be on your desk when you come back. Howard, I'll admit I'm jealous. I don't know how you get it all done. To what do you attribute your success?"

"The movies."

"The movies? How?"

"By not going to them," Howard said. "Gave me a lot of time to go over the case."

"Ah ha."

"And theater and concerts—let's give them credit, too."

"I see," Zeke commented. "You don't go to those, either. That's some kind of life you lead. I think I'll stick to being a failure."

The call raised Howard's spirits. It also made him reflect, after he put the phone down, that he'd gotten something out of the marriage, too. When Linda was studying, it gave him plenty of time to work on law briefs. Linda had listened sympathetically as his last case had progressed. Although fishing rights and maritime law were far from her field, she had come up with a few suggestions and he'd been pleased at her tries. If he really wanted to get sentimental, there was that day he'd bought the bicycles. She'd turned pale at the sight of them, claimed she'd fall off, didn't know

how to balance. He had reminded her of the Russians, exercising, getting oxygen to their brains. When he took her to the park, away from traffic, she seemed almost to be having fun as they started and for as long as he held on to the handlebars. When he thought she had the idea, he let go. She didn't have the idea. She was down on the ground, crying.

"Hey, come on," Howard had said as he bent over and helped her up. "It wasn't that bad a fall."

"The fall didn't hurt. What hurts is that I can't do it. I'm a freak. I'm good for nothing but chess." She sniveled into a handkerchief she'd pulled from the sleeve of her sweater.

"You're not a freak. And you *can* do it. Here, I'll show you how, and I won't let go of the handlebars until you tell me you're really ready."

She was so excited when she finally made progress that you'd think she'd won the world championship of biking. They rested on the grass for a while, and Linda had said, "Have you noticed that since we've been married, the lighting has improved at all the tournaments, the chairs aren't too tall or too short, and the audience has stopped making noise?"

Howard had told her that was the nicest tribute to a marriage that any person could make and had kissed her.

Face it, he now told himself, they needed each other. And if it sometimes got lopsided, then he would resign himself to being the caretaker of her genius. Better than being without her. Linda's hysterical complaints today about lights, timing, this last piddling rule change, would blow over, and it was his duty to help her get past these things. She was nervous. Maybe that reporter, Mike, was right. Linda could, subconsciously, be worried about some kind of physical danger. Violence was a possibility at any international event.

Howard opened the door and walked to the living room. Linda was sitting on the couch, in the same position as when he'd left her, but her face no longer looked like that of an ice princess. It showed strain. The argument had probably been as tough on his wife as it had on him.

Linda spoke before Howard had a chance.

"Are you sure you won't do something about the rule? It's late for me to try getting another attorney."

He sat down next to her, took her hand, and said, "Linda, dear, the rule isn't important. The question is, do we go to St. Swillens now, this minute, while I've got the time to be with you."

"The rule is more important than whether or not you're with me."

Howard dropped her hand, got up and said the cruelest thing he could think of, "Linda, chess is only a game."

She looked as though he had struck her.

Howard walked back to the bedroom and began unpacking his suitcase.

· THREE ·

Ten minutes later, Howard picked up the phone, dialed Alethea's number, and said, "Linda's going to St. Swillens."

He didn't add that he was not. Alethea, when she got through thanking him, could start the round-robin phone calls that would get Linda's support group off to the airport.

Howard picked up his wife's suitcases and escorted Linda to the car. Both maintained silence. The last time they'd spoken was when Linda had come to the bedroom and announced she was ready to go to St. Swillens, that he could forget the rule change. Her eyes had widened at the sight of his half-unpacked suitcase. She asked him to drive her to the airport, and since she was the only person in the entire city of Los Angeles who didn't know how to drive a car, Howard had agreed.

Now he took his eyes off the freeway to glance at her profile. No signs of sorrow there, no regrets, not

one lousy crystal teardrop on her lovely cheek. When the freeway sign read "Los Angeles International Airport," Howard drove the car onto the "off" ramp, continued on surface streets, and then parked in the parking maze. He checked Linda's bags and escorted her past photographers' flashing bulbs, to the plane. He intended to walk away now, but found himself kissing her lightly on the lips. Then he gently ran his fingers along her forehead and wondered what was behind it. Was she thinking about Albin's Counter Gambit, the Marshall Variation of the Ruy Lopez, or Bronstein's theories on the End Game? He looked into her eyes. It seemed, for a second, that she was thinking about him. She planted a true kiss on his lips. Beautiful. But not enough to make up for today's hurts.

"Good luck," Howard said.

"There's no such thing as luck in chess." Linda turned and walked up the steps. He watched her independent, ramrod back. Three-quarters of the way up, she paused, turned around, and looked at him with an expression of such vulnerability that he expected her to cry out. But she turned and continued on up the steps.

Did she expect him to wait three beats and then just as the plane was about to close its door, run after her the way they did in the movies? How should he know what they were doing in the movies these days? He hadn't seen any. He walked away.

"You're looking grim," Isaac said.

"Oh, hi, Isaac. I didn't see you. Lost in my own world."

It was a world where he was telling himself that love as one-sided as his for Linda was not healthy and he was going to try to get well. Seeing Isaac made Howard realize it would take time. At the first sight of Isaac's intelligent, kindly face, Howard's immediate re-

action was to thank the Lord the man would be in St. Swillens to care for Linda, to help her. Having a really good Second at a tournament, someone who helps analyze adjourned games and also pampers, caters to, and protects the player can make a huge difference in tournament chess. Isaac was a great Second. Occasionally, he'd drop in on Linda and Howard's apartment.

"Sure, she yells a lot to get some rules changed," he'd once said to Howard in the slight Russian accent left over from his youth. "But everyone in the chess world benefits by the changes made."

Now he asked, "Where's Linda?"

"On the plane."

"Good. We'd better board, too."

"I'm not going," Howard said.

"Not going? She needs you. You have to."

"I don't have to do anything. Rest easy. My cranky genius will do all right for herself."

"You make 'genius' sound like a dirty word," Isaac said.

"I'm beginning to think it is."

"I'm sorry about your vacation, the changes, the planning. I know your timing didn't work out well."

"Her timing."

"Forgive her," Isaac said. "Geniuses have time clocks of their own. I've known Linda since she was a kid. Only a few child prodigies, like Mozart, fulfill their potential. Linda is our chess world's Mozart. Do you expect her to be a perfect lady on top of that?"

"Botslimik is a genius and a perfect gentleman, besides," Howard said.

"Yes, but he didn't come up the hard way. He was subsidized by his government from Young Pioneer days onward. Now that he's at the top, he's surrounded by advisers and Seconds."

"I'm sure he treats them better than Linda treats

me," Howard said, and was immediately embarrassed at the little-boy-feeling-mad-at-mama tone of his voice.

Isaac laughed. "But then Botslimik isn't in love with his advisers and Seconds and Linda obviously loves you. I think she has become much warmer and more human since you married."

"I've done a lot of giving. Linda hasn't. She talks about the truth and poetry in chess. But where the hell has the truth and poetry been in her human relationships?"

"She hasn't had much practice. People think they're looking at a cold cookie. They're looking at a scared one. You can't expect the strength and logic that go into her work to apply to life. To me, Linda is like a beautiful whooping crane."

"A what?"

"I forgot, the whooper isn't a symbol to your generation as it was to mine. They're regal, white birds, never forgotten by those who've seen them. Big and beautiful. But it's a bird that couldn't compromise or adjust its way of life to ours, not like its cousin, the sandhill crane."

"So what happened to the whoopers?" Howard asked.

"Almost extinguished. Down to just twenty-one birds at one time."

"Then?"

"Then man pulled himself together and decided it was time to cherish them." Isaac paused. "I don't blame you for thinking you've done more than your share of nurturing and cherishing these last few weeks, but Linda is special. Please come. She needs you. St. Swillens may be a dangerous place."

"It's just a dumb tropical island," Howard said.

"With competitive, nasty people on it who are

coming from all over the world. Please, change your mind."

"No. But take care of my whooper. Good luck." Howard shook Isaac's hand and walked away.

Linda sat in the airplane wondering for the thousandth time why she was so stupid. Why couldn't she have said something simple like, "Howard, I love you and want you with me." It was true that he had cruelly called chess "only a game," but he'd been angry. She made people angry. But she had made the tremendous concession of letting the important rule change go by, had walked to the bedroom to tell Howard she'd go to St. Swillens, had been horrified to see him unpacking. How could he do this to her, let her go up against the Soviets, who were out to get her, the photographers, the newsmen, the purple-robed gurus who were gathering on the island perhaps to cast a voodoo spell? She would be miserable without him, was miserable now.

Alethea and Stan settled themselves into their seats.

"Don't smile at the little shit," Stan warned his wife.

But Alethea did smile at Linda, then looked shaken when she noticed that Howard wasn't on board.

Debs adjusted her eyeglasses and took a notebook out of her purse. She was thoroughly happy. The chess brat had made it, and Debs would have her book to write.

As the plane taxied down the ramp, Linda began to think about what opening she'd use in her first game, if she got to be White. She was on her way to the tournament to do what she did best. She opened the well-thumbed book she had brought along to study. As the jumbo jet rose in the air, Linda began to feel she was now on solid ground.

· FOUR ·

Debs wished she hadn't glimpsed the lush attractions of the island of St. Swillens on her way from the airport to the monolith of luxury that was her hotel. Since she was going to be, basically, cooped up with her co-author, beginning tomorrow, she was sorry she had noticed forests of jagged-leaf banana trees, white sand beaches, and dramatic green cones which the Governor of St. Swillens explained were cores of lava, remnants of volcanoes, rising abruptly from the ocean floor. It was sweet of the Governor to spend time talking to her in the limo ride on the way from the airport. The impressive man had been there to greet Linda, a star of the chess world, but when he realized how uncommunicative she was, he'd shared his time with Althea, Stan, and Debs.

The official party he was sponsoring tonight to welcome the eight chess competitors would be Debs's only evening activity. She put on the one dressy dress she'd brought, a sexy version of a monk's robe, cut deep in

the bustline. She wrapped its silk rope belt around her waist and wondered if she was getting the knot quite right. She looked in the mirror. The knot was too casual. She tied it again and felt neater. Nothing wrong with her appearance in general. It was good to be five-feet-seven-and-a-half inches tall, have long brown hair, blue eyes, and a flawless complexion. So why did she have to wear glasses? That's life.

On her way to the elevator, a young, blond man came out of the room two doors down from Debs's own and gave away his nationality by saying, "Good-even-ying." Debs smiled at the Russian, doing her share for detente.

They entered the elevator together. His eyes went to her cleavage as he announced, "I am Kamkoff."

"Of course. I should have recognized you. You're one of the eight Grandmasters. My co-author will be interviewing you after we all settle in."

He smiled at this, but gallantly said he'd prefer to have her do it. Debs didn't explain that the book's editor wanted her co-author to do the Russian interviews because of his knowledge of the idioms. She decided this particular Russian would have rated a medal for handsomeness if it weren't for the Soviet dental work. Why did they use gold on incisors?

The ballroom of the hotel was filled with interesting-looking foreign types, men and women of the chess world who'd flown a long way to get here.

"It's a glittering party," Debs said, when she bumped into Stan and Alethea. "And you guys glitter. You're both looking sleek and happy. Why not? We're here, at last."

Alethea reached for the cocktail a waiter brought on a tray.

"You're looking good, yourself," Alethea said. "I'm glad because you're going to meet him tonight."

"Him who?"

"You know, your co-author."

"Yes, I'd hoped to. But why the matchmaker's gleam? With one failed marriage to a fellow writer on my record, my next, if there ever is one, will be to someone who doesn't know how to hold a typewriter in his hands."

"You're going to like this writer, Debs. Stan and I had lunch with him in New York when your editor suggested him for the book. He's funny and bright and sensitive and sweet. Trust me."

A chess player descended on Alethea, taking the patron's attention. Debs decided to wander outside. There was moonlight. Warm air. A view of palm trees etched against the sky. She sat down on a chaise. An oh-so-obviously-honeymooning couple sat nearby, holding hands. They were young, the girl a thin number topped with twenty pounds of blonde hair, the boy dark and trimly bearded. Debs wouldn't have dreamed of starting a conversation with them, assuming they wanted privacy, but the young man asked, "Are you here for the chess tournament?"

"Yes, not to play in it. I've no talent for that. But I'm going to be writing about it."

"Ah, you're a journalist," he said.

There was something wary in the young wife's eyes as her husband said this. Was she a society figure, not wanting anyone to know they were on this island?

"And you?" Debs asked.

"We're Bipsey and Billy Olive, here on our honeymoon," Billy said.

Yes, Debs thought, the girl could well be a society figure, a graduate of the Preppie Handbook. Debutantes frequently wound up as grown-ups called Mab-sie, Bipsey, Boppsie, and so forth—names from grammar school that stuck as they all went on to identi-

cal colleges and sororities. Coming from a working-class background, herself, Debs had escaped this problem. No one had ever called her Debsie. Eugene Debs, the Socialist for whom her mother named her, would have hated that.

"You two must have reserved your room before you knew the chess tournament would be held here."

"We did," Bipsev said, "but Billy's happy it turned out this way. He likes chess and wants to go to some of the games. I wouldn't know the king from the queen." She giggled. Definitely a society giggle.

"Well, I won't leave Bipsev alone too long," Billy said, "but a couple of the games should be fun."

"Fun? Fun?" Debs was amused. "From the research I've done, the tournaments sound more like a grand form of madness than fun to me."

Seti, the Norwegian Grandmaster, strolled over, cocktail in hand, and joined in the conversation. Debs recognized him immediately from her memory of his photos. Most male Norwegians look like Paul Newman, but Seti's genetic material hadn't worked out quite that way. He looked like a short but merry Norwegian troll.

"It's true, what you say," he contributed. "Sometimes I feel as though I'm in a madhouse when I'm at a tournament. Do you people remember the Karpov-Korchnoi match? Karpov ordered yogurt as a refreshment during play and . . ."

"You mean it's okay to eat and play chess at the same time?" Bipsev asked.

"Yes," Seti said. "We need energy. Nobody eats at the chess board, of course. The Chief Arbiter designates an area nearby, where a player who isn't on the move can eat or walk or hum or whatever. I happened to have been a spectator rather than a participant at that match. Players were eating things like coffee and

Danish, and I guess Karpov planned to keep his blood sugar up with something more healthful. Anyway, his opponent and his opponent's Seconds figured that Karpov was receiving signals by being sent different flavors of yogurt at different times."

Debs laughed. "I always wondered what they thought each flavor would mean. Would boysenberry mean, 'move one of the boys, a pawn,' do you think? Passion fruit, I suppose, would mean 'move your queen, dummy.' Plain vanilla might stand for a bishop with a holier-than-thou attitude."

Seti contributed, "French apple would be a good flavor. It could mean 'use a variation of the French-Sicilian defense.'"

"What happened?" Bipsej asked.

Seti said, "Charges were presented to the Appeals Committee. It ruled that Karpov could still have his yogurt, but it had to be blueberry and blueberry only, and it had to be served at the same time every day."

"The media loved it," Debs said. "And they loved the other things that started going on, too. A Soviet parapsychologist sat in the audience and stared at the Soviet defector. But Korchnoi and his Seconds protested at the possible effect of brain waves and hypnotic influence on his game, and the parapsychologist was told to sit farther back. Korchnoi wasn't satisfied so he took instruction from two gurus who taught him how to meditate in order to ward off the evil waves."

"Whatever does it for you," Bipsej said.

"Of course," Seti agreed. "But it just so happened that the gurus were out on bail after appealing a conviction of attempted murder. So Karpov's people wanted them banished from the playing area, in fact from the city. The Appeals Committee went back and forth on that."

"In the meantime," Debs said, "the match went on,

the players were tied. Everything hinged on the last game. It was just before this game that the Committee declared its decision. The gurus must go. The parapsychologist could stay and he could now sit in the fourth row."

"Sounds unfair to me," Bipsev said. "Sounds as though the Soviet got the better of the deal. Who won?"

"The Soviet," Seti said.

"See what I mean," Bipsev said. "All those goings-on must have had a great influence on the players. Isn't that taken into account?"

Debs said, "Korchnoi, the defector, protested when the International Chess Federation met in Buenos Aires that year. They ruled on all the goings-on."

"What did they rule?"

"They ruled that the match was over," Debs said.

"Oh."

Seti was soon cornered by a reporter, and the honeymoon couple strolled away, hand-in-hand, leaving Debs alone to enjoy the moonlight. A waiter approached her.

"A whiskey sour, please," she said.

An owlish man sat down on the chaise next to hers and asked, "What makes you think they know how to make a whiskey sour on this Robinson Crusoe island?"

"I'm sure the bartender got his training somewhere on the mainland," Debs said.

The man mumbled something about not trusting any of the staff, and then said clearly, "You want to leave?"

"No."

"Well, what did you come to a party for if you don't want to leave?"

"That was a hell of a courtship," Debs said, getting up and walking away. The waiter met her when she

was halfway back to the party room and gave her the whiskey sour, which tasted as good as anything mixed on the mainland.

The chutzpah of available middle-aged males was hard to believe. And, boy, could they spot the divorcee. Debs was convinced they had an extra sense. It had nothing to do with wedding rings. She'd had men approach her at ski resorts when snow mittens had covered her hands. Besides, she had a married friend who was allergic to metal and couldn't wear a ring, a charming, attractive woman, but nobody tried to pick her up at parties. There was some sort of invisible badge that said "married" on her friend.

"How's the whiskey sour?"

Debs was startled. Here he was beside her again. She took a better look at him this time. He was lean and presentable, but that was about it. His eyes had a sad look about them because they were hooded like a basset hound's.

"I'm sorry I came on so strong," he said. "I never do know how to approach an attractive woman, so I just kind of throw out any old line I hear friends use."

So now he was doing a helpless number. And weren't his eyes just perfect for it? Dark, sad, sensitive, liquid. His helpless number probably worked with some women. Debs was glad to spot Alethea making her way over to them. A friend to the rescue. You could always trust Alethea's instincts.

"My dears," Alethea said. "How clever you both are to have found each other. I'm ashamed I couldn't get to the introductions sooner."

"We haven't been introduced," Debs said.

"Well, then, Debs—this is Calvin: Calvin, Debs." Alethea raised her glass in a toast. "To the happy co-authorship of your book."

• FIVE •

The hotel housekeeper had sent up the two bridge tables Debs had requested. She placed hers near a socket where she could plug in her word processor and Daisy wheel printer and have room left for stacks of continuous form feed paper. There was good light from the lamp near her table. Where the vile bassett hound would put his computer was his problem. There were enough sockets in the room because she'd requested just such quarters in advance. His table was here. Lighting would be up to him to figure out.

Even though it was daytime, Debs kept the drapes closed and her lamp on. She'd never liked the distraction of looking out of windows when she wrote. She delved into her briefcase and came up with sheets of pink paper for taking notes and an electric pencil sharpener. She plugged in her computer in one socket and the sharpener in another. She was about to begin her pencil sharpening ritual when she heard Calvin yelling at her door, "Open up fast or I'll get a hernia."

Debs took her time getting to the door and was saying, "Don't you believe in knocking," when she opened up and said, "My God, what have you got in your hands? Can that antique object be a typewriter?"

"Where'll I put it?"

"Here. I guess we won't have to worry about an electric outlet for it. Obviously invented before the kite. Before candles and torches, too, I'll bet."

"It was a graduation gift from my parents. My career as a writer started with it and if anything ever happens to this typewriter, my career as a writer ends."

"All very cute. Now, where's your computer?"

"I don't have one."

Debs paled. "It was my understanding—or rather, my assumption—oh, my God, this is impossible, I mean how are we to get an instant book done! I mean this is serious!"

"It looks to me like we're going to have a serious scene here, if that's what you mean by serious. Don't get so excited. I turn out perfectly wonderful books on perfect white typing paper. Shakespeare wrote on white."

"We have no proof of that. I still can't believe this is happening. Here I bring my Modem, so we can telecommunicate with our editor's computer, and you're sitting here with this primitive thing. And what's this crazy projection on the side of your typewriter, this part that—"

"Don't touch her."

"Oh, so it's a she."

"No, she's a she."

"How sexist and quaint."

"Look," Calvin said, his basset-hound eyes looking at her accusingly, "it's going to be tough enough getting an instant book done without a lot of carping added. I'll clear the air, tell you all about my habits now. Gave up smoking six months ago. So I chew paper and spit it in a wastebasket I keep on my right." Calvin picked up the

only wastebasket in the room and put it to the right of his desk. "I drink coffee in paper cups. Already ordered some sent up. When I've finished drinking the contents, I stack the cups and place them to the upper left of my typewriter. That way I can get a sense of how much time has gone by without having to look at my watch. I get up and pace occasionally but probably no more or less than any other writer. Now, yours."

"My what?"

"Habits."

"Well, I'm not obsessed with the mechanics of my craft. Except for pencil sharpening. I'm big on that. I've been known, when getting stuck on a story, to sharpen a brand-new pencil down to the eraser before a fresh idea will come."

"Why do you use a pencil if you own a computer?"

"To take notes."

"On this little-girl pink paper, I assume. You didn't finish."

"With what?"

"Your habits."

"Well, I did really," Debs said. "I told you about the pencil sharpening and that's about it unless you want to count the teeth tapping."

"I do want to count. Tell me."

"It's just that I kind of tap my teeth with the metal part of a pencil, you know, the part near the eraser, when I'm correcting copy. I don't think you'll hear it across the room."

"I hear everything when I write," Calvin said.

"And I drink diet Coke but I don't count the cups."

"Don't you know those diet drinks will split your bladder cells?"

"If you drink 365 cans a day."

"Do you?"

"Only in the summer. Well, I'm glad you suggested

we clear the air. I'm sure we'll soon get used to each other's little ways."

"Yes, I'm sure you will," Cal said. "Why don't we start by exchanging information?" he suggested. "I can read the transcriptions of the taped interviews you've been doing in L.A., and you can listen to the interview I did with Botslimik last night after you left the party."

Ah, so Calvin wasn't as lazy as his sleepy, hooded eyes suggested. Debs was pleased to hear that he'd done some work at the party.

"How did the interview go?" she asked.

"Pretty well. Isaac, Linda's Second, was a big help. He happened to be talking to the Russians in their language when I came along. God, he's fluent. He left Russia when he was young, but apparently his parents spoke it around him a lot. I wish I could use him for every interview, but, obviously, I can't count on him when he gets busy with the games. I'll have to plunge right in with my Russian."

"I've been told you'll do all right," Debs said.

"I'm incredibly modest about my ability. I guess because none of the Russians mistook me for one of them. A lot of people were hanging around us. Most of them assumed Isaac was one of the Soviet players because when he translated into English, his slight Russian accent was there. I don't know how much of the stuff I have on the tape is going to be colorful enough for the book. Maybe Botslimik will get a little looser as I do more interviews."

"I've got some good things on my tapes from the people who surround Linda—Alethea, Isaac, Howard, and others—but the tapes with Linda aren't good. She doesn't open up."

"Who's Howard?"

"Her superb husband. He's really special, a nice guy. Every woman dreams about being in the position

of a Virginia Woolf: having one's own Leonard Woolf around to be supportive, to back you all the way, to . . . well, to take care of you."

"So that's the answer to Freud's question about what do women really want. I don't remember meeting this Leonard Woolf guy, this Howard, last night."

"Ah, oh, he's not going to be at the tournament. Apparently, Howard and Linda had a big fight."

"Well, that should teach you ladies to stop putting your faith in Leonard Woolf wimps. There's something to be said for your average, normal, sexist male."

Debs and Calvin exchanged tapes and transcripts. Debs was in the middle of the Botslimik interview when there was a knock on the door. She got up and answered it. The man who stood in her doorway was tall, had strong features, and was so openly wholesome-looking that she knew instinctively that he was not a chess player.

"I'm Frank Murdock, police lieutenant. May I come in?"

His plain clothes were a little too plain for a resort, Debs decided, and it seemed logical enough for him to be a policeman, but she looked at his proffered credentials before she let him in.

"We're writing a book and can't spare much time, but you're welcome to some of it."

Debs introduced Calvin. Murdock gave a nod and said, "I'll get right to the point, ma'am. We've had a jewel theft here in the hotel, in one of the rooms."

"Thanks for telling me, but it won't cause me to rush down and put my valuables in the safe. I'm into costume jewelry as befits my income."

"I'd still appreciate it if you'd open up your jewelry case and have a look. The lady's loss was quite sizable."

Debs crossed over to the bureau. It was flattering that the officer thought she had a "jewelry case," but hers was

just one of those nylon folding things. As Debs unfolded it, she noted her familiar pieces: the turquoise ring, imitation jade beads, her amber pin. Nothing missing. She gasped. Something had been added, something magnificent and of bedazzling quality, a peacock pin with the body of diamonds and feathers in various shades of green that had to be several types of emeralds. The peacock was as elegant as one painted by Whistler.

"That's an interesting piece," Lieutenant Murdock said. "Would you mind leaving your jewelry folder open while I read my list?" He read in silence and then pronounced judgment: "The peacock pin, one of the lady's missing items, matches the description of the one in your hand."

"You don't have to keep calling her 'the lady,'" Debs snapped. "I know who she is, a very dear friend of mine. I've seen her wearing the peacock pin before. What on earth is it doing among my things? Why didn't Alethea put her jewels in the safe?"

"She said she stopped believing in hotel safes after the big robbery at the Pierre hit the headlines," Lieutenant Murdock said.

"I hope she hasn't stopped believing in insurance," Calvin said.

"No, she's covered. Do you mind if we look through your things?" he asked Deb.

"Of course not. You're welcome to. Since I didn't know the pin was here, maybe whoever planted the peacock has put other pieces in my room. You do realize it was planted, I hope."

Debs was deeply disturbed that the Lieutenant didn't answer, and she knew it would be impossible to work while he and the assistant he called in searched her room. She sat and watched. Calvin, after having made a few noises to the Lieutenant about invasion of

privacy and sanctity of free speech, had gone back to work on the book.

The detectives were thorough but turned up nothing new in the way of jewelry. Debs was relieved. Murdock turned to her and said, "Why don't we go downstairs and have your friend identify the peacock?"

"Down? Her room must be above. She and Stan reserved a penthouse suite," Debs said.

"Yes, on my floor," Calvin added. "My room isn't a suite, but it's on the same floor as Alethea's and Stan's.

The Lieutenant said, "If you two didn't have your drapes drawn like a couple of moles, you'd see she's out by the pool."

He pulled the cord that opened the drapes and exposed a gorgeous baby-blue day. It seemed to Debs that everyone was out by the pool, taking advantage of the morning at leisure before the opening afternoon games.

"Hey, look at the action," Calvin said. "Are those monks over there, the ones in purple with shaved heads?"

"Yes," Murdock said. "They're planning to send out vibrations for either the Soviets or the Americans. Told me they haven't decided on which."

"Shades of the Korchnoi-Karpov conflict. Good. We need all the color we can get." Calvin went back to typing.

When an embarrassed Debs and an intense Murdock arrived at the pool area, they found Alethea guarding her lovely skin under an umbrella. She was working a puzzle in her Will Weng book but looked up and smiled at the Lieutenant. He held out the glittering peacock and said, "Can you identify this, ma'am?"

"Of course," Alethea said. "It's mine. You're a clever, fast worker. I'm thrilled. Where are the others?"

"We found only this one, so far, in your friend's

room." The way he said "friend" made Debs wonder how he'd say "enemy." "It was in her jewelry case."

"Jewelry folder," Debs corrected, looking miserable.

"Well, of course, it would be in her folder," Alethea said cheerfully. "I made a mistake this morning when I listed this as missing. It wasn't among the stolen items. I forgot I gave it to Debs on the plane yesterday."

"Gave this?" Murdock asked. "Just simply gave it to a friend? Was it for a special occasion?"

"No. The only thing special about the occasion," Alethea said, "was that Debs was wearing a blue dress and I thought the green of the peacock would set off the dress and—oh, it was just one of those impulsive things you do for a friend."

Murdock looked at Alethea in a stern way that would have made an average human back down, but Alethea broke eye contact only for the moment it took her to reach for a glass of Perrier that was on the umbrella table. She took a sip of her drink and said, "I wonder if you'd be kind enough, Lieutenant, to get your secretary to retype the jewelry schedule and exclude the peacock pin. I'll sign it and we can destroy the first paper. Or, I know, maybe she can just put a bunch of x's through the description of the peacock and I'll initial that. Yes, that does seem the simpler way to do it, doesn't it?"

Alethea picked up her puzzle book and pencil, an act of dismissal. Debs reflected that anyone smart enough to do Will Weng puzzles from *The New York Times* was smart enough to remember that Debs had never liked green.

▪ SIX ▪

Linda walked across the stage of the auditorium and shook the hand Titovan, her Yugoslavian opponent, extended, but she did not return his smile. She sat down in the leather and chrome chair that had been designed for her. Linda had drawn White so the Referee pushed the lever that started her side of the double-faced time clock.

The "Silence" sign flashed on and off in the auditorium, but it was hardly needed for the respectful, almost worshipful audience.

Linda and Isaac and her other aides had already decided on her opening move in advance. P-K4. But she always experienced a devilish tingle before making her first move. She might decide on another opening. Not today. She pushed her pawn to the K4 square and then pressed the lever that set the hands of Titovan's half of the time clock going. She picked up the pencil that had been placed to her right and noted "P-K4" on her side of the score sheet, wrote her name on the top of the

column for *White* and her opponent's on *Black*. One more score sheet to add to the thousands she had kept in her files from childhood on.

She stared at her last name, the name she had taken on as a married woman. Damn Howard for making her so unhappy, for giving her the worst evening of her life last night, her first night of sleeping in a bed without him. As awful as the nights had been when they were quarreling, they had continued to share a bed, and, if not for her pride, her rigidity, her stupidity, there could have been the chance to reach out to him. She hadn't realized what that meant until last night when he wasn't there to reach out to or not to reach out to. For someone who had geared herself to tolerate loneliness and long hours of studying, she hadn't known this would hit her so hard, and she was experiencing true loss. But she must not indulge in these thoughts now. An opponent could pick up any weakness in her psyche.

There were no weaknesses in her grooming. She looked exquisite in her white silk dress and white high-heeled sandals. Howard always told her she had gorgeous legs. They were encased in sheer pantyhose. Let the men in the audience suffer. She wore the gold charm bracelet Howard had given her for her birthday. Each charm represented a chess piece. After she wrote on her scorepad, her bracelet made a *clunk* against the wooden table as she put the pencil down. Titovan frowned. Too bad. She would not, could not, remove Howard's gift, not today, when she felt the loss of his presence so keenly. She usually removed her bracelet when she played in Los Angeles because it was unfair to your opponent to *clink* or *clunk*, and she was a very fair person. She hated the press for calling her demanding and bitchy.

Titovan played P-K4 and set Linda's time clock in motion.

She had heard Parnell, her secondary Second, tell that police officer who had come to her room this morning that she could not be disturbed on the day of a game, but she had heard the Lieutenant talking about a jewelry robbery in the hotel. Suppose her bracelet had been stolen? How terrible to lose this link to Howard. Howard, Howard, Howard. All right, that was the last indulgence. She would now empty her mind of everything but the board and the chess pieces. It was okay to indulge in stray thoughts when playing a standard opening, but this would soon develop into myriad variations. Concentration was everything. The smallest error can be fatal in a top-level game. Soon the intense physical and mental struggle would begin. She hadn't gotten to where she was by being in a state of mourning.

She moved. Titovan moved. Linda made her next move, pressed the time clock, and was about to make note of her move when she heard Titovan grind his teeth. Linda glared at him. He was notorious for this, but his dentist had submitted a note to the Chess Federation claiming that his habit was strictly involuntary.

Titovan took forty-five minutes for his next move. Linda spent part of that time going to the secluded area that had been set aside for the players for refreshments. But she couldn't eat. If Titovan decided to do the obvious and open up his King's Bishop file, the temptation would be for her to try for the long-term advantage of a potential Queenside pawn majority. That was how some of the greatest chess names in the past had analyzed this kind of position. But when you stopped to think about eventually getting into a dumb poisoned

pawn thing, it gave you pause. As depressed as she was over Howard, she wasn't suicidal.

She thought of Stan and Alethea. They did everything together, had never taken separate trips. That was what marriage was about. Why had Howard deserted her, or had she deserted him? Which? Linda returned to her seat. Wouldn't want to get in time trouble. She sometimes took forty-five minutes to an hour-and-a-half to think out a move. One saved time for that.

Linda looked at the board. Ah, challenging. She wrote Titovan's move on her scorepad. She had been wrong in thinking he'd do the obvious. Instead, he was trying to centralize his forces. She'd have to block him. This was the point where her adrenaline began to flow, her blood pressure to change. She loved it. The war was on. She ignored Titovan's grinding teeth as he stood to walk away. She put her elbows on the table and cupped her face in her hands. She could see where moving her Bishop could lead to an early castling on the short side, but that was only one of more than a thousand and one possibilities. She couldn't cover them all. This was where imagination soared. She saw something she liked and was halfway thinking it through, when someone in the audience cleared his throat. Linda beckoned the Referee over and protested the "crowd noise" that had emanated from the left side of the auditorium.

"I'll have the ushers watch that section," the Referee said. "By the way, Titovan has lodged a protest with the Committee. It's about your bracelet. Says it makes noise. I was going to wait to tell you when your clock's not running. Sorry. Won't take up any more of your time now."

"I'll take off my bracelet when he stops grinding his teeth," Linda said to the Referee's back.

Her thoughts returned to the board, and she decided on a solid, vengeful move and made it.

Titovan took a full hour for his next move. When Linda heard him press the starter on the clock, she returned to the table, studied his move, and decided it was either the elaborate beginning of a trap or a lapse on her opponent's part. She thought it out and picked up her white Knight by its head. The snout was smooth in her hand, but the sharp, tense feel of the horse's ears made her aware that the animal was ready to go. To the K-5 square, of course. Linda placed him there, pushed the time clock and leaned back in her chair, enormously satisfied. She waited several moments before making the notation of the move on her score sheet. She put an exclamation mark after it. The game was no longer even. It was weighted on her side. She was in control. Black's twenty-ninth move had, indeed, been a lapse. Her thirtieth, inspired.

Alethea, Stan, Calvin, and Debs sat in the lecture room that was down the hall from the auditorium. It was crowded with chess fans who were watching the auditorium action over closed-circuit television monitors. The screen focused on a demonstration board of Linda's and Titovan's moves and on duplicates of their time clocks, showing elapsed time. The cameraman was obviously a little bit in love with Linda because when he would swing to close-ups of the players, he favored her over Titovan.

Debs felt slightly dizzy as the Chess Expert stood at the head of the lecture room, making comments on the game, using a magnetic board to demonstrate . . . "If . . . then" . . . "if . . . then" . . . "but if. . . ." Alethea, Stan, and Calvin seemed to be happily following him. Alethea had a pocket chess set on her lap on

which she worked out variations. Calvin had one, too, but Stan seemed content to let his eyes follow the flat, magnetic chess pieces the Lecturer moved about on the magnetic demonstration board.

"I feel like a chess illiterate," Debs said when she heard the combination of contented sighs and applause that broke out at Linda's thirtieth move. "What was so great about that?"

"Here, I'll show you," Calvin offered. Using his portable board and pieces, he explained the action in a way that made it come clear to Debs.

The thrilled Lecturer began to comment on the thirtieth move as soon as the fans quieted down.

"He's reconfusing me," Debs told Calvin. "Your explanation was better. I hope you'll be as incisive and terrific in our book."

"You're softening toward me," Calvin said, looking pleased. "You want to leave?"

Debs smiled. "I know what you're going to say next. Why did I come to a chess lecture if I didn't want to leave?"

Calvin sighed. "Unfortunately, if we left, we'd have to go to your room with all those horrible reminders of our unborn book: your computer, your pencil sharpener, and those sissy pink papers you take notes on."

"And your stacks of empty coffee cups. Let's not forget those."

Debs watched Titovan's face on the screen. He was studying Linda's last move, obviously not liking it.

"Since I'm the human-interest-person half of our book," Debs said, "I'll have to come up with a word to describe Titovan's face at this moment. Scowling? Sickly? Petulant?"

"Pissed. That's the word you want, pissed."

"Thank you. Oops, there goes Titovan's jaw, moving again, slightly but perceptibly. Good thing Linda's

offstage. I'm keeping track of all the teeth-grinding, bracelet-clunking, crowd-noise complaints lodged with the Referee right here in my notes."

"Good girl."

Debs turned from Calvin to Alethea and said, "I think Titovan is going to ponder for a while. Want some coffee?"

Alethea said yes and Stan said no, which pleased Debs since she had been waiting to get her friend alone. As soon as they got to the coffee shop and sat down, Debs opened her purse, took out the peacock pin, and handed it to Alethea.

"This will look better on you," Debs said. "You know I don't wear green, though I could learn to live with it if I were the rightful owner. It was sweet of you to protect me, Alethea, but I honest-to-God didn't take it, or any of your other jewelry."

"I didn't think for one minute that you had."

"Then who did? And why did he decide to make me look like a thief? When did the robbery happen? Can you pinpoint the time?"

"Yes. Stan and I left the cocktail party—among the last to leave—you know us. We went to our room and I took off the bracelet and earrings I'd worn at the party and put them with my other jewelry. When I was partly undressed, Stan went out on the balcony to look at the moon. He thought it was so lovely that he suggested we take a walk in the moonlight. That man would stay up all night if I let him. I threw on some slacks and a light top and we went down to the beach. When we came back in, we locked the double locks of our suite's door and went to sleep. When we got up this morning and dressed, I reached for my jewelry case and it was gone."

"So the robbery has to have taken place in the time you were walking on the beach."

"Yes."

"Hmm."

"What does 'hmm' mean?" Alethea asked.

"It means that pinpointing the time is of no help to an untrained mind like mine, but maybe it will be to Lieutenant Murdock."

"He's been all through this. Doesn't seem to be helping him."

Debs sipped her coffee, then looked up and saw the young Russian, Kamkoff, staring at her and Alethea. When he saw Debs looking at him, he flashed his gold teeth at her and approached the two women as though Debs's look had been an invitation. When he got half-way to their table, he hesitated and then, unexpectedly, veered away.

"What kind of chess player is Kamkoff?" Debs asked Alethea.

"Brilliant. Scary brilliant. But Linda's that tiny edge better. I hope. You'll see him in action tomorrow."

"I think I've seen him in action already."

When Debs and Alethea returned to the Analysis Room, the first thing that struck Debs was the sad look on Linda's face as projected on the TV monitor.

"What happened?" Debs asked Calvin. "Something awful?"

"No. Linda's doing beautifully. Moving right along. She's got a potential forking move."

"Then why so sad?"

"I don't know. Maybe she's wondering where she can find another Leonard Woolf."

That was exactly what Linda was wondering, although she wouldn't have put it quite that way. The joy she should be feeling at this moment when she was about to cripple her opponent by threatening his

Queen and Rook at the same time was mitigated by her longing for Howard. Damn.

She called the Referee over and asked him to silence the already silent crowd.

"But they're being good, in fact very good," he said.

"Not good enough."

The very air was pressing in on her. Maybe she should complain about the air conditioning.

The Referee held up a hand-written "Silence" sign even as the mechanical one flashed.

A teenage boy, who had studied every one of Linda's published games, sat in the audience feeling delight at the beautiful way the game was going for his favorite. He reached in his pocket, pulled out a plastic box of Tic Tacs, and opened the flap. Being careful not to make noise, he turned the box over in his palm and began gently to shake out two Tic Tacs. This was the moment at which his neighbor, feeling cramped, chose to stretch. All the itty-bitty, bullet-hard candies fell bouncing to the floor. It wasn't enough noise to make anyone turn around in a movie theater, but it was enough to make Linda jump up from her chair and storm out of the auditorium, her time clock running.

▪ SEVEN ▪

“Crazy. I told you the bitch was crazy from the day you first wanted to sponsor her.” Stan was looking at Alethea accusingly as she continued to speak to Linda’s hotel room door.

“Linda, dear, please,” Alethea begged the door. “Your time clock is running on a winning game. You do know, dear, that you’re winning?”

Silence from the room.

“Of course, the little shit knows she’s winning,” Stan said. He gently maneuvered Alethea to one side and knocked on the door himself. Loudly.

“Linda, you can’t do this to us. Or to yourself. Open up like a reasonable human being.” (“Which we know she’s not,” he muttered in an aside to Alethea, Debs, and Calvin.) “Or . . . or . . . well, I won’t kick the door down, being reasonable myself, but I’ll do something.”

Linda’s Seconds emerged from the elevator and

came running down the hall to join Stan, Alethea, Calvin, and Debs.

"Is she in there?" the first Second, Noah, asked.

"Yes," Debs said. "The four of us came on the gallop when Linda walked out on the game, and we all saw her go into her room as we came down the hall."

"Has she answered anybody?" the second Second, Parnell, asked.

At Alethea's hopeless, "No," Parnell offered to try.

"I think you'd be wasting energy," Stan said, "that could be put to better use trying to find Isaac. She's more apt to listen to him than to any of us."

"Of course," Alethea said. "How clever of you, Stan. Why didn't any of the rest of us think of that? He's her true mentor."

"I'm surprised Isaac isn't here already," Noah said, "but I'll go looking. God, this is awful. Keep trying, everybody."

"We're forming quite a classy group of beggars," Calvin said to Debs. "There's a lot of brains and money in this hallway, pleading with one simple-minded girl."

"And now . . . dah, dah . . . sex appeal," Debs said as the society-honeymoon couple approached the group. Billy was Belafonte-ed into a form-fitting, unbuttoned-to-the-waist shirt. A chain hung around his neck, its gold medallion nestling in the hairs on his chest. Bipsey was dressed in white silk pants and a gossamer blouse that was printed with dramatic, open-winged Monarch butterflies. Her long, graceful neck was holding her head proudly erect, as though her twenty pounds of golden hair were weightless.

"Is something the matter?" Bipsey asked.

"Depends on whether you're rooting for Titovan or Linda." Calvin was being sarcastic, but Billy answered with apparent sincerity, "We're planning to root for Linda. When we can get to a game. Didn't get to go

today, but we sure enjoyed meeting everyone at the party."

"This is a kind of supplicants' party we're having here in the hallway," Debs explained. "Linda walked out on today's game, and we're begging her to go back before it's too late."

Billy's chief distraction from chess, Bipsey, asked, "What will happen if you don't get her to go back? Will that mean she's out of the running for good?"

"No," Calvin said. "But losing one game is pretty hairy. Sometimes it can be impossible to make up. Grandmasters are in a class by themselves. When they're playing other Grandmasters, one game can make or break a championship."

"Maybe if I was to say a few words to her," Billy offered over the sound of Alethea's repeated knocking on the door, "maybe kind of appeal to her patriotic side, tell her we're all rooting for her."

Alethea looked at him with an if-Linda-doesn't-open-the-door-soon-I'll-kill-myself look and said, "The girl doesn't have a patriotic side."

"Oh. Well, good luck," Billy said, and moved off with Bipsey.

Debs silently congratulated him for not imposing himself any longer on Alethea's anguish.

Calvin looked at his watch and whispered to Debs, "It's beginning to look hopeless. I think it's time we moved on, too. To your room, specifically. Have to get on with the book, even though it'll be a failure with a loser as its heroine."

"I hate to leave Alethea now when she's so distressed."

"You can't do her much good."

Calvin took Debs's arm and led her away. When they got to the room, Debs immediately sharpened a pencil.

"That won't help," Calvin said. "Sharp pencils do not a good book make."

"Damn it, neither will your archaic typewriter."

"True, in this one instance," Calvin agreed. "Linda's winning would make our book a winner. And she can't win games she walks out on. What's the matter with her? Premenstrual?"

"Pig. Male chess players have been known to behave like a bunch of nuts. Are they premenstrual? Damn it again! Everything's going wrong. I'm accused of stealing my best friend's jewelry, and now the book will be a flop."

Debs hadn't meant to sound whiny, but she felt a need to be comforted, and you sometimes had to whine in order to elicit comfort. Calvin yawned.

"Leonard Woolf wouldn't yawn," Debs said. "He'd make soothing, sensitive, clucking noises." And put his arm around me, she thought.

Calvin pushed himself away from his typewriter, crossed over to Debs, put a hand on her shoulder, and said, "I gotta take a leak."

He walked past her to the bathroom. Debs sharpened another pencil and pulled a sheet of pink paper toward her. Discipline. Today's events would have to be reported whether the book was a best-seller or a fizzle. A contract was a contract. She jumped when she heard Calvin say, "Brace yourself."

"How can I brace myself while I'm jumping out of my skin? Wasn't expecting you back so soon."

"Bad news. Someone is lying on your bathroom floor . . . er . . . injured."

Debs began to get up.

"No," Calvin said. Debs noticed that his face was pale. "Sit right here. He's too sick. Don't look. I forbid it."

Calvin went to the telephone, picked it up, and

asked the operator to locate Lieutenant Murdock, fast. Calvin's back was to Debs as she walked quietly across the room, opened the bathroom door, and looked down at Isaac. He had gone further than being sick. He was dead. How sweet of Calvin, she thought, to have described Isaac as "sick" instead of "strangled." My God, strangled! And wasn't that cord around his bloated neck something that belonged to her? Of course. It was her monk's belt, the one she'd had trouble putting a knot in on the night of the party. Debs felt ill and profoundly scared at the same time. The tragedy of Isaac's death confronted her along with the ugly fact that his murderer had used her belt to do the deed.

"Debs."

Calvin's voice startled her. She turned to look at him. He reached for her and held her trembling body steady.

"How you spoil things." He pulled her closer. "I was trying to make like Leonard Woolf for you. I told you not to look."

· EIGHT ·

Debs, nervous and frightened, kept wishing Lieutenant Murdock and his assistant would either stop taking so much time to examine the scene of the crime or else would send her and Calvin off to a room with a corpseless bathroom attached. But Murdock had made it clear they were not to leave. He and his assistant measured space, powdered surfaces, and photographed in and out of both rooms, while Debs and Calvin sat and waited.

Calvin was chewing a wad of no-cal paper. He removed it from his mouth, placed it in the wastebasket, and said, "I've really got smoking licked if I don't crave a cigarette at a time like this."

"Possibly true," Debs said. "But how are you going to kick chewing paper?"

"One step at a time. We could do some writing now. God, you're jumpy."

"I'm not chewing paper."

"No. But you've done a fair job on your nails. You

know, there are some writers who can write on a train or in an air balloon. I know one guy who went back to working on Chapter Twelve of his book five minutes after his wife, two kids, and his dog walked out on him."

"Makes sense," Debs said. "Nothing like a quiet house in which to lure one's Muse."

"I guess we don't fit in the category of dauntless writers. We shouldn't be wasting this time, but somehow I think doing anything but sitting here would be poor taste until Isaac's body is taken away."

Debs agreed. Isaac had been a good person. People she'd interviewed back in Los Angeles had told her he'd been known as "the gentleman of chess" in his circle. This thought brought tears to Debs's eyes. Bad enough that her belt had been involved in this killing, even worse that it was involved in the death of an excellent person.

There was a knock on the door. Before Debs could get up to answer, the Lieutenant came out of the bathroom, nodded at her, and said, "It's okay. One of my people. I'll get it."

"One of his people" turned out to be an attractive hotel maid, who pushed her double-decker housekeeping cart, piled with Kleenex, broomsticks, and linens, into Debs's room. The "maid" helped the two detectives carry Isaac's body out of the bathroom, into the bedroom, and onto the bottom deck of the housekeeping cart. Debs found it gruesome enough that they were bending the corpse in two to make it fit, but when the "maid" began to drape a soiled sheet over Isaac, Debs became so outraged that she jumped to her feet to protest. Calvin was right behind her.

Over their cries of, "Dignity," "First Amendment," "Plain human decency," Lieutenant Murdock's voice rose to silence them with, "Secrecy."

He asked them to sit down, and he joined them. The "maid" opened the door and wheeled her cart into the hallway, shutting the door behind her. The other assistant waited several beats, then left, too.

"After they get the body into our waiting van, it will be treated with dignity, I promise you. We've made arrangements with St. Swillens's mortuary to have Isaac's body shipped to Los Angeles. You'll have to take my word that there's a reason for all the secrecy. Nobody but my assistants, you two people, and the murderer is to know that Isaac is dead. There are international aspects to take into consideration. I know it's difficult for two journalists to shut up. But do it."

Debs was thrilled at his reference to "you two people, and the murderer." She'd been scared to death that Murdock would pounce on her accusingly after he was through with his chores. But as she experienced relief, she wondered, at the same time, why the Lieutenant had been all too willing to cast her in the role of jewel thief but not as a murderer.

"If Isaac isn't dead, then what's the story to be about where he is?" Calvin asked. "There are people who'll need to know. Linda, for one."

"Yes," Debs added. "He was her chief Second. Linda's others are considered tops, too, but it was Isaac who really held Linda together."

"He had a heart attack," Lieutenant Murdock said.

"No good," Debs said. "Linda'll want to visit him."

"Can't. He's in the intensive care ward in a mainland hospital," Murdock said. "No visitors permitted. The kind of care he could get on this island isn't sophisticated enough, the doctor on St. Swillens being an alcoholic."

"As you and I would be," Calvin said, "if forced to live here. You don't think I thought for one minute dur-

ing the great jewelry interrogation that you were a St. Swillens policeman. What are you? FBI? CIA?"

Lieutenant Murdock, ignoring him, turned to Debs and said, "Now, about the cord around Isaac's neck—"

Debs interrupted, "It's mine. Was mine. Obviously, I never want to see it again. I couldn't even tie the proper knot in it the night I wore it to the party. I called it my 'monk's belt' because it goes with a dress that I wore to the party, as I just said, I think. There are a lot of people who have a tendency to overtalk when they're nervous. I'm usually not one of them, but this situation is so weird, so unusual, that it—well, I guess I better shut up but as to the question, yes, the answer is yes, it was mine."

"I didn't ask if it was yours. I recognized it from the time I examined your closet after the jewelry theft. Where were you this morning?"

"In the Analysis Room," Debs said, liking her short answer. No more running off at the mouth for her.

"Elaborate," The Lieutenant directed.

"Uh, I thought I'd keep my answers short."

"Okay," Lieutenant Murdock said. "I'll elaborate. You got up this morning, got dressed. In what?"

"In what I'm wearing now."

"Good. Just wanted to establish that you weren't wearing the dress that goes with the monk's belt."

He was her friend.

"Of course not. That belt went with my party dress."

"Who saw you in the Analysis Room?"

"I sat with Alethea, Stan, and Calvin the whole time I was there."

"When were you not there?"

"Just once. When I left, with Alethea, for a coffee break."

"Did you stay with her the whole time?"

"Yes, we sat and had coffee, while I gave her back her peacock pin."

"Yes. That green pin she had graciously given you on the airplane because you like green. Was she miffed at having her gift returned?"

Debs realized she should have stuck to her resolution to keep her answers short. All she had had to say, dumbness, was "Yes, we sat and had coffee."

"No." That was short enough.

"You returned to the Analysis Room?"

"Yes."

"With Alethea?"

"Yes."

"When did you leave the Analysis Room again?"

"When Linda ran out on her winning game. Alethea kind of led the way and the rest of us—Stan, Calvin, and I—ran with her."

"Why?"

"To try to get Linda to get back to her game."

"When did you come to this room?"

"When Calvin and I saw—or heard, rather—that Linda wasn't responding to anyone's pleas. Then we came back here, talked a little, wrote a little, and then Cal discovered Isaac's body."

The Lieutenant turned to Calvin and said, "That's when you called me."

Calvin nodded.

The Lieutenant looked at Debs. "Basically, you have a decent alibi." He seemed, for some reason, pleased with her. He turned to Calvin and said, "It rather covers your activities, too, in a way, since you were with Stan, Alethea, and Debs. And while the two women were out having coffee, were you and Stan together?"

"Yes and no," Calvin said. "Well, to be precise,

no, not all the time. Stan and I stayed in the Analysis Room when the women left, but we did get up, stretch, walk outside of the room for a little, that type of thing."

"Together?"

"No, not always at the same time. But neither Stan nor I was gone at any one time for long."

"Any idea how long?"

"No. Yes. A short time."

"How short?"

"Short."

Murdock put his hands on his knees and got up. "It's been a rough day. If you'll excuse me, I have to get on with it." He moved to the door, then turned and said, "Remember, Isaac is our secret."

As the door closed behind Murdock, Calvin said, "God, how I need a cigarette."

"I thought you had the habit licked," Debs said.

"I did until that creep who just left turned me paranoid."

Debs was not sharing Calvin's feelings of paranoia. "When I calmed down after Murdock was through questioning me," she said, "I began to read his vibes when he started talking to you, and I got the feeling he doesn't think that you or I committed the murder."

"That's easy for you to say, Little Miss Perfect Alibi, but *my* time isn't ideally accounted for."

"No, really, Cal, I can't put my finger on just why he doesn't think we did it, but it's a fact. Well, all right, an intuitive fact. I think he has somebody bigger in mind. And I hate to think what he would be like if he thought either one of us *did* do it."

■ NINE ■

The next morning Noah, one of Linda's remaining two Seconds, was on the phone, long-distance, to his wife. After telling her she needn't envy his "tropical vacation," that he hated every palm tree on St. Swillens and had, in fact, been in a generally foul mood from yesterday on when Linda had forfeited her winning game, he asked, "And you know what god-awful thing I have to do now?"

"No. What, sweetheart?"

"I have to leave my room, walk down the hall, knock on Linda's door, and tell her Isaac's had a heart attack."

"Oh, no. When did that happen?"

"Yesterday. I thought it odd that he wasn't with us when we chased after Linda. One Lieutenant Murdock told me this morning that Isaac at that point was being rushed off the island for better medical care. The Lieutenant gave Parnell and me the job of breaking the news to Linda. Then, Parnell gave me the job."

"Poor Isaac. I'm so fond of him."

"I am, too. But Linda's more than fond. She's dependent, though she won't admit dependence on anyone. She's been sulking over Howard's absence. She's been tough enough on me and Parnell already, and now I've got to tell her about Isaac."

"Do me a favor, will you?"

"I'm dying of aggravation and you're asking for favors? What?"

"When you break the news to Linda, don't put a comforting arm around her shoulder."

Noah laughed. "I think it's hysterically funny that you've shown jealousy over Linda, of all people, these last couple of years."

"Funny? My husband is cooped up for long hours with the most gorgeous woman I've seen outside of the movies while I'm freckle-faced and running ten pounds overweight these days from sharing Hostess Twinkies with the kids. By the way, you didn't ask about them. They're fine."

"I'm glad."

"Promise? No comforting arm."

"I promise, and I think you're beautiful. Linda's a turn-off. She's cold, fish-like, and I can name the fish—the piranha. God, I can't take much more of her sulking, her bitchiness. If she didn't have the greatest chess mind of the century, I'd resign as her Second."

"Who's she playing today?"

"Kamkoff."

"Oh, oh, he's the Soviet you think's so brilliant. Why can't you wait to break the news of Isaac's heart attack until after the game?"

"Because the sulky princess has sat, dressed in a bathrobe, in her room all morning, not listening to Parnell's or my coaching but asking why Isaac isn't around. Parnell says she's really asking about Howard,

too, in a sense, because she keeps fondling that bracelet her husband gave her."

"Why don't you call Howard and tell him to come to St. Swillens? Then Linda would be happy and I wouldn't be jealous."

"Linda tried calling him several times this morning. Can you imagine her overcoming her pride like that? Parnell and I could hear her trying to get through to L.A. She has a small suite, and Parnell and I were sitting on the couch in front of the chess table, while she'd wander off, glassy-eyed, to the bedroom from time to time to place her call. Howard wasn't home."

"Maybe he's in an airplane right now winging his way to St. Swillens."

"Optimist. I think he's home in L.A., wandering the streets, looking for a freckle-faced woman stuffed with Hostess Twinkies who has a real live beating heart in her sexy chest."

"Good. I'll get out on Los Angeles streets right now."

"Wait till I hang up. I'll call tomorrow. Love to the kids. I love you."

"I love you, too. Remember, no arm around the shoulder."

After Noah hung up, he walked down the hall and knocked on Linda's door. Parnell, a chess book in one hand, let Noah into the room. Linda looked up listlessly. Noah was pleased to note she was now out of her bathrobe and into a pale blue linen dress. That was a fairly good sign. She was dressed for the game, even if she was obviously not in the mood to play it. Noah and Parnell had decided it was better for her to know that Isaac was ill than for her to think he had deserted her, so Noah plunged right in, breaking the news of Isaac's heart attack. Linda's sad face became sadder.

"I feel guilty," she said.

"Guilty?"

"Because I walked out on the game yesterday. Maybe that aggravated Isaac and led to his attack."

Noah said, "Heart attacks come from a buildup of fat along the walls of arteries." He wanted to add, "Not from spoiled brats walking out on a more than half-won game," but controlled himself.

"Isaac's thin," Linda said.

"Yes, but I guess his arteries are fat. Anyway, his being thin will help his chances for recovery. Don't be guilty of feeling guilty. The Lieutenant told me Isaac had his attack before you walked out on Titovan."

Noah reflected that perhaps he shouldn't be comforting her with that information, then he and Parnell could milk Linda's guilt, forcing her out of her listlessness and making her work up enough creative energy to face the formidable Kamkoff and win for Isaac's sake. But the opportunity had passed.

"I want to send Isaac some flowers and write him a note," Linda said, "but I don't write very well."

She seemed to grow even more depressed at that thought. Noah, feeling rotten himself, realized that depression was contagious.

There was a knock on the door. Parnell told Noah, "Your turn to answer. Tell whoever it is to go away, that Linda can't be disturbed before a game. It's bad enough we had to tell her about Isaac."

"Some 'we,'" Noah said. He walked to the door and opened it only partially, but flung it wide when he saw who was standing there.

"Howard! Howard, am I glad to see you, old buddy!"

Howard put his suitcase on the floor, smiled at Noah, shook his hand, then looked past him. Linda was running toward her husband, her face so alive and full of love that Noah saw, for the first time, that his

wife was right in calling her gorgeous. His wife had also been right about Howard's winging his way to St. Swillens. Noah turned to Parnell and made the "V" for victory sign.

Linda and Howard were locked in each other's arms, kissing face, ears, throat, and it was getting rather embarrassing for Noah. "Look," he said, "we'd love to leave you two kids alone, but it's too close to game time."

"I know." Howard still held onto Linda. "I saw the schedule in the lobby."

"Everything's been so awful," Linda told Howard. "I've tried calling you all morning."

"You have?" Howard grinned. He told Linda how, after she'd left, he'd brought his stereo out of storage. But he hadn't listened to music, as planned. He had turned to the station that broadcast the games and had suffered for Linda through the teeth-grinding and the counter bracelet-tinkle-and-clunk complaints. When the game ended in "Tic Tac Tension," as the press now called it, with Linda, in a winning position, storming out of the auditorium, Howard said he recognized the sound of a whooping crane when he heard one and that had been a big whoop. He'd gotten on the next plane.

"Just in time," Linda said. "I've been so depressed, and now Noah tells me Isaac's had a heart attack."

"I know about that, too," Howard said. "I bumped into Stan at the airport and he told me. When I landed at St. Swillens, Stan was there, waiting to board the next plane out."

"Alone? Without Alethea?" Linda asked.

"Yes. Told me he had to leave on business, but he'll be back."

"Impossible. Alethea and Stan never part for busi-

ness or any other reason. They're famous for never parting."

"They've just loused up their track record. From now on, we're going to be the couple to become famous for never parting."

Parnell and Noah gathered the papers and notebooks needed to take to the game, broke the kissing lovers up and guided them to the auditorium.

Linda crossed the stage, shook Kamkoff's hand, and smiled graciously. He smiled back, and she noted the frames of gold around his front teeth and the flash of gold on his incisors. She hoped the glinting would not distract her during the game. But she had a cure for that. She'd play in a way that would never give him cause to smile.

The Referee started Kamkoff's time clock. Linda took up score sheet and pen and wrote Kamkoff's name under *White* and hers under *Black*. She loved the way her married name looked. Then she did something she'd never done before. She wrote, *Dedicated to Isaac, a get-well card*, on the top of the score sheet. Maybe she couldn't compose a "get-well" letter very well—Howard would have to help her with that later—but she could play a beautiful game of chess and mail the moves to her mentor. Each move would speak for her better than any words written on a Hallmark card.

Kamkoff played P-Q4. The Queen Pawn openings have been described as the "chamber music" of chess. They are "close" openings, which is why so many potzers avoid them. It takes time for the tactical contact between the opposing forces to develop. Linda played P-Q4. Kamkoff played P-QB4 and Linda played P-K4, the Queen's gambit declined. Linda, wanting to insure her hold on the Center, supported her Queen Pawn with a Pawn move. But this play also blocked the diagonal of her Queen Bishop, that "problem child of the

Queen's Gambit." This serious loss of mobility can lead to defeat for Black, but Linda had a lot of tricks up her sleeve. She would not permit herself to get hemmed in.

Kamkoff was taking his time on his next move, so Linda looked for Howard in the audience. She found his dear face and smiled. She wished he could meet her backstage, between moves, but that was strictly forbidden. Chess players are not allowed to make contact with anyone who might help their game along.

Noah and Parnell sat next to Howard, taking notes. Their analyses would be of help later if the game was to be adjourned.

Linda glanced at the man sitting just behind Howard. His malevolent stare focused on her must have drawn her eyes to his. The man was Rimsky. Parnell had pointed him out to her the other day.

"I've already lodged a complaint with the Committee," Parnell had said. "This Rimsky has a reputation that's even hotter than Uri Geller's. Uri can bend spoons and forks with his mind. Rimsky, I've heard, can bend spoons, forks, knives, large silver serving pieces, and trays with his. I want him out of here."

Noah had said, "If not out, then as far back in the auditorium as we can get him. The Committee will probably pull their usual 'we can't limit the type of person who attends' bit."

"I know," Parnell had said. "I, personally, don't believe in mind rays for one minute. But I believe that people who believe will be affected by them. It'll have a bad effect on the chess players."

Linda, usually a protest enthusiast, had been so listless that day because of Howard's absence that she'd barely heard Parnell and Noah's comments. But now, with Howard in the audience and her game that was to be Isaac's get-well card in progress, she took note of

the man. Was he a danger? No. Definitely not. She looked at him with contempt. He was probably a rotten chess player, a non-person. If he were any good, he'd be on the stage, not in the audience, trying to bend her mind. Let the creep go to the restaurant and find himself some spoons. Linda turned her beautiful face away from Rimsky's, put her elbows on the table, cupped her chin in her hands, and looked at the chess pieces.

In the Analysis Room, Debs, Calvin, and Alethea watched Linda and Kamkoff's game on the screen. The Lecturer painstakingly analyzed each move. Calvin and Alethea had their miniature boards and pieces out. Debs sat there, feeling like the little girl who had said, after she'd finished reading a book on penguins, "This book taught me more about penguins than I wanted to know."

Debs let her mind drift back to when Alethea had met her and Calvin in the Analysis Room for that day's game. Alethea had been extremely upset about the news of Isaac's heart attack. In her usual thoughtful way she had made arrangements to have flowers and books delivered to him.

"Lieutenant Murdock gave me the name of the hospital and assured me that Isaac will be out of Intensive Care and in a regular room soon enough to receive flowers, though he won't be able to take phone calls for a while," Alethea had said.

"Clever Murdock," Debs had almost said aloud. He must have alerted the hospital to receive anything addressed to their nonexistent patient.

"Where's Stan today?" Debs asked.

"Off and away. He had to leave St. Swillens. Business. But he'll be back."

"That's unusual. You and Stan never part," Debs had said.

"First time. But on business as big as this, he had to make an exception." Alethea had smiled. "I don't know just when he'll be back."

Now Debs was tired. She yawned, then asked Calvin, "Is this game taking forever?"

"No, but almost. It'll probably have to go into an adjournment."

"How's Linda doing?" Debs asked.

"She's playing a strong, good game, an excellent one."

"Then what's the trouble? Why doesn't she get on with it?"

"Kamkoff is also playing a strong, good game, an excellent one."

During the stretch of time Kamkoff took over his next move, Alethea invited Debs for coffee. Debs turned her down, saying, "Later." As soon as Alethea was gone, Debs turned to Calvin and said, "Calvin, listen to me."

"I'm listening."

"You're not listening. You're playing with your chess pieces."

"Okay." He leaned back.

"Alethea has just told me she doesn't know when Stan will return."

"It doesn't surprise me that he left. He was probably jealous."

"Jealous? Of what?"

"Of whom. Kamkoff, that's *whom*, the guy on our screen. My room's on the same floor as Alethea's, and I saw him and Alethea necking in the hallway."

"Necking? Necking! Alethea and Kamkoff? You're crazy!"

"A voyeur, yes, but crazy, no. Sorry if I shocked you. I wasn't being judgmental about them, myself."

After all, it was above-the-neck necking. You know, simple handholding, a peck on the cheek."

"Please!"

"I don't mean to upset your image of Alethea. But she may be undergoing midlife crisis as a lot of females do from their adolescence on into their nineties. You know how women can get."

"No," Debs said icily. "Tell me."

"They . . . sorry," Calvin interrupted himself after catching the vicious look in Debs's eyes.

The Lecturer said, "Since the Referee has just told the audience"—oops, she and Calvin had missed something—"that the game will be adjourned as soon as Kamkoff seals his next move, I'll see you here when play is resumed tomorrow."

Calvin stretched and said, "Linda, Parnell, and Noah will have their work cut out for them tonight, wondering what's in that envelope and what response Linda should make to whatever it is."

"Linda, Parnell, Noah, and *Howard*," Alethea said. She was back, paper coffee cup in hand. "Isn't it great news? I saw Howard in the coffee shop. He looks marvelously happy."

"As do you," Debs said, and found herself smiling. Alethea certainly couldn't have anything going with Kamkoff, in spite of what Calvin thought he had seen. Alethea was, obviously, still in Linda's corner. "All of us must be looking happy," Debs continued. "Howard is good for Linda and is, therefore, good for the Match. And good for our book."

"Speaking of which," Calvin said, turning to Debs, "why don't we do our human-interest interviews? I can tackle Rimsky, the spoon-bender, or parapsychologist, as he calls himself."

"And I've already got an appointment with the Gov-

ernor of St. Swillens, but I can do the purple people on my way over there. I've been meaning to get to them."

"Who?" Alethea asked.

"You know," Debs said, "those priestly, Zennish people who've been wandering around the hotel grounds in purple robes and shaved heads. I heard a rumor that they're going to pray for Linda."

"Good. Can't hurt," Alethea said. "It's a tight game. Looks drawish, at best."

Calvin offered to help Debs set up her tape recorder in a way that she couldn't louse up, but she said a curt, "No," and felt good about snubbing him. Maybe that would teach him not to malign her friend's reputation.

When Debs passed the pool area, she saw a small group of purple people gathered in a circle, their heads bent, just beyond the pool's concrete apron. Since she wanted to interview only one purple person at a time, she walked past the group to a solitary figure sitting under a solitary palm tree. He was in the lotus position, purple robe gathered around him. Debs sat beside him and said, "Hi, my name is Debs," before she heard the purring coming from deep inside his chest.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to interrupt your mantra."

"That's all right." The young man was pleasant. "If you have a need to talk to me, I will place your needs first." He nodded his head and Debs was amazed at how close-shaved it was. Looked more like an electrolysis job than a shave.

"Do you mind if I use my tape recorder?"

"No, I don't mind."

Debs started it up and hoped it was working, but it was making a rather odd noise. She should have let Calvin help her with it.

"I hear that your friends are praying for Linda," she began.

"That is true."

"When did you decide to do that?"

"When we caught her patterns. It takes a little time, but once we caught them, we realized she is worthy of our chants."

The Governor of St. Swillens also thought Linda worthy of *his* chants. After receiving Debs graciously when they met for their appointment in the Hospitality Room of the hotel, the impressive man, speaking in the soft, lilting tone of a native, was all business in his passion to get his island on the right track. The Chess Tournament was bringing St. Swillens much good publicity, and much good publicity brought tourists.

He'd asked Debs where she came from, and when she said Los Angeles, he informed her, "I have six cousins in Los Angeles, and four in New York. St. Swillens, like other islands in the Caribbean, is subject to historical migration in search of jobs."

Debs nodded, interpreting this to mean that the island couldn't feed its people. She had to agree that it would be terrifying to have to depend on the few primary crops St. Swillens could produce.

"Unlike Grenada, which gave your country such difficulty," he said liltingly to Debs, "we do not wait for an invasion from your armed forces. The invasion we've been waiting for is the invasion of tourists. We are extremely grateful to your government for helping to finance our airport. With its long runway, which can accommodate jumbo jets, we expect our number of tourists to triple."

Debs was delighted that he'd mentioned Grenada because she could now feel free to ask him if there were the makings of any similar problems on his island.

"Never. Of course, there are small left-wing groups

with power ambitions, and I've no doubt they've sent some of their students to Moscow or Cuba, but to no avail, for they have made little impression on us."

After spending time asking the Governor questions, Debs was thrown into culture shock when Lieutenant Murdock began to ask her one question after another. The man had obviously been waiting for her just outside the Hospitality Room because he started in on her the minute she left the Governor behind. Where was her friend's husband, Stan? What kind of "business" was so important that he'd leave the island? Didn't any idiot know you don't leave the scene of the crime when police are in the middle of an investigation?

"So why didn't you stop him?" Debs asked.

"Because I couldn't tell him a crime had been committed."

"Well, Lieutenant, you can't have it both ways."

"Has Alethea said anything to you about when he'll be back?"

"Yes, that she doesn't know how long he'll be gone but that he'll be back."

"Exactly what she told me, but she must have told you more than that."

"Sorry, she didn't."

Murdock persisted, but Debs stuck to her honest answer. The Lieutenant, looking frustrated and annoyed, finally shrugged and said, "In a way, you can't blame the man for leaving. His wife sure has something going with that young Soviet, Kamkoff."

• TEN •

Debs would have loved walking the rest of the way in silence, but Murdock continued to nag at her about Alethea. Debs hit on the bright idea of changing the subject by asking a question.

"Is the Governor right in thinking all of St. Swillens's problems will be solved with one airport? He certainly seems grateful for it."

"Grateful? All these island statesmen are experts on grantsmanship. They know there's an underlying threat if the U.S. doesn't come through. When we made the mistake of not supporting Grenada because she went socialist, she grabbed grants from Iraq and Libya for her airport, let East Germany take care of agriculture while Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia granted weapons and, of course, Cuba and Russia took care of everything else."

"But we're standing by the Caribbean nations true-blue now, aren't we?"

"Yes. After the Marines got through invading Grenada, they were followed by a second invasion of eco-

conomic advisers, officials from the Agency for International Development, and, of course, you wonderful members of the press. Your crowd didn't want to believe the leaders and people who said they were glad to get rid of socialism and could now get down to business. Look how well they've all done."

When they got back to the pool area, Murdock seemed to lose interest in Debs and politics and walked away. Debs noticed that Calvin was on the other side of the pool interviewing the parapsychologist. She hoped Cal's mind wasn't being bent. Although why should she have such a charitable thought? Calvin and now Murdock were two dirty-minded men who thought Alethea had a lover.

Beginning to feel that her own mind was getting out of shape, Debs had the urge to fling herself into the ocean, to swim until cleansed of all thought. She went to her room, changed into a bikini, and put on a white terry robe. Once downstairs, she took the robe off, put it on a webbed poolside chair, along with her tape recorder, and, always one to prefer ocean to stagnant water, headed for the sea, walking past the sissy pool people. The sun's rays were warm but tropically moist. She had the powdery beach all to herself and had one foot in the white-tipped water when she heard a loud, "Stop!"

Debs turned to see Billy and Bipsey running toward her from the direction of the pool area. Bipsey, panting, came to a halt and asked, "Didn't you read the warning? It was in the brochure in your hotel room."

"No," Debs said. "I haven't had a chance. The awful problem with writing is that you don't get to read. What's wrong? Sharks?"

"Worse. Sandflies. Itchy-twitchy sandflies."

Billy added, "That's why the hotel sells so much Calomine lotion. The silent insects come out about this

time of day. But we also came to warn you about the water. Should never go in without protecting your feet. There's too much coral. It can rip your soles to shreds."

"Thank you. You're angels for warning me. I guess it's back to the pool."

As they walked in that direction, Billy said, "Bipse and I go out in the morning before the sandflies, cover our feet with fins and our faces with masks, and go snorkeling. There's a weirdly beautiful world of fish and urchins among the coral."

"I'd love to see that world before the Match is over," Debs said, "but my co-author probably won't let me out of my cage. I envy you two your leisure."

But Debs didn't envy anybody anything once in the pool. The crystal-clear aqua water sustained her floating body. Her mind was emptied of all thoughts except the one that it was good to be alive. Damn. That made her think of Isaac, poor, dead Isaac. Who had killed him? And tried to make her look guilty? How was the murderer to know she had a rather nice alibi? No sense in dwelling on this. Better to get out of the pool and back to work.

As Debs stepped out of the water, she saw Calvin lounging on a chaise, his lust-crazed eyes appraising her body.

"Hot damn," he said. "Nothing like a beautiful female figure emerging from a pool with drops of water still glistening on her skin. I love the tropics."

"How did your interview go?" Debs put on her robe.

"Don't change the subject. I'm telling you you're the best-looking woman on the island."

"Thank you, but it's a small island."

"Why do you have to chop everything I say? And while I'm listing grievances, how come you've been swimming while I haven't been in once?"

"Treat yourself. I'm going back to work. I've been wanting to get started on the media people interviews. You know, what you and I talked about, asking them why their readers are so interested in the Match this year, why the unusual amount of coverage and so on. Is it the interest in Linda or in the area and the political changes?"

"Going to start with Dan Rather?" Cal asked.

"Haven't seen people of quite his stature around, but I've seen a few names. See that woman over there?"

"The freckle-faced one in the orange bikini?"

"That's Jacqueline Bond," Debs said.

"Ah ha. Editor of the leading feminist mag. How come she isn't as pretty as Gloria Steinem or as unpretty as Bella Abzug?"

"Because the women's movement is expanding, and it isn't quite as extreme these days. You don't believe my answer, I see, but then I didn't believe your question."

Debs picked up her tape recorder and walked over to the chair that stood next to Jacqueline's chaise and sat down. Debs introduced herself, adding that she was a charter subscriber to Jacqueline's magazine.

"Do you have time to give me a brief interview?" Debs asked.

"Do I have time? That's all I've got." Jacqueline raised her sunglasses, pushing them to the crown of her red hair. "I've tried doing my own interviews, but we're not dealing with a communicative bunch, are we? I feel sorry for you having to do a book about these people. My piece is only an article. Since nobody says anything quotable, I'll have to flesh it out."

Debs said, "I get to put in all the games that my co-author will analyze and a lot of background on the his-

tory of chess and on who helps sponsor the Match, that sort of thing."

"She's the only nice one of the bunch, Linda's sponsor, Alethea, that is."

"I know. She's a good friend of mine."

"About the only decent thing I can say for Linda," Jacqueline said, "is that she doesn't pull the usual clichés about 'I believe in equal pay for equal work but can't agree with some of the other things the women's movement stands for.' But then, I think maybe the reason she doesn't pull the cliché is that she doesn't know there are people in this world, men and women, who work for wages. What a monumental ego."

"She has a kind, intelligent husband, who caters to that ego," Debs said.

"Good for her. Every great woman should have an understanding 'wife.' The male journalists here are going to play up Linda's temperamental fits, her running out on the first match. I'll have to mention these things, but I'm going to explain that men have walked out on chess matches, too. My research person has supplied me with examples."

"Yes. But the men who've walked away haven't done it for love of a woman. Linda stomped out, my friend Alethea told me, for love of a man. Alethea finally got it out of Linda that she was unhappy about Howard's absence. 'Crowd noise' was just an excuse." Debs sighed. "Maybe there is something basic in the nature of women that causes us to give up too much for men."

"Nonsense," Jacqueline said. "What about the Duke of Windsor giving up his kingdom for a woman?"

"Good point. Sorry I broke. The chess world is driving me crazy."

"We'll keep that our secret. One thing I'll have to

say for Linda, she certainly knows how to dress for success. That white dress was smashing on the first day, and then came that heavenly blue one. She was also driving Titovan crazy with her bracelet. That was dressing for success, in a peculiar, mean kind of way."

"And against the rules. She hasn't worn it in play with Kamkoff. But she doesn't need to now that her husband's here," Debs said.

"Speaking of jewelry, I love the clever way you placed that fabulous firefly on your shoulder so that it looks as though it's just landed there."

Debs felt a chill stir the warm air. She tucked in her chin, looked down at her shoulder, and saw a magnificent firefly, its ruby eyes aglow in the sunlight, its diamond wings gauzy.

Debs asked, "Would you mind taking it off me? I can't reach it."

"Only if I get to keep it."

"I wish I could give it to you and run. Far, far away. There's something creepy and awful going on here in St. Swillens that I'm not free to talk about. I'm in big trouble and definitely not dressed for success. I'm dressed to go to jail."

Jacqueline looked sympathetic. She held the firefly in her hand and said, "If it isn't yours, you are in trouble. The pin is even better up close. What craftsmanship, getting something as hard as diamonds and rubies to look gauzy. I love the work as much as the gems."

"They're the right color, too. Everyone knows I love red."

"Look, if you need help, that's what sisterhood is all about. Call if you need me."

"Thanks, I just might," Debs said. "In the meantime, send good thoughts my way."

"For a charter subscriber, of course."

Debs, trembling, took the pin, walked to the pool

phone, and asked the operator to page Lieutenant Murdock. When he arrived, heard her story and looked at the firefly, he did not reach for it. Would he reach for handcuffs instead?

"Some timing," he said. "Did you do this deliberately to aggravate me?"

"I beg your pardon."

"Your friend Alethea told me ten minutes ago that she wants the jewelry investigation called off, permanently."

"What?" It was a happy "what" as the vision of handcuffs disappeared.

Murdock said, "I'm annoyed as hell with Stan for leaving St. Swillens, and now I'm angry with Alethea for withdrawing the burglary complaint. The robbery's connected with Isaac's murder, somehow, someway."

"Do you think that perhaps Stan could have recovered the jewels, all but the peacock, which I returned, and the firefly, which I'll return to Alethea in two minutes, and taken them back to the States?"

"No way. He couldn't have gotten them past my men at the airport. They're set up as 'customs inspectors,' and they went over him especially careful."

"Hmm."

"Alethea hasn't been told of Isaac's death, so she is as free as she wants to be about withdrawing her jewelry robbery complaint. I told her she's put us to a lot of trouble and asked if she's sure she wants to do this. Her answer was yes."

Debs told Murdock he couldn't have it both ways and then walked off to find Alethea and hand her what Debs hoped was to be the last of the menagerie of jewels to be planted on her person.

• ELEVEN •

“Even paranoids have real enemies,” Calvin consoled Debs after she confessed to going mad. They were in the coffee shop, where Cal had invited her to join him for a cup of coffee and a wad of paper, or anything else she wanted to order. She’d selected papaya, an island specialty.

“Who said that, originally, about paranoids having real enemies?” Debs asked.

“Delmore Schwartz, a poet whose work I admire. His reputation is on the rise again. Read him.”

“Was he paranoid?”

“As a matter of fact, yes.”

“Did he have real enemies?”

“No, just some very good friends who tried to get him transferred from Bellevue to a better hospital, when he broke down. He was the Humboldt in *Humboldt’s Gift*.”

“That I’ve read. Therefore,” Debs accused, “he was just a magnificent intellectual going mad from life’s

general abuses. He didn't have people using his jewelry folder in which to plant Alethea's peacock pin. He didn't have someone use his bathroom in which to murder a chess expert. And I'll bet nobody planted a ruby and diamond firefly on the shoulder of his terry cloth robe."

"I can check it out with his biographer, but in the meantime I wouldn't be surprised if you were right. It's amazing that without having those things happen to him, he managed to come up with a terrific insight."

"Why does the murderer keep pointing a finger at me? Why the firefly pin? Wasn't the peacock enough?"

"Whoever it is who did the first two numbers on you, planting the peacock and killing Isaac in what you call 'your' bathroom but which I consider 'ours' when I'm working in your room, must be awfully annoyed to see you still walking around. He would have expected, in the normal course of events, for you to be in jail by now."

"True. He wouldn't know about my alibi."

"Instead of seeing you handcuffed and led away, the murderer doesn't even see any police around the hotel because it's all plainclothesmen. Then, there's not even any news of a murder, just news of a heart attack. God, the murderer must be frustrated and probably getting a little paranoid, too, by now. So he tries to frame you a third time, in case no one's catching on, slipping another Alethea gem to your shoulder. I guess he didn't plant it in your room because he figured whatever secret police are around are keeping an eye on it. I call what the murderer is doing to you 'over-kill.'"

"Please. Such an awful word. Wash your mouth out."

"Can't. Got paper in it." Calvin looked at his

watch. "Ready to go watch Linda and Kamkoff resume their game?"

"Sure. Might as well. Keeps me off the streets and out of mischief. Provides me with alibis."

Noah, Parnell, Howard, and Linda sat in her room, surrounded by pounds of crumpled, discarded papers. Noah reflected that a stranger walking in at this moment might envy the three men for sitting near lovely Linda, who was dressed in hot pink, her dark hair falling over slender shoulders. But Noah could, with clear conscience, report in his next phone call to his wife, that he didn't think Linda gorgeous. The beauty he'd seen on her face when she had been reunited with Howard had long since been replaced with truculence. Damn it, he and Parnell had explained that there was no way to win this game. The two men had exhausted themselves from the time Kamkoff had sealed his move until today, analyzing, giving it their best. The game would be a draw, barring tornadoes, earthquakes, and other natural disasters.

"A draw is nothing to be ashamed of," they'd told her. She, of course, knew that, having had her share of drawn games. But the dumb genius needed reassurance upon reassurance. She'd sat hunched over the chess board in her corner of the room and joined them from time to time in the analysis.

Now, just before the game was to be resumed, when they should be relaxing, Noah said, "Let's go over it again, Linda. We start with the assumption that Kamkoff is mentally sound, and a mentally sound Grandmaster has either placed his King's Rook in the Queen 1 square or else has pushed his pawn up to back his Knight. One or the other of those moves is on the score sheet in the sealed envelope. There are no

third or fourth possibilities. Didn't we all agree on that last night and this morning?"

"Yeah," from Linda.

Great communication. You're doing fine, was what Noah wanted to say, but he always refrained from using sarcasm with her. Isaac had taught him that. Sarcasm was what Noah used on his kids at home.

Parnell said, "The question now is really a matter of taste, of tact. When do you offer a draw?"

Since Linda wasn't answering, seemed to be concentrating on looking sulkier, her husband filled in the conversational gap while holding her hand. "The contrast between champ chess and social chess can sometimes be very funny. In parlor chess, have you noticed that players seldom agree to a draw until there's no hope of winning?"

"Yes," Parnell said. "Cheerful, optimistic potzers can go on and on playing until it's impossible for either player to mate the other."

"Just my point, Linda," Noah said. "When two fine minds like yours and Kamkoff's can see ahead far enough to know the game will end in a draw, it's foolish and demeaning to go through the motions."

"I know." Linda sighed. "But I'm still trying to think of a way to turn this game around."

"Look, Linda, let's go over this again . . ." Parnell began.

"No, let's not." Noah was looking at his watch and thanking the Lord that he had a sense of time. Linda, that idiot savant, would stare off into space for two more hours if they'd let her.

The three men escorted Linda to the auditorium and as far as the foot of the stage. Howard kissed her and followed Noah and Parnell to their audience seats.

Linda crossed the stage and sat down, thinking, thinking, thinking. Howard, Noah, and Parnell proba-

bly considered her stubborn for not admitting this was going to be a draw, but she wanted a win for Isaac. That would be an appropriate get-well card, not a drawn game.

She checked over the chess pieces on the board. The position immediately preceding Kamkoff's sealed move had been set up. Linda had never known anyone to place the pieces incorrectly before but she checked, anyway, to make sure. She also checked the time clock. It was set at the times she and Kamkoff had used up at the moment of adjournment. Her half of the clock would not be started until the envelope with Kamkoff's sealed move was opened and the Referee made that move on the board.

He did so now. King's Rook to Queen 1. Parnell and Noah had been right. Kamkoff was of sound mind. Linda noted the move on her score sheet. Hmm. No sense in knocking her brains out. She would respond with the Bishop move she, Parnell, and Noah had worked out late last night.

Then, of course, Kamkoff, who was just now sitting down and smiling with those awful teeth, would either get his Knight moving or else bring his hidden Bishop out for temporary nastiness. He brought the Bishop out and punched his time clock. Now, Linda would get her Queen's skirts unfurled and move that lady where she'd do some little good. Ho-hum. She punched her time clock. Kamkoff had an obvious answer for that. His Queen would also unfurl her skirts, and they were off to a draw. But Kamkoff's hand did not touch his Queen. It rested on a Pawn. Linda became tense, alert, excited.

"Touch move," she wanted to cry out. But Kamkoff would know as well as any Grandmaster that he must now move the piece he touched. There was no way he could change his mind.

"He's lost tempo," was Linda's immediate reaction. He could be sent to Siberia for a move like that. She'd send him, herself, if she were a Soviet official.

But a move that was, to her mind at this moment, clearly a gift, could be Kamkoff's utterly clever and devious try for a win of his own, his breakthrough move. Linda took her time now. It would require subtlety to find the thread that would lead to her win.

She looked up at the end of the first twenty minutes and found Kamkoff's eyes on hers. His slid away when she tried to fathom his. Linda remembered a print of a drawing that hung on one of the walls of her Chess Club at home. It was by someone named Retzsch, and it showed Mephistopheles playing chess with man for his soul. Linda had the most uncomfortable feeling that Kamkoff had just sold her his soul. He had made his last move for a human reason, not a chess reason. She had been in his head long enough during this game to know that.

She bent her own head over the board and concentrated on choices. She focused on the most deadly, the most cruel of moves. It was also the most elegant. Beautiful. She waited a bit longer, checking for flaws. But perfect was perfect. She moved and punched her clock.

Linda looked out at the audience and found Howard's face. She wanted to wink at him but Grandmaster manners forbade. The man, Rimsky, whose face floated a row behind Howard's, stared at her but it was the glare of a failure. His hate rays had been deflected, damaging his fellow countryman's game, not hers. Linda couldn't resist smiling at Howard, whose good head was what had probably deflected Rimsky's rays.

Now she concentrated on finishing off her opponent. It was Isaac who had taught her what he called the "poetry of the End Game," sometimes comparing it

to the coda of a symphony or to the last two lines of a sonata.

When Linda wrote "Resigns" as her opponent's last move, she picked up her score sheet and was happy that she needn't be ashamed to send it to Isaac. Perhaps her line of play could not be credited as superb because it arose as a result of her opponent's error, but she had woven into victory a thin thread of advantage, a thread that a player of lesser vision might not have seen.

The audience was crazy about the game and proved it by applauding loudly. Some rose to their feet, and one wag even shouted, "Encore."

Linda smiled, nodded briefly, and walked toward Howard, who was waiting backstage for her now, doing his own grinning and applauding. The expression on his face changed dramatically and he yelled, "Linda, look out!"

She stopped short. Heavy strobe lights came crashing down in front of her, missing her trembling body by inches.

• TWELVE •

Howard circled the rubble of broken glass and metal, reached for Linda, and held her. She put her arms around his neck and came as close to saying "Thank you" as her nature permitted.

Noah and Parnell ran up to the stage. Noah realized the sheer investment of time and emotional energy he had put into guarding Linda's talent made the attack on her seem like an attack on himself. But why was he thinking of this as an attack? Surely it had been an accident. Noah looked at the mess, pulled himself together, and said, "It must have been caused by reverberations from the applause."

"And if that's the case," Parnell said, "then the Committee's to blame for the carelessness with which the lights were mounted in the first place. They should have overseen the electricians."

Noah suggested that Howard take Linda back to the room while Noah and Parnell would go screaming at any Committee members they would be able to dig up.

They'd make them call a meeting and then they'd yell at all of them.

"It wasn't the Committee's fault," Linda said. Noah was startled. Everything was always the Committee's fault, according to Linda. For once, she'd be absolutely right in laying the blame at their door.

"Whose fault was it?" he asked.

"That Rimsky. You know," Linda said, "the Russian parapsychologist, the one who can bend metal?"

"Yes?"

"Well, strobe lights are metal."

"Uh, true, Linda," Noah said. "But he's kind of a spoon, fork, and knife man, and even those objects have to be nearby. He doesn't claim to bend metal from a distance."

Linda persisted. Noah realized she hated Russians even more than she hated the Committee, so he said he'd go lodge a complaint and have Rimsky barred from all further games.

"But," Noah added when he and Parnell were out of Linda's hearing, "we'll also scream about the sheer, damn negligence in the way those lights were handled."

In the Analysis Room Alethea was making a similar announcement to Debs and Calvin.

"I'm still shaking, but I don't know if it's from fear or fury. I'm going to go out and find myself a Committee member or two to be brutal with. I wish Stan were here. He can be so marvelously forceful when he's angry. I'll see you later."

Debs was left with Calvin. Just as well. The funny thing was that he had become the only person with whom she could speak openly. Lieutenant Murdock had turned the two writers into coconspirators, in a way, by making them keep their mouths shut about Isaac.

"I," said Debs, "call what we saw happen on the screen a murder attempt, not an accident."

"You better believe it. And we're both without alibis this time. Those strobe lights could have been loosened anytime this morning."

"Come off it, Cal. If that were so, then why did they come crashing down near Linda? Someone must have been nearby to choose that moment to give the lights their last nudge."

"Not necessarily. Maybe whoever did it was out to get Kamkoff or Linda."

"How indiscriminate."

"I'm going to make you a proposition."

"Other than your standard 'let's leave' one?"

"You might want to consider both. But right now, how about setting out to do our own detective work, going whole hog on it?"

"That's an elegant offer, Calvin. And almost tempting. I'll admit I'm scared, what with peacocks and fireflies and the feeling that someone's out to get me."

"I think we should be assertive and not take any of Murdock's 'intricate international problems' crap anymore. He acts as though he hasn't heard of the Freedom of Information Act."

"'Assertive' was the buzz word, Cal. I'm with you." Debs shook his hand.

"Okay. We begin by searching for clues."

"But where, how? This is an awfully large resort."

"We'll begin with individual rooms."

"Which ones first and how do we get in?"

"I have a mental list of people who've behaved peculiarly, but we'll begin with Alethea's room because she's not only behaved suspiciously, she also happens to be busy now chasing down Committee members, leaving us plenty of time for a leisurely search."

"My friend's room? You're crazy! I say an unqualified no!"

"Going back on a handshake? Think of it this way, Debs, Linda's life is at stake, not to mention our book's life. We're in trouble, and Alethea's actions are suspicious enough—calling off the police search for her jewels, necking with her prodigy's opponent—so that maybe your friend is under some crazy kind of pressure. We'll be helping her rather than harming her by tracking down clues."

His logic didn't thrill Debs, and he had to do a lot more talking before she decided to go along for the practice.

"We absolutely won't find any clues in Alethea's room," she told Cal, "but I'll go along with you on this because we just might find clues in some of the other rooms. By the way, how do we get in?"

"The same way whoever got into your room to plant the peacock pin did, by asking the desk clerk for the key. Receptionists don't bother to correlate face and room. The murderer probably kept one of your keys after planting the peacock in your jewelry folder and then used it to unlock your door while talking Isaac into entering and getting murdered."

So she and Cal were about to lower themselves to the murderer's level and go sneaking hotel keys. There was something wrong, but Debs didn't know what. Yes, she did; it was immoral. But getting back at a murderer was not immoral. She and Calvin headed for the lobby.

When they stood within sight of the receptionist's desk, Cal said, "We're in luck. The clerk looks a little dingy."

The lady was slender and pleasant looking and, Debs was happy to note, did have a rather vacuous look on her face.

Calvin said, "I'm afraid you'll have to ask for Alethea's key. It would look funny if a man did. The clerk may remember that Alethea's husband has gone."

"I thought you said receptionists don't correlate faces and key numbers."

"Uh, I did say that. But just in case. I'll take my turn when it comes to getting keys to men's rooms."

Debs straightened her glasses and patted her hair.

"Do I look like a penthouse person?" she asked Calvin.

"Do you look like a penthouse person!"

"That's not answering a question, just repeating it."

"You look sensational!"

Debs made her move, smiling at the receptionist and asking for the key. The woman smiled back and handed it to her. Thank God this wasn't New York or Los Angeles.

"Isn't it beautiful today?" Debs asked, feeling she owed the clerk something for having deceived her.

"Every day is a beautiful day on St. Swillens."

Debs handed the key to Calvin once they were in the elevator. He could have the privilege. She'd done her dirty deed. When they reached Alethea's room, Calvin unlocked the door, after sneaking looks down both ends of the empty hallway.

"Where do we begin?" Debs asked.

"Closets, drawers, top of the desk, nightstand, medicine chest, you know, the usual."

"What usual? I've never done it before."

"Neither have I. But I hope we'll recognize a clue when we see one. To prevent duplication of effort, how's about you take the closet and I'll take the bureau drawers."

Debs walked to the closet and opened the accordion-pleated doors.

"I love my first clue," she announced.

"What is it?"

"Stan's clothes are still here. Therefore, he expects to come back to St. Swillens and hasn't flown away in a fit of jealousy as you and Murdock seem to think."

"That's nice."

"You sound bored with me. What's in the bureau?"

"I'm concentrating on how sensuous and slithery Alethea's nightgowns feel. I wonder how her husband or lover can catch hold of her."

"Stop thinking of Kamkoff as her lover. Maybe, at the most, Alethea could have been pulling a Mata Hari act, flirting with the enemy, lulling his senses before the Match. I can buy that idea. More power to her."

"But Stan couldn't buy it."

"I just told you, dummy, that most of his clothes are in the closet. I don't know if they're all here, but there's enough to show he's coming back."

"Unless Alethea plans to pack them for him."

"I won't like your clues any better than you like mine, if you come up with any. I'm promising you, Cal, I'm going to hate your clues."

"Ah, here's the lady's jewel case."

Debs crossed over to the bureau and watched while Calvin opened an impressive leather-fitted case. It had been crafted to hold a lot but all that it contained now was a familiar peacock and firefly.

"Just as we expected," Calvin said.

"You said that quickly, before I could knock your clue. No fair. I'm going to tackle the desk."

"Okay. I'll do the nightstands."

As Debs went through the magazines and papers on the desk, she could see nothing remotely resembling a clue. She came across Alethea's score sheets of the games that had been played so far. They showed the sponsor's enthusiasm for her prodigy's play. Alethea had circled Linda's outstanding moves and had even

drawn a smiling, daisy-faced flower next to one. Debs went through more papers, then stopped at one and said, "This is odd."

Calvin was beside her in a second. She showed him a game printed in Russian.

"That's not odd," Calvin said.

"Not to you because you speak the language, but for someone like Alethea or myself, it's odd to have a copy of an unreadable game around. My friend's a poor linguist."

It was one of Alethea's few failings. She had once told Debs that if she, Alethea, had ever become a really fine chess player, she would have had to learn to speak and read Russian and that she was rather relieved she never got to be great at the game because she was a lousy linguist. Debs could remember sympathizing.

Calvin's eyes scanned the game. "Wish I had time to study it. Looks as though there's a fascinating trap set here." He pointed to a bunch of exclamation marks. "But this is no time to do an analysis."

She had to agree with that. But there was something fishy about the game's being here. It would have been nice if Calvin could have had time to go over it, but Debs kept having the awful feeling that Alethea's key to the suite, the one Stan had probably left behind, was going to turn in the lock. Hopefully, Alethea was having trouble tracking down Committee people. They must be hiding in shame, wanting to avoid questions about shaky strobe lights.

Calvin was leafing through Alethea's Will Weng puzzle book. A piece of ecru-colored paper fell to the carpet. He picked it up, looked at it for quite a while, and solemnly handed it to Debs.

"Nothing," was her verdict.

"Come on, now, a joke's a joke. I know you prom-

ised you'd knock my first real clue, but let's be serious, woman. This is it."

"Nothing," Debs repeated. "I'm sorry but I recognize the names and the 'K's and the lines. It's Alethea's Roots project. Old hat."

"Damn Alex Haley for spawning all these amateur genealogists! Those names look beautifully suspicious, being Russian, and the lines look nicely incriminating. Look, a squiggle here, an arrow there."

"That's because it's a rough draft. You would have recognized it as a genealogical chart when you saw later, refined copies. I've seen them. You follow the . . ."

Debs froze at the sound of a key in the door. Calvin was more practical, putting the ecru-colored paper back in the Will Weng puzzle book and placing it on Alethea's nightstand.

Debs, preparing herself for the hurt that would be on Alethea's face, made an instant decision. She would level with her friend, tell her about Isaac's death, the seriousness of everything that was happening. It was time for truth telling. Lieutenant Murdock be damned.

But it was the Lieutenant, himself, who entered the room. Debs felt a new stab of guilt, this time for having just mentally damned the man. Then, she let herself enjoy the relief she felt at his not being Alethea.

"I came up to warn you two to stop playing Nick and Nora. Real life isn't *The Thin Man*."

"How did you know we were here?" Calvin asked.

"The receptionist called after Debs asked for the penthouse key, but it took her a while to get me because I had to be paged. Naturally, the clerk has been alert to any funny stuff going on with people asking for the wrong keys. Has been ever since I told her of the possibility that someone originally gained access to Debs's own room this way."

Debs shot Calvin a filthy look, which he ignored. He reached in his pocket and handed Murdock the key to Alethea's suite, then took Debs's hand and walked her toward the door.

Murdock warned, "No more Nick and Nora. Remember."

Calvin said, "Lieutenant, we aren't even married."

· THIRTEEN ·

Debs spent the day working, by herself, on the book while Calvin went off to spend the morning watching Kamkoff get taken by his Brazilian opponent and the afternoon seeing Linda play an Israeli Grandmaster. Zvi Ben Ami played with chutzpah, making soaring, swooping moves. Linda played coldly, as though lacking imagination and insight, but Calvin noted that she was building a nice fortress for her King and opening up her Bishop files.

The Committee had barred Rimsky from the auditorium today. The Soviets had counter-complained that they'd like all purple-robed cult members immediately to stop praying for Linda. The Committee had said it was difficult to stop people from praying, but it would see what it could do.

Zvi Ben Ami exchanged Knights with Linda. Just what she had waited for. Now, she played with intense energy and gained tempo. Ben Ami found he could no longer Castle. Linda got her Rooks into action. In the

end game, her fine technique made the win look easy but Calvin came up to Debs's room and reported that it had been one of the most exciting games of the Match so far.

"Linda's a hell of a gal," he said. "No wonder Margaret Mead said she feared the day when countries would start to use women in battle, that they'd be too ruthless."

"I, personally, would love to be a woman warrior instead of a woman writer," Debs said. "I've been working so hard, and I ache all over. But I've filled up a floppy disk."

"Beautiful. How about having dinner with me to celebrate?"

Debs yawned. "I'd love to, but I can barely keep my eyes open. All I want is a bed and bath."

Cal offered to share those, but Debs said no and asked if they could make dinner on another night. Cal agreed and said good-bye. Debs soaked in the tub, got into her bathrobe, stretched out on the bed, and stared at the ceiling. Tomorrow she'd have to go down to that nice boutique in the lobby and buy a dynamite dress to wear to dinner with Cal. The phone rang. It was Alethea, pleasant, chatty Alethea, whose tone became serious as she asked, "Can you do me a favor?"

"Of course I'll be glad to anytime all you have to do is ask oh you just asked how dumb of me the answer is yes of course I'll be glad to." Debs, still burdened with guilt for having searched Alethea's room, knew she was overreacting but couldn't stop. How marvelous that her friend was asking a favor!

"I love your enthusiasm," Alethea said. "How about meeting me in the coffee shop in ten minutes and we can talk there?"

"Alethea, I'm zonked. I couldn't possibly make it to

the coffee shop. Can't you just ask the favor over the phone? I'll do whatever you want."

"But the first part of the favor is meeting me in the coffee shop to talk about the rest of the favor. It's something that I can't discuss on the phone."

"I give. First part granted. See you in ten minutes."

Debs dragged her screaming body off the bed and over to the closet, dressed and met her friend in the restaurant. Alethea looked tense.

"You should be happy, Alethea, not anxious. The Match is going well."

"Can you cover for me tonight from eight o'clock until about nine-thirty? I have something important to do."

"Sure, I'll cover for you even though I have no idea what you mean by 'cover.'"

"There's someone who watches my room, a man out by the pool area, who keeps looking up at my windows. I haven't caught anyone spying on me in the hallway yet, but I'll bet this KGB man, if that's what he is, has a back-up person he signals to follow me whenever I leave my room."

"Welcome to Club Paranoia."

"I have something personal that must be taken care of tonight," Alethea said. "This is what I want you to do first. Go back to your room and dress like me."

"Alethea, Sugar, there's no way I can dress like you. God knows, I wish I could but it would require several shopping sessions to Gucci and Pucci me up and you're talking about tonight."

"We don't need designer clothes to outwit a snooper. Both of us must have something in our closets that will look similar from a distance. What I'll want you to do is come up to my suite and exchange places with me at my doorway, which can't be seen from the

pool area. I checked this afternoon. Then, all you need do is walk around my room, let your shadow reflect against a draped window, and then, perhaps, pass in front of or glimpse out of an undraped window, briefly, from time to time."

"No problem. Once I get this coffee down, I'll have energy for that."

"Do you have a beige skirt with you, by any chance?"

"No."

"Red slacks?"

"Sorry, no. Just navy ones," Debs said.

"Great. I have navy, too. Now, what do we do for tops?"

"I have a red short-sleeved one," Debs volunteered.

"I don't. I have a white short-sleeved blouse, a checked—"

"Stop. I've matched you. I've got a white short-sleeved blouse."

"Great. Now, if you'll just go back to your room and get dressed in your navy slacks and white top, I'll do the same. I will be forever grateful, Debs."

"A snag. I just thought of it. Hair coloring."

"I've got that covered. Unintentional pun. Glad you thought to ask, though. I'm planning to tie my hair in a scarf as soon as I go back to my room and change clothes. I'll walk around until the spy gets used to my outfit. The scarf is a distinctive one. When you come to the door to change places with me, I'll give the scarf to you to put on."

As they drank their coffee, Debs reflected on the ethics of friendship. When a pal asks for ten dollars or a hundred, you are not supposed to ask what she wants it for. Debs couldn't ask Alethea what the "something personal that must be taken care of tonight" was, but a

tryst with a Russian lover presented itself as *the* possibility. If Alethea didn't volunteer to tell, then that was that and there was no volunteering in the few minutes that it took for them to finish their coffee. Alethea had trusted Debs when it came to peacocks and fireflies. Debs had to trust Alethea now, even though Debs wanted to say, "Please don't go ape over Kamkoff. He'll go back to his country and forget you. Shipboard romances are dumb."

Debs went to her room, got out of her clothes and into the navy slacks and white blouse. Damn, they hadn't discussed shoes. She wanted to phone but the project was not discussable on the phone. Debs would have to wing it. White sandals? Navy flats? Eenie, meenie . . . navy flats.

She took the elevator to the top floor, got out, rapped three times on Alethea's door and said, "It's me . . . or I, if we want to be technical."

Alethea opened up, a grin on her face.

"You're looking cheerful now," Debs said.

"Nothing like action to make one cheerful."

Debs blushed, but Alethea couldn't have noticed because her head was bent as she untied her scarf. She handed it to Debs, then pecked her friend on the cheek and went out the door. Debs adjusted her glasses and took a step into the room. A knock on the door made her jump.

"It's me . . . I, Alethea," the urgent whisper came through wood. "Don't bother to open up. Just take off your glasses. We both forgot the obvious."

"Oh, right. Good-night."

Debs walked the room, feeling righteous about not being here to ransack it. She remembered Calvin at the bureau, going through Alethea's nightgowns, remembered herself at the desk. Tonight Debs wouldn't so much as pick up a magazine from the coffee table. She

hoped she cast a nice shadow on the closed drapes as she passed them. She ventured close to the open window once in a while so that the man would look up and be sure to see her.

She, of course, could not see him without her glasses. But there were some shapes down by the pool. Tables? Chairs? People? Damn, Calvin *had* turned her into Nora. She wanted very much to see who watched Alethea's room. Did she dare risk putting on her glasses for just a minute? Why not? Alethea sometimes used reading glasses. Debs picked up a book, opened it, then put on her glasses and pulled a chair over to the window. Pretending to read, she looked down at the pool area. There were two men, one stretched out on a chaise, star-gazing, the other sitting in an upright, webbed chair, with an open newspaper in front of his face.

Some movement, some shadows beyond the pool area, out by the ocean, caught Debs's eyes. She focused on the shadows. A woman, in navy slacks and a white blouse, Alethea, holding the hand of a blond young man dressed in turtleneck top and jeans, walked the beach so furtively that Debs was grateful the man behind the newspaper had put it down and was now gazing up at the penthouse suite. Debs recognized him as someone she'd seen around. Definitely a Russian. She'd heard him speaking to his fellow countrymen. Debs ducked her head back into the book. She looked up a moment later and saw Alethea and Kamkoff. It was his face that shone, now, in the moonlight. They would soon be past sight of the pool area, at the rate they were walking, but they stopped for a moment. Alethea touched Kamkoff on the cheek.

Debs got up, walked, cast shadows, and thought, So much for the Mata Hari theory. Calvin had told Debs that Kamkoff had been a big loser today and would soon be out of the running, so Alethea's prod-

igy, Linda, had nothing to fear from him. Debs found herself humming, "It's a long, long way from May to December," then stopped herself and concentrated on casting shadows. She was grateful when Alethea, at last, let herself into the suite. Debs smiled at her friend, tentatively, unhappily.

Alethea's return smile was exultant.

The next morning a peevish Calvin turned up for work in Debs's room, nodded at her curtly, sat in front of his typewriter, and spoke to it.

"She didn't answer my phone calls. Where was she last night?"

"Could the 'she' you're asking your typewriter about possibly be me?"

"Yes," Calvin told his typewriter. "The woman turns me down for dinner because she's tired, 'can barely keep her eyes open' is what she said, inventing a new cliché, and then when I call her room to bid her a fond good-night, there is no answer. I try again. Again, no answer. Calvin, I say to myself, you've been lied to by a woman you were just learning to trust."

"Do you often talk to your typewriter?"

"Yes."

"I guess that's a good thing for a writer to do as long as the typewriter answers. Cal, I'm sorry about last night. I would have turned down Robert Redford."

"Robert Redford didn't ask you."

"Don't be catty. I would have turned down any and everybody except the one person who did call, Alethea, asking a favor. After searching her room the other day, I felt I owed her. I spent the evening babysitting her suite."

Calvin turned to face Debs, puzzlement in his bassett hound's eyes. "I didn't know penthouse suites required baby-sitters."

Debs explained the role she had played last night, but not quite its purpose, saying only that Alethea had had something personal to take care of.

"I'm telling you all this, Cal, because I think it's important for you to know. The man by the pool who had his eyes on Alethea's suite is definitely a Soviet. I've seen him around."

"So?"

"So there may truly be 'intricate international problems to be considered,' as Lieutenant Murdock says. Maybe you and I should stop this William Powell and Myrna Loy act."

"Never. 'International intricacies' be damned. We'll squeeze in as much detective work as possible whenever we take a break from the book. I also intend to have a social life. How about dinner tomorrow night?"

"I'd love it. As long as your typewriter doesn't mind."

They went to work on the book. Fifteen minutes passed. Calvin paused to drink some coffee and chew some paper. He looked over at Debs and asked, "The personal thing that Alethea had to take care of was a tryst with Kamkoff, maybe?"

Debs went on typing. Calvin repeated the question.

"Ask her," Debs said, nodding toward Cal's typewriter.

Calvin waited a second and then told Debs, "She said 'yes.'"

Debs continued typing on her computer until there was a knock, then said, "Damn," to the interruption, and opened the door. Murdock stood there.

"Good morning, Lieutenant."

"Good morning. May I come in?" He was more than halfway there, so Debs, not answering, just offered him a chair.

"I have unpleasant news," the Lieutenant began.

"Do you know Kamkoff, the young Soviet, with the dental work?"

"Can't say that I 'know' him, Lieutenant. But I've seen him at the chess table, and I answered his 'good-even-ying' once in an elevator."

"He's either dead or missing, and I think more likely dead."

Debs, too startled to speak, heard Calvin ask, "How do you know he didn't defect and fly off to the United States? Or maybe get sent home by his KGB people, who might be mad at him for something?"

Debs was grateful that Calvin hadn't mentioned who that "something" might be. Kamkoff's prior pursuit of Alethea had probably not gone unnoticed by the KGB, even if she might have gotten away with last night's tryst.

"He couldn't have defected to the mainland because there was no plane or boat out of here last night. There was absolutely no way off the island, and he can't be lodged in an Embassy on St. Swillens because there is none. Can I have some of that coffee?"

Debs got him some. He sipped, then said, "There was a second part to your question. How do we know he didn't get sent home by his KGB people? For one thing, they're the ones who complained to me this morning that he's missing. If they had spirited him away, they could have easily pretended the man was sick, as we did with Isaac, or that he was called home to visit an ailing parent. The KGB are genuinely furious. I can recognize angry Soviets when I see them."

"Have you searched the entire island, Lieutenant?" Debs asked.

"Just about. Still in the process."

"Will the chess match have to be called off?"

It was Calvin who answered her. "No, the Swiss system is being used and Kamkoff hasn't made a good

showing so he's practically disqualified by now. The games can go on without him."

The Lieutenant got up, threw his now empty paper cup into the wastebasket, and said to Debs, "Your friend Alethea took the news well. I just came from her room. Let me know, will you, if she tells you anything."

Debs didn't answer but did escort the Lieutenant to the door. She said, "I wish you luck in your search for Kamkoff."

"Thanks."

When she shut the door, Debs slumped against it and said, "A revolting development. I knew I didn't like Murdock's sudden switch to friendliness just now. That man always has a purpose for his attitudes. Now he wants me to let him know if my best friend tells me anything. To hell with him."

Calvin came to stand beside her and said, "You look ill. Don't get your guts in an uproar. I know it looks bad for Alethea since she was probably the last person to see Kamkoff alive . . . ah . . . I mean, next to the last . . . but . . ."

"Cal, please do me an enormous favor. I want you to trust Alethea the way I do. Please."

"I will, Debs." Calvin took her in his arms. "But it'll be tough. We're just beginning to trust each other."

■ FOURTEEN ■

Debs never, ever shopped for clothes when working on a book. A firm rule. There were enough distractions, like keeping her pencils sharp. The "no shopping" rule should, of course, be applied even more strictly to an instant book, but Debs felt sweetly guiltless as she stood looking in the windows of the hotel boutique. If her writing could be so nastily interrupted in the past few days by various horrors, then, by golly, she could take this break to buy a dress.

She had announced her plan to Calvin that morning and left him alone to work in her room.

"I know your typewriter doesn't approve of my selfishness," she'd said, "but it's me you're taking to dinner tonight, not her."

Now, she looked in the boutique window and worried about possible luck in finding anything. There was a pink pleated cocktail dress with a high neck and batwing sleeves that hung on the mannequin. Matronly. Its price was not too terrible, considering that

the hotel had captive customers. No place else to shop for miles. But Debs didn't want this dress at any price. Then, she was cheered as her eye caught sight of a gossamer blouse that was printed with dramatic, open-winged Monarch butterflies. She remembered Bipsey, the honeymooner, wearing that blouse with white slacks, the day they'd all been trying to get Linda to return to her walked-out-on game. The blouse had looked perfectly smashing on Bipsey, so the boutique did have something to offer.

Debs went in. The saleswoman was a fine-boned, elegant skeleton, a café-au-lait beauty with a Byzantine face. Naturally, her clothes hung like a dream on her.

"I want to look just the way you do," Debs would have said if going for the honest approach. Instead, "I'd like a dressy dress, something to wear to dine and dance in here at the hotel and also to tide me over for summer evenings in L.A."

The Byzantine beauty showed her understanding of clothes by not offering Debs the matronly pink pleated number that hung in the window. She brought out several charming dresses, their colors electric, their cut revealing. Debs tried them on and was immediately besotted with a bright blue that was cut on the bias. Her only question to the saleswoman was, "Is this dress too revealing?"

"My mother always tells me, 'You gotta show your goods.'"

"Your mother is right. I'll take it."

"You're lucky to live in Los Angeles," the saleswoman said as she wrapped the dress. "You have great stores out there."

Debs agreed, not explaining that she was forced to shop away from home because the belt of the dressy dress she'd brought along had been used for a murder.

She chatted briefly with the saleswoman, who told

her she'd been born on St. Swillens. She wanted to show Debs a bikini but, tempted, Debs recognized it as another part of Bipsey's wardrobe and didn't want to duplicate. What was she thinking of, anyway? The number of times she'd be in the pool would be practically nil from now on. She'd make do with the bikini she'd brought. Guiltless and happy, she took her new dress to her room. Calvin stared, disapprovingly, at the upbeat expression on her face.

"Cal, do you know that your blink rate is uncommonly slow?"

"I've been working hard while you were being frivolous. But I've come up with a good idea."

"I'll have to hang up my new dress before I can listen to it."

"That's not a dress. That's a slip," Calvin said as Debs hung the dress on a hanger."

"That's rather the idea." Debs put the garment in the closet and shut the door. "Now, I'm ready to listen."

"Hmm, I forget what I was going to tell you. I'm thinking about the dress. Oh, yes, I know, I was going to invite you to go detecting."

"Can't. I'd really feel guilty. We mustn't leave this room today, must, must work."

"That's the beauty of my idea. It's a new system, which combines working on the book and detecting. I thought we'd start by taking our tape recorders and doing an interview with Linda."

"She's a rotten interviewee. Why Linda?"

"The strobe lights. Somebody tried to murder her."

"Or Kamkoff, as you pointed out, and since he's missing or dead, it's now clear it was Kamkoff the murderer was trying for."

"My instincts say no. Besides, what the hell, Kamkoff isn't around to interview, so we might as well start

with the one potential victim who is around. If Isaac's killer was trying for Linda, then he still is. Reason? It may be because the killer feared Isaac told Linda something before he was killed."

"If that was so, then Linda has probably long since told what Isaac told her."

"Not necessarily. Linda may not know that she knows something."

"That sounds like Linda. But, Cal, this is all so tenuous. Please, let's get back to the book."

"How can we break our appointment with Linda?"

"Appointment?"

"Yes, in two minutes."

"Manipulator."

As they walked down the hall toward Linda's room, Debs asked, "How come she agreed to see us on her day off?"

"I explained that some funny things are going on at this match, which we need to record in the book. Wasn't hard to convince her. Linda thinks Rimsky is the evil mastermind behind everything, along with the Rules Committee, of course. I told her I thought Isaac might have said something out of the ordinary to her before he got his heart attack and that we can't question him in the hospital, so we want to dredge up whatever he said out of her memory."

"You don't think it unfair to use her fondness for her mentor as an excuse to question her?"

"Of course not. Isaac's ghost is rather in the position of Hamlet's father. It wants the murderer caught and punished."

"And since you and Shakespeare have writing on white paper in common, you tend to identify with him. Makes sense."

Just as they approached the Grandmaster's door, Bipsey came out of Linda's room, shutting the door be-

hind her. The blonde was dressed in a pink skirt with a flowered pink top that Debs recognized as another boutique item. God, Debs hoped Bipsey hadn't bought the blue dinner dress, too. It seemed she favored boutiques, was one of those people who loves buying at resorts.

Bipsey said, "Hi, there. How's your book coming?"

"Not too well," Debs said at the same time Calvin was saying, "Fine."

Bipsey giggled at the disagreement.

Debs said, "We're hoping to get a useful interview with Linda."

"I think you will," Bipsey said. "I just got through teaching her a yoga posture, so she has some energy flowing in now and some negativity flowing out. But she's not very physically integrated, is she?"

"Uh, I wouldn't know," Calvin said.

"She has difficulty finding her center," Bipsey said. "But then, I did, too, of course, when I first took classes. Have either of you ever taken? It's great for relieving stress."

"What possible stress can you be under on a honeymoon?" Calvin leered.

Bipsey giggled wildly.

"As a matter of fact," she said, "I have grown lax about my yoga on St. Swillens. But it's important for Linda. Isn't she an awfully nice person? Billy just went right up to her yesterday after her fabulous win and introduced himself as a fan and me as a chess idiot. Well, not in quite those words, of course."

When she left, Calvin turned to Debs and asked, "What kind of stress can that blonde moron be under that made her a yoga expert? Is she worried about where her next dress is coming from?"

"As a matter of fact, no. It's probably coming from the hotel boutique. You're an awful snob, Cal. I think

that girl is smarter than she appears. I want to take her somewhere, sit her down, and tell her there's a whole new world for women out there. It's not seemly to play the role of the dumb blonde anymore."

"She's not playing a role. That blonde is genuinely brainless, one of your basic flakes."

"You sure know how to get the words in, Cal."

It was Howard who opened the door after Calvin knocked. The young attorney looked confused when Cal said, "Hi, Leonard." Howard corrected him, smiled at Debs, and invited them in. "I hope it's going to be a short interview," he said, "because Linda needs her rest."

"Of course," Calvin said. "That's what we agreed to on the phone." He smiled ingratiatingly at Linda and asked, "How's the Grandmistress doing today?"

Linda gave him a haughty-Linda look.

Debs thought perhaps she'd better exert a little diplomacy now that Calvin had offended everyone. But Howard was laughing.

"I like that word," he said. "Linda and I have talked about the possibility of changing Grandmaster to Grandperson, but I nixed that as sounding egotistical. Maybe you've come up with the compromise. There's a nice redheaded woman covering the tournament for the big feminist magazine. I'll have to get her interested in campaigning for the change."

Calvin pulled a chair up close to Linda and began to tell her the story of his life. Debs, knowing that every interviewer must share a bit of himself with the interviewee in order to bring the person out, thought this was fine until Calvin began overdoing it. He described for Linda his many long hours of solitude, of hideous loneliness as a child while he taught himself to write, imitating the masters, "much as you went over all the games of the chess masters." Then—moving right

along into his teens—of how frequently his Muse deserted him, how often he'd suffered writer's block. On into his manhood—how he'd finally realized he'd have to make it on his own without that damn hag, his Muse. If She wanted a reconciliation, he would be willing to work something out with Her, but in the meantime he was pushing out a certain number of typed sheets a day. He'd learned to think of his work as his mission. "The solitary professions make us saintly, I feel. The work always calls us back."

"Yeah," Linda breathed.

Calvin went on. "There are no alternative professions for me. Just as I can't picture you ever, ever playing bridge."

"That's a crummy game," Linda said. "Partners. Where's the beauty in a game that has to come out of sharing your brains? A game should be you against the world."

"Of course," Calvin agreed.

"But then there are a lot of Masters who play crummy chess, in the style of a robot, always making stereotyped moves which are stored in the memory. I'd just as soon play chess with a computer as play with those people."

"Everyone always talks about the magnificent complications of your games. Do you strive for that?"

"No. Never. I always prefer the simple to the complicated. You can analyze any of my games and see that if there are two moves that might lead to the same goal, I'll always choose the more direct."

"Come to think of it, that's what arouses my jealousy when I analyze your games, Linda. They look simple afterward, leaving me saying, 'Why didn't I see that?'"

"When I say I look for the direct, I'm also saying that I'm looking for the most beautiful. Howard is read-

ing a book called *The Double Helix*, and he told me that when that researcher discovered DNA, he recognized the chain was right because it was beautiful. That's the way I feel about a correct move; it's the beautiful one."

Debs was furious. Calvin had gotten the first worthwhile quote from Linda after she, Debs, had worked so hard, back in Los Angeles, to set up communications. It took these two self-absorbed neurotics, Calvin and Linda, to play on each other. Maybe she'd let Cal take Linda to dinner tonight.

"Don't feel bad about your Muse," Linda was saying to Calvin. "Mine deserts me, too, but in chess I figure all my losses as lessons. I used to spend time before falling asleep each night, rehearsing the cause of my collapse in a game. Still do, sometimes."

"Thank you, Linda," Calvin said.

Debs could have barfed.

"Can you remember what Isaac told you before he had his heart attack?" Calvin asked.

Debs was cheered to hear he had remembered the purpose of this visit.

"I was thinking about it after your phone call, but then Bipsey came by to teach me a yoga posture, and I forgot to think anymore. Isaac did say something rather mysterious, but I've forgotten what. Also why it sounded peculiar."

"Why don't we try free association?" Debs suggested. "Or hypnosis, if anyone knows how."

"It was something about a Knight, I think." Linda directed this to Calvin and ignored Debs.

Howard got to his feet and said to Debs, "We don't need to try free association or hypnosis on my wife. If it was 'about a Knight,' all we have to do is put Linda in front of a chessboard."

"Good idea," Cal agreed.

Linda got up and walked to the table, where pieces were set up. The other three followed her. She cleared the board, then picked up two white Knights and two black ones. She played idly with them and then suddenly moved one of the white Knights and one of the black ones off the board, staring at the one-of-each which remained.

"It was something about a black Knight," she said, "and a white Knight. But what? Oh, yes, and a King."

Linda picked up the white King, put it on the board, and was silent for longer than Calvin could seem to bear.

"You said a King. Why did you pick up the white one instead of the black?" he asked.

"Because white is the good color in chess, the color that gets to move first. Isaac is the King and Isaac is a good person." Linda looked pleased now as she added, "It just came to me, what Isaac said. It was that someone mistook him for a 'King, a man of power.'"

She looked down at the board and was silent again. Then she picked up the black Knight and made him leap over the white one. She picked up the white Knight and had him leap over the black.

"Well, that's it," she said, leaning back in her chair.

"What's it?" Debs asked.

"What Isaac said to me that morning. He was sounding amused as he told me, 'I had a good time at the party last night. I was mistaken twice for a King, a man of power. It was crazy because once it was by a black Knight who wants to become white and the other time by a white Knight who wants to become black.'"

Debs repressed a groan. "That was it?" she asked. Linda nodded.

Howard volunteered, "Isaac often talks to Linda in

chess terms about things that don't necessarily relate to chess. It's a habit he's had since Linda was a girl."

Calvin looked depressed.

"I'm so glad I could help," Linda said, misreading his expression.

Debs and Calvin thanked her as Howard, looking at his watch, shooed them out. But Calvin turned in the doorway and said, "I forgot to congratulate you, Linda, on your win. Zvi Ben Ami came on strong. I admired your coolness."

"That was nothing," Linda said, with her usual lack of grace in the face of a compliment. "He was easy to beat. Kamkoff is really a better player, but Kamkoff gave me the game I played with him."

Howard, smiling, said a firm "good-bye" and closed the door.

"What totally unenlightening information," Debs complained as she and Calvin stood in the hallway.

"Not necessarily, Nurse Watson."

"The line is 'Doctor Watson.'"

"Just wanted to see if you're on your feminist toes. The stuff about the Knights and the King, the Isaac quote, is probably going to be tough to crack. But do you realize what Linda said just now? About Kamkoff giving her the game?"

"I didn't find it highly significant. I've heard ordinary chess players use the expression."

"Because ordinary chess players sometimes do give away a game by doing dumb things. Grandmasters don't give away anything. You fight them for it. If Linda said Kamkoff gave her the game, and Linda's chess instincts are infallible, then Kamkoff must have been trying to disqualify himself, for reasons of his own. Kamkoff had a plan. To defect?"

"No. Because then it would be the other way around. One would stand a better chance of defecting

by being a top chess player, top ballet dancer, top physicist, whatever, rather than a loser. Besides, Lieutenant Murdock said there was no way off St. Swillens when the Soviet disappeared."

"Maybe Kamkoff's plans went awry." Calvin looked beyond Debs and added, "Well, speaking of getting off the island, here's someone who found a way of getting back on."

Debs turned to see what Calvin meant.

"Stan. Alethea." Debs went to her two friends and embraced each, in turn. She adjusted her eyeglasses and said, "It's so good to see you back, Stan."

"It's good to be back," Stan said, and then reached to shake Calvin's hand.

"How did you get here?" Calvin asked.

"Airplane. Any other way? Cruise ships make me nervous. Alethea tells me that our Linda is in magnificent form these days." Stan nodded in the direction of Linda's door.

"Yes," Debs said, and noticed that Alethea was looking at Stan as though he were the magnificent one. In fact, they both looked enormously pleased with each other.

"We'll just go in to say a short hello to Linda and Howard, to congratulate them on yesterday's win," Stan said. "It seems like such a long time ago that you two and Alethea and I were standing here in this hallway, knocking our asses out, trying to get Linda to go back to her game with Titovan. Look at the remarkable way she's been behaving since then."

"But then, hasn't everybody?" Calvin asked. "Been behaving remarkably, I mean."

• FIFTEEN •

A large section of the hotel's dining room was open to the outdoors, allowing diners to see the moon and hear the surf. Debs felt a sensuous breeze on her bare shoulders. She mentally thanked the boutique saleswoman's mother, who was right, "You gotta show your goods." Debs enjoyed having Cal slobber all over her with his eyes as they dined.

"It looked better on the hanger," he'd told her when he'd first come to her room to pick her up, but he'd broken down over the salad course and said, "What the hell, I might as well tell you, I like that shade of blue." Now, during the main course, he said, "All right, already, you don't look half-bad in the dress. Do you mind if I bite your shoulder?"

"Why don't you wait until you're through with your teriyaki? I do enjoy watching you eat something besides paper."

"Sip more wine and you'll beg me to bite your shoulder."

"Don't need wine to make me romantic. That calypso music is heady."

"It makes a beautiful background for telling me the story of your life, Debs. You heard mine this afternoon in Linda's room. I blew it by using up valuable material that I should have saved for my first date with you, but I had to soften Linda up."

"Don't take this personally, Cal, but I hate the story of your life."

"Can't blame you. It is shoddy stuff. Let's hear yours. Better be colorful."

"It isn't, and maybe that's why I hate yours. Mine is the same, almost word for word, although I wouldn't have told it in such a maudlin fashion, showing an author in the nude, stripped of his dust jacket. The only thing you left out that I might have added, and I guess it's typical of every writer, was the utter and total importance of my high school English teacher to my life. She was the only one of the entire faculty who existed for me. Miss Pritman."

"The reason I omitted mine was because Miss Simms is too sacred for me to share with Linda. But I have just revealed her name to you. Does that tell you something?"

"Yes, and as we say in Los Angeles, thank you for sharing, Cal."

"Let's dance."

Calvin surprised Debs by being a good dancer. As they sailed across the floor, Debs looked over Cal's shoulder and noticed lights flickering on the beach. Candles. The purple people were lighting candles.

"Good," Cal said when she pointed them out. "Linda needs a little voodoo for her game with Seti tomorrow. He's not one of your pushover, pussycat grandmasters. If you feel yourself being steered off in a new direction, it's because I'm trying to avoid Billy and Boopsey. She'll talk us to death."

"Bipsey," Debs corrected. "I'm afraid to look. Is she wearing a blue dress?"

"No. Orange. Want me to turn you around?"

"Never mind. As long as her dress is orange. Oh, hi, Stan. Hi, Alethea."

Calvin said his "hi's," too, then steered Debs away and said, "Did you notice how your friends are dancing? Like lovers. Now that Kamkoff isn't around to distract Alethea."

Debs raised her head from Calvin's shoulder and looked at him sorrowfully.

He apologized. "Forgot I'm not supposed to make any cracks. You did ask me to trust Alethea, and for your sake, I do. Now that Kamkoff isn't around."

"Oh, look at Murdock sitting over there at the bar."

Calvin turned his head. "Must feel rotten, poor fellow. He hasn't found the jewels, hasn't solved Isaac's murder, hasn't found Kamkoff's body. He's entitled to get sloshed."

"And there's Rimsky, the mind bender, dancing with a lady in black. Why is he hanging around now that he's been barred from the games?"

"I've been on more romantic dance floors, Debs, floors where there are not suspects everywhere I turn my partner. What's the point of beautiful music if one of the calypso singers turns out to be KGB? I've forgotten about biting your shoulder."

"I'm glad. If you were to bite it now, Lieutenant Murdock might think it's a clue and he's looking mixed up and unhappy as it is. You didn't answer my question about Rimsky. Why is he still hanging around?"

The music stopped. Cal took Debs's hand, led her back to their table, and answered, "General mischief, I guess. Even if he can't go into the auditorium, he can still pass by Linda when she's out at the pool and give her a mind-bending stare."

“Does he really bend spoons?”

“Yes. The day I interviewed him, he demonstrated with the teaspoon from his iced tea. I imagine the hotel management isn’t overly fond of him. The son of a bitch would have bent my pocket watch if I’d let him.”

“What an awful effect this must have on the chess players, thinking their minds are being bent.”

“Rimsky loves his power, was happy to talk to me about it, but the interview isn’t the greatest in the world, as you’ll see from my translation of the tape. I missed some of the subtle inflections of his Russian. That’s the toughest thing about not speaking a language as well as one wants to and—”

Debs interrupted. “That’s it,” she said and grabbed Cal’s hand. “That’s what was different about Isaac.”

“You’re breaking my hand, but don’t let go, it’s kind of sexy.”

“Cal, listen to me. Why did someone mistake Isaac for ‘a king, a man of power’? That’s what he told Linda. You told me, the morning after the opening night party, that Isaac had spoken such perfect Russian—naturally, it was his native tongue—that people mistook him for a Soviet. You said you wished Isaac could be around to help translate, but, of course, you knew he’d be too busy with Linda.”

“Terrific insight! I think she’s got it, by George! She’s got it! Although, there has to be more. Just being Russian doesn’t make you a ‘man of power,’ unless you’re Gorbachev.”

The waiter interrupted to ask about coffee and dessert.

“Let’s order quickly,” Calvin suggested. “It’s easier than explaining that we’re in the middle of solving a mystery.”

“You order for me, Cal, I’m too excited.”

“All right. Two coffees and two rum parfaits.”

"Uh, could you change that, please," Debs asked the waiter, "to two coffees, one rum parfait and one chocolate mousse." She turned back to Calvin. "I'm sorry," she said, "I'm excited but not to the point of forgetting that when I sin, I sin with chocolate mousse and not rum parfait. All right, moving right along here, if we assume that someone's thinking Isaac was Russian meant Isaac had influence in some way, that person must have confided something to him, or given him a message, thinking Isaac was part of the Russian delegation."

"That person," Calvin said, "was then, of course, shocked to find out Isaac was Linda's chief Second, lured him to your room the next morning and killed him. It must have been a hell of a message."

Debs wanted to get right up, go over to the bar, and tell Murdock what they had figured out, before he turned completely alcoholic. She suggested this to Cal, while she stirred her coffee.

"Screw Murdock," was Cal's reaction. "He'll say, 'Great, kids, but keep it quiet,' and then he'll make some mysterious reference to 'intricate international problems.' Let's show a little initiative on follow-up. It's time for outside help."

"From whom?"

"Our editor. Where any writer turns for dirty work to be done. Besides, we'll call from your room, and that could lead to a seduction scene. The dance floor wasn't the place. That was the talkiest dancing I've ever done."

"I agree to the call, but we'll see about the seduction."

When they got to Debs's room, Calvin dialed and Debs heard him say, "I can't think of a better time to call you than when you're asleep. Your daytime is one long lunch away from the office. I ought to know. I've lunched with you."

Debs figured the next remark from the editor to be an

inquiry about how the book was going because Calvin was saying, "In the pink. My co-author, whom I'm madly in love with, so no cracks, please, owns a word processor so we let it do all the work while we play. The sun and surf, the moon above, the sand below, it's all beautiful, Quentin—you'd love it here. But you know how boring these things can get so just to keep ourselves busy while the word processor is at work, we got involved in something. . . . Don't talk dirty, Quentin. . . . Anyhow, we need you to do some detecting for us . . . okay, not you personally . . . sure, sure, you're busy . . . but you can get that crime writer, what's-his-face, the one who does police procedurals . . . no, no, he'll love doing it, and they know him in all the station houses. I'll do him a favor someday, maybe let him in on the crimes going on around here . . . yes, they do relate to the book . . . sure, they'll help sales . . . no, I can't tell you yet . . . Okay, I'm going to shoot you some names."

While Calvin was pulling out a piece of hotel stationery from a drawer, Debs hissed at him, "How come you told our editor before you told me, that you're in love with your co-author?"

Cal covered the mouthpiece of the phone and hissed back, "I thought you knew. You're supposed to be the human-interest part of the team. Are you so insensitive that you miss these things?"

Cal began to write on the stationery as he dictated to their editor. He mentioned Stan, Alethea, an insurance man who should have been interested in the missing jewels in the first place but who hadn't shown up at St. Swillens, and Isaac, Linda, Howard, the purple-people cult, and on and on and, oh, yes, a young couple named Billy and Burpsey.

"Bipse," Debs corrected, and then found herself staring at the stationery Calvin was using.

Cal hung up and asked why she was staring. "Did I leave any names out?"

"It's not the names, it's the ecru stationery I'm looking at. Do you remember the family chart we found in Alethea's room?"

"Of course. It was my first real clue but you zapped it, told me it was just old scraps of notes for Alethea's *Roots* chart."

"But it wasn't old if it was written on this hotel's stationery, and it was written on that exact shade of ecru. If we'd turned the paper over, we would have seen the hotel's logo on it. I just looked at the family names and the 'K's that stand for 'Kaminsky' and . . ."

"The 'K's that stand for what?"

"Kaminsky, Alethea's maiden name."

Calvin leaned toward Debs and gently bit her shoulder.

"Sugarplum," he said, "I've just discovered that a genuine clue is an aphrodisiac. 'Kaminsky' was also the name on the game written in Russian that we found in Alethea's room. I read that name in Russian but didn't bother to translate it for you because I had no idea it was your friend's maiden name."

Debs told Calvin about Alethea's past Brilliancy Game, the one that had appeared in Soviet books. She said, "Now, I know the answers to one mystery. Kamkoff isn't dead or missing."

"Of course not," Calvin said. "He's alive and well and living where he wants to be living, in the United States."

"And Alethea and Stan got him there."

▪ SIXTEEN ▪

Debs and Calvin got off the elevator and walked toward Alethea and Stan's penthouse suite, where they had arranged to meet Lieutenant Murdock after paging him at the bar. Alethea and Stan had already left the dining room and had been "at home" for Debs's call.

"You're lucky I'm not a cranky person," Calvin said crankily.

"Why am I lucky?"

"Because a truly cranky male would be miffed as hell at being cheated out of his seduction scene. Damn clever the way you got me to help solve the Kamkoff mystery and then maneuvered me up here to confront Alethea, Stan, and Lieutenant Murdock."

Debs kissed Calvin on the lips and said, "Maybe I was cheated out of *my* seduction scene. Think about that."

Calvin brightened. Debs knocked on the door. Alethea opened it, greeted them warmly, and offered to call room service for refreshments.

"God, no," Calvin refused. "We just had dinner. As a friend of mine used to graciously say if offered food when full, 'It will come right up on me.'"

"In that case . . ." Alethea trailed off.

Stan was looking curious and impatient. Debs was relieved when Murdock showed up a minute later.

"For a man who spends his off-hours at the bar, you're looking sharp and alert," Calvin said.

"I have no off-hours," the Lieutenant said. "Any idiot can stay sharp and alert on Perrier with lime."

"As long as he doesn't overdo the lime. Debs, do you want to call this meeting to order or should I?"

"Why don't you go ahead?" Debs suggested.

"Okay. Lieutenant, Debs and I have solved the Kamkoff caper. We called this meeting to share this particular solution so that your mind won't be so cluttered up that it keeps you from finding who's responsible for what."

"Uh, Cal," Debs interrupted, "that's not a tactful approach. Perhaps you and I should share in the telling. I can start by asking Stan and Alethea a question." Debs turned to her friends. "When did Kamkoff first approach you to say he wanted to defect to the United States?"

Stan said, "Debs, you're being even less tactful than Cal. And indiscreet to boot. There's no telling if these hotel rooms are bugged."

"Why would that matter now?" Calvin asked. "Kamkoff's already off the island."

"True," Stan said. "But Alethea and I aren't. Can't we wait until the Match is over to discuss this? We were planning to tell everyone about it on the way home, out of hearing of the KGB."

Lieutenant Murdock said, "We'll talk about it now." He gave his reasons, telling Stan and Alethea that Isaac had been murdered on the first morning of

the match and that the jewel theft and Kamkoff's disappearance might be connected.

"Isaac dead! That can't be!" Alethea cried. "I've had flowers sent to the hospital every day and I've mailed notes and—oh, why am I prattling? I'm trying to avoid understanding what you're telling me. Isaac is dead. And someone killed him. That's perfectly obvious, otherwise you wouldn't have pulled this cruel trick of keeping the news from us. We could have been properly mourning that much-loved man. Explain the cruelty, Lieutenant."

"The flowers have been going to the children's ward," Murdock said as though addressing himself to the question. Alethea just stared at him.

Stan said, "Whoever murdered Isaac couldn't have known him. Goddamn it, Isaac never harmed anyone! He loved chess and liked people. And he was one of the world's most gifted teachers. Does Linda know?"

"No," Lieutenant Murdock said, "and we're forced to continue keeping it from her and everybody else. There may be intricate international problems to consider."

"It will devastate Linda when she does hear," Alethea said. "The poor girl can't reach out to people. She trusted only Isaac and Howard."

"If you can take any comfort in the fact, Alethea," Debs said, "Linda is getting nicer in the people department now that Howard's here. She's slowly getting there." The only immediate example Debs could think of was dim-witted Bipsey and the yoga lesson, so Debs didn't give an example.

"How did you find out we had spirited Kamkoff away?" Stan asked. "Alethea and I were extremely cautious."

"Clues," Calvin said. "Left around your room, Alethea, which we searched."

Debs blushed. She would have liked to have been the one to confess to Alethea that she'd searched her friend's room and not have it come so tactlessly from Calvin. No, actually, she wouldn't have liked being the one to break the news. Just as well that Cal had done it.

"But I swear we didn't leave any Kamkoff clues around," Alethea said.

"Two, to be exact," Calvin said. "A *Roots* chart that you had tucked into your puzzle book and had obviously drawn up for someone here on St. Swillens, since Debs and I realized, just tonight, that it was written on hotel stationery. The other clue was a game printed in Russian. One of the opponents was a young lady named Kaminsky. When Debs told me your maiden name, it all came together."

"But how did you two come together—you and Kamkoff, I mean?" Debs asked.

"He approached me in the hallway," Alethea said, "and told me, in his awful English, that he wanted to defect."

"What did you tell him?" Lieutenant Murdock asked.

"'Good luck,' and then I began to turn away. He told me he needed me to help him 'to freedom.' 'Wrong lady,' I said firmly, looking him right in the eye. That was a mistake. His dark eyes are moist and expressive. 'Look,' I told him, 'I'm sorry but it wouldn't be fitting for me to come to an international match and not behave according to the rules. Besides, perhaps it wouldn't be for the best even if I could help you. Things aren't so great in the United States either, or anywhere else in the world, I guess.'"

"That must have comforted him," Calvin said.

"My nephew has a bumper sticker on his VW that says, 'If Voting Could Really Change the System, It Would Be Illegal.' I told Kamkoff that our politics are

awful, assassination has become a popular sport, we have a large crime rate, and on and on. When I ran out of steam, he asked if I'd send my family to Russia to live. When I said, 'God forbid,' he began talking about the actual plans for helping him defect. I told him Stan and I would get in trouble and immediately regretted those words, feeling like a spoiled bitch for having said them. What do I know about trouble? Trouble is Siberia, the Gulag—that's trouble."

"Did he cinch the deal, Alethea, by showing you the game he had carried with him?" Debs asked.

"Yes. His telling me that he thought we were related hit home. Do you know that from the day a very young Kamkoff saw my name in a Soviet chess book and thought we could be cousins, he carried that game around with him. He gave it to me that night, and that's why you found the Russian-written text in my room."

Stan said, "Kamkoff had recently read an article on my wife's sponsoring role in American chess in a magazine that mentioned her maiden name. Knowing both her married and maiden name and that she'd be at the Match, he felt luck was finally with him."

"Everything in life has a purpose," Alethea said. "That idiot Brilliancy that I performed in my youth was meant to become famous so that a relative could find me these many years later."

"That's beautiful, Alethea," Debs said. "So he's really your cousin."

"We're almost positive. Kamkoff and I tried to work it out on paper, but his English is flawed and my memory of my *Roots* chart isn't perfect, but it looks as though we're second cousins."

Debs remembered that moonlit night and the maternal gesture Alethea had made, stopping to touch Kamkoff on the cheek, before she spirited him away from St. Swillens.

Alethea turned to Murdock and said, "I owe you an apology. You must have thought me an utter dingbat for calling off the search for my jewels after you'd worked so hard to find them. But once I'd made up my mind to help Kamkoff defect, I didn't want you breathing down my neck, Lieutenant. Forgive?"

"I'll forgive if your husband will tell me how he got Kamkoff off St. Swillens on a planeless, boatless night. Because of international problems, photo scrutiny of all islands in the area is intense. Pictures are taken from repositional reconnaissance satellites, and we pride ourselves in knowing what goes on at the harbor and airports."

Stan said, "I hired a private boat, one that I instructed not to dock at the harbor, and I had Alethea lead Kamkoff to it. When my wife first told me about her cousin, I made arrangements to leave for home to contact attorneys and a friend in the State Department. I knew it would seem odd if Alethea flew away from a tournament she'd planned on for so long, so I pretended to be called home on business. I'd arranged for Kamkoff's boat before leaving. I'd considered hiring a private plane, but the airports are crazy here. You wouldn't believe the curiosity of St. Swillens customs men. I was given a hell of a thorough search when I left."

Alethea turned to Debs. "I'm sorry that I couldn't level with you the night we switched identities. I would have liked telling you that you were contributing to Kamkoff's defection, but Stan and I agreed that the fewer people who knew, the better."

"I understand, Alethea," Debs said.

Alethea turned to Murdock. "You can be sure of one person who didn't kill Isaac: my cousin Kamkoff. Isaac was the only American Kamkoff heard speaking Russian on the night of the opening party. Then, to his

delight, he found out Isaac was Linda's chief Second and, therefore, connected with me. Kamkoff's English is poor, and he wanted to use Isaac as a sympathetic interpreter. Isaac agreed to convey the message."

"What happened after that agreement?" the Lieutenant asked.

"Nothing," Alethea said. "And that upset Kamkoff. He had told Isaac that if I was willing to take on helping my cousin defect, then Isaac should get back to him." Alethea turned to Debs and asked, "Do you remember the morning you and I were having coffee and Kamkoff began to approach us?"

Debs nodded, remembering how the Russian had started toward them and then veered away.

"He told me later," Alethea continued, "that he was trying to work up the nerve to speak to me since he hadn't heard from Isaac. When he did hear about Isaac's heart attack—the word got to the Russians, of course, that Linda's chief Second was ill—he approached me directly."

"And then?" from Murdock.

"Then I introduced him to Stan, who began to get things going. Kamkoff and I met surreptitiously in my room and sometimes, briefly, in the hallway. He told me he had thrown his game to Linda. It was done so subtly that I hadn't picked up on it. His plan to disqualify himself was an advance favor to me. The Match could continue. Kamkoff knew I had a high emotional stake in Linda."

"But what a setback in his career," Calvin said.

"Exactly," Alethea said. "When I asked him if he realized that he'd have to start his chess career all over, that a candidate has to go through a three-year cycle before getting to the Interzonals, he just looked at me. He was desperate enough about defecting that he would have thrown himself in the ocean if necessary."

Throwing a game seemed like a relatively small thing to do."

Debs said, "So now we know that Kamkoff was the Black Knight trying to become White, or vice versa, but how do we account for the other Knight, the Knight who murdered Isaac?"

Debs was taken aback at the what's-this-crazy-lady-saying? look she was getting from everyone except Calvin.

He took over and explained about the interview they had had with Linda. He added, "If one of Isaac's Knights meant to defect to the U.S. and that turns out to have been Kamkoff, then it follows that the other Knight meant to defect to Russia. Is there anyone here that crazy?"

Stan said, "Other than Lee Harvey Oswald and one or two other nuts, I can't think of anyone offhand who ever defected to Russia. But then, we're in the Caribbean, where people on some of the other islands are known to have gone to Russia or Cuba for lessons in Marxism. Nobody here on this peaceful, untouched island seems interested."

Debs said, "Don't be too sure. The Governor told me, when I interviewed him, that there are leftist groups with power ambitions on *all* the islands."

Alethea was concentrating on her relative who had escaped the Soviets, not on who was dumb enough to want to go to Russia, so she asked Lieutenant Murdock what he planned to do about her secret. He was not interested in giving out a single clue about Kamkoff, he claimed, asking why he should contribute to international tension.

"You're a good person," Alethea said as she stroked Murdock's hand. "I'm sorry that I gave you such difficulties. If I'd known about Isaac, Stan and I would have done anything we could have to help. You mentioned

that the jewels might be connected in some way. If you'd like, I'll be happy to make a claim with my insurance man."

"Not necessary," Murdock said. "You've all said a lot more tonight than you realize. I now know where to find the jewels, so I'll just go get them."

▪ SEVENTEEN ▪

The next day Noah stretched out on his bed and phoned his wife.

"I want you to hear this from me before you hear it on the radio," he said.

"What? What?"

Noah cautioned his wife to have patience because he liked a story to build, but he would tell her in advance that this one had a happy ending. It had started today with Linda playing against Seti, the Norwegian. "Linda was doing all right with Seti, but she's not doing *that* all right at adjournment, but, get this, the game has developed into a Caro-Kahn Defense."

"Oh, Noah, how beautiful for you. Our claim to fame; yours for having written *the* book on Caro-Kahn and mine for typing the manuscript. I've shown your book to everybody I've ever come in contact with—the clerk at the checkout stand, Lisa's nursery school teacher."

"Yep. I'm the expert, right? Whole chess world

knows it, the checkout stand clerk knows it, and so does Lisa's nursery school teacher. As Howard, Parnell, Linda, and I were walking from the auditorium to Linda's room, Howard comments on how lucky we all are that I'm here, and Parnell is saying, 'I'll try like the devil to contribute, Noah, but naturally, I'll defer to you in the final analysis on this one.'

"I should think so."

"We get to Linda's room. I, Caro-Kahn big shot, can hardly wait to set up the chess pieces. Parnell spreads out charts and, I'm pleased to see, he's brought out a copy of my book. I study the position and look up to find Parnell and Howard eagerly watching me. But Linda? Linda's eyes are drooping and she puts her hand in front of her mouth to cover a great big yawn. 'I'm going to bed,' she says. We think she means for a fifteen-minute catnap, so Parnell and I are not alarmed. She goes to her bedroom, stretches out on the bed but doesn't shut the door, so we're still assuming it's to be for a short time."

"I don't like the picture, Noah. Her gorgeous body stretched out on a bed you can see from the sitting room."

"It's not so gorgeous. She's lost weight during the games."

"Of course. Champion chess players don't have to clean out kids' lunchboxes and eat leftover Hostess Twinkies."

"Anyway, Howard covered her with a blanket so she wouldn't get a chill from the air conditioner, and settled himself at her feet, adoringly."

"That's beautiful. I love it when he loves her."

"But she isn't quite napping, she's, rather, in a trance, not moving, like a princess in a forest."

"Don't get poetic about her, Noah. I worry when you get poetic."

“Wait. She kind of comes out of the trance and looks over at Parnell and me working our asses off in the other room. Parnell smiles at her and says, ‘Noah and I have some interesting contributions here, Linda.’ She looks through him, then shuts her eyes and locks him out. This went on several times, with Parnell and me taking turns trying to entice her to the game table. In the meantime we worked. Parnell was the first to break. He looked at his watch and said, ‘She’ll never have time now to really go over the analysis. I can’t handle being Linda’s Second anymore. Fuck her.’ ‘God forbid,’ I said.”

“You did, darling? You really said, ‘God forbid’?”

Noah went on to tell his wife that Parnell had said he was going to resign. Noah told him he couldn’t, that he had to stay on, and past this tournament, too, emphasizing that, “We’ll see her to the championship of the world; she owes us that day. Then we’ll drown her.” “Makes sense,” Parnell had agreed and added, “There’s a rumor that Scotland is favored for the big match. We could drown her in one of the lochs, put her in a sack and tie weights to it.”

“We two shook hands and felt a lot better. Then I went to the bedroom,” Noah continued, “and woke the princess up by snapping my fingers in front of her face. She came out of her trance, and I held out the papers Parnell and I had worked on and told Linda there was now just a small amount of time before the game, but I’d like her to at least scan our notes. I was trying to be as patient as Isaac is. I keep making myself pretend she’s one of my kids . . . uh, our kids.”

“Danny is mine. Lisa is yours. That was understood from the times I gave birth. You took the pink blanket and I took the blue. You know, that hospital now uses white blankets only. Parents no longer take sides.”

“I swear I never show favoritism.”

"Uh huh. Just toward Lisa. Anyway, they're both fine. Glad you asked. Now we can go back to Linda."

"She didn't reach for the papers I was holding out to her, just mumbled something about having thought of some moves on her own and that she'd use this time to change clothes. I blew. 'Linda, it's not a party we're going to. It's an important game.' She said, 'I know, that's why I have to change my dress.'"

"I can relate to that, Noah. You told me Linda rarely goes out. Games are her parties, in a way, her big thing, her self-respect."

"Well, I couldn't relate to it. I refused to talk to her when she came out and, obviously, I didn't offer the papers again."

"Did she ask?"

"Are you kidding?"

"What was she wearing?"

"I don't know. A sort of soft yellowish thing."

"I'll bet she looked magnificent."

"Not to Parnell and me. On the way to the auditorium, he whispered, 'Why wait for a loch? There's nothing wrong with that ocean out there, pounding, pounding. Hear it, Noah?' But lucky Linda got up on the stage before I could acknowledge Parnell. It was only then I realized we shouldn't have joked about such things. I remembered that frightening incident with the strobe lights."

"You said the story has a happy ending. The only one I'll accept is having her fall on her face and losing the damn game."

"Wrong ending. She played the 'Game of the 80s.' That's what you're going to hear on TV and radio. It must have been given to her in that trance, a kind of accumulation of what's in her subconscious. She's gone beyond my book with a totally new response to

Caro-Kahn, one that none of us would ever have imagined."

Noah's wife asked if he'd now have to rewrite the book and—oh, dear God, please, no—would she have to retype it? He told her no, that he'd just add a grand and glorious chapter.

"The newsmen and women," Noah said, "are having fun playing on the fact that this most elegant of games was played by a woman. She's magnificent. Beautiful. The crowd loves her. I love her."

"And this you call a happy ending? My worst fears. I want you home on the next plane."

"I love her, sweetheart, only from the eyebrows up. I love you in both directions. Hey, do you want to hear something nice?"

"Yes, if it's about me."

"Sorry, it isn't. But real fast then. Linda dedicated this game to Alethea."

"Linda?"

"Yes."

When the game was over, Noah recounted, Linda and Howard had pressed past adoring fans and walked to the Analysis Room, where Stan and Alethea were just getting up from having watched the game. Linda thrust her score sheet into Alethea's hands. Alethea, that elegant, charming lady, looked at the dedication, got misty-eyed, and told Linda she'd have it framed and hang it on a wall in her chess room. "Among all those priceless chess sets?" Linda had asked, looking pleased. "Linda, dear," Alethea had said, "if there's ever a fire in that room, this gift from you is what I'll run with, not the chess sets." Stan, Calvin, and Debs piled congratulations on Linda. The girl didn't take flattery well. Noah had wanted to tell her, "A simple *thank you* will suffice," but before he could, she nod-

ded in agreement to all the compliments, said, "Yeah," and walked out.

"I'm happy for you," Noah's wife said, "for all of us. I love you. I've been clipping out all the articles that appear in the *L.A. Times* and the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*."

"Thanks. I'm drained. But, lord, it was a great day. I love you, too. Give my best to the kids; tell them I love them equally."

"They're too smart to believe that. Good-night, sweet Noah."

The next morning, Noah met Parnell over breakfast. They agreed that the ideal way to spend the day would be to bask in the pleasure of yesterday's game, to relive it, to analyze and reanalyze it, but they were realists. The enemy today would be Gameliel, and they had most of his past games with them, enough to go over and get a feel for the opening he might use today. They realized that if Linda knocked Gameliel on his ass and if Botslimik drew his game against Titovan, then Linda and Botslimik would be running neck-and-neck, the two leaders. And all this with having walked out on her first game and throwing them into despair.

"Pretty good for a girl we were prepared to drown," Noah said.

"I must confess, Noah, that I was enormously relieved to find you getting as mad at Linda as I was."

"Why not? I was entitled to be even madder. After all, Caro-Kahn is my thing."

"Yeah, I know, but with the way Howard has been acting, overly protective and possessive, I figured you and Linda might have had something going."

"What? Are you crazy? My God, you're beginning to sound like my wife."

"Hear me out. I was entitled to my dirty thoughts."

When Howard started hovering and never leaving us alone in the room with her, I figured, Jeez, what's going on? Noah's a married man . . ."

"You bet your ass I am."

". . . and I'm a wimp."

"No, Parnell. Your self-esteem is low."

"My self-esteem is low *and* I'm a wimp. I figured since you're the tall, good-looking one, it was you Howard was worried about. Maybe I should call your wife and . . . I'm kidding, Noah, I'm kidding! Anyway, after you and I agreed to drown Linda, I decided, hell, whatever's going on, it's all in Howard's mind, so it's his problem."

"Gee, thanks, pal."

While Parnell was talking, Noah did a mental review of the way Howard had been behaving and, son of a gun, Parnell was right. But it wasn't only with the two Seconds. It was all the time. Like last night. Howard had come to Linda's side before all her adoring fans did and that couldn't have been easy.

"He's not jealous of me," Noah told Parnell. "He's jealous of the whole world. He hovers, sticks to Linda, leaves her alone only when he has to take calls from his law firm, and even then, I noticed, one day he wanted her to go in the room with him. I remember thinking that was kind of crazy, asking your mate to go help you take a phone call."

"He didn't start out acting this way," Parnell said.

"He's always been protective, but this is crazy."

"Do you think Linda notices?" Noah asked.

"Linda probably thinks it's her due."

"I can pinpoint it, Parnell. Just now it hit me. A good thing you didn't call my wife. It's been from the day the strobe lights came crashing down. You and I went off to round up Committee members, but Howard took Linda off to her room, at our suggestion, and he

hasn't let her out of his sight since except to take calls from home."

"You're right, old buddy, absolutely right," Parnell said. "But if you ever do decide to have an affair with anyone, I'm going to move right in with your wife. Her red hair turns me on."

"She's not available, you goddamn wimp."

"Be careful with my self-esteem, Noah."

"Screw your self-esteem. Hey, do you think maybe Howard knows what he's doing? Maybe his protectiveness is justified, what with all the crap going on at the Matches, Rimsky and his mind-bending rays, that jewelry robbery, the preponderance of KGB men. I can tell who they are because they have no necks. Like the U.S.C. football players at home, Parnell. Have you ever noticed that the Trojans have no necks? Just those massive heads attached to those hulking chests. That's what KGBs look like, too."

"Whether or not Howard knows what he's doing, it can't do any harm to have Linda so well protected," Parnell said.

And things were going well, knock wood, Noah thought. If Linda won the prize money, she could go off and spend it and her husband could justify his share as bodyguard fees.

· EIGHTEEN ·

Every day was, indeed, a beautiful day on St. Swillens. Debs felt the sun caress the parts of her body that were exposed by her sundress as she headed toward Linda's side of the pool. The Grandmistress was surrounded by Howard, a couple of purple people, and a young chess enthusiast who was asking for her autograph.

Before Debs could get there, Alethea stopped her with a "Hi," from under an umbrella-table's umbrella.

"Hi, I didn't see you," Debs said. "Tell me what happened. Any word from the Lieutenant?"

"Yes. He's found my jewels, but they're not quite mine yet."

"Alethea, what do you mean the jewels aren't quite yours yet? They *are* yours."

"Not quite. I've seen them, in their hiding place, actually, and so has Stan, but Murdock wants us to leave them there, for a reason I'm not allowed to talk about. I've just given my consent to let them remain

hidden. By the way, this is not to be told to anyone. Of course, since you're my friend, you aren't 'anyone.'"

Debs thanked Alethea for that. Since there was so little to tell about the jewels, Debs figured she wouldn't be tempted. But she was enormously pleased that Alethea now knew where they were; the main thing was that they were not on Debs's own person. If she had one more piece planted in her room or on her clothes, she wouldn't be able to take it.

"Want a Perrier to celebrate?" Alethea asked.

"No, thanks. I'll have to be content with tap water from now on as Cal and I speed up the book." She held up her tape recorder. "I'm on my way to interview The Woman Who Played the Game of the '80s. I don't know why, but I'm feeling optimistic about getting something quotable out of her. Cal managed to, and he's not even the human-interest-person half of our book. Today feels like my day."

Debs worked her way past Linda's worshippers and soon found optimism dimming. Her questions were answered with sullen "uh huhs" and reluctant "yeahs." Debs couldn't very well use the story of her life to draw Linda out, since the Grandmaster had already heard Calvin's, and Debs's was too similar. She debated about giving up on the interview and talking, instead, to the people who had been around the game. Fans, perhaps? Get their reaction? Calvin was, right now, speaking to Noah and Parnell. Debs knew the two Seconds hadn't wanted to spare him the time, had felt it would take away from what they were supposed to be doing: preparing for the coming game with Gameliel. But apparently Cal had tempted them to relive the fabulous win.

Debs was about to leave when she saw Linda's eyes light up. Linda had been off in another world. What had brought her to life? Debs followed the direction of

Linda's eyes. It was a hat walking by, a large, white woven straw hat with Bipsey under it.

"That's just what I've been wanting," Linda said. "I didn't bring one, didn't know I'd be out of my room this much, but Howard believes in fresh air."

"Don't you believe in fresh air, Linda?" Debs asked.

"Of course not," Linda said, and called out, "Bipsey, where did you get your hat?"

The blonde turned her head, smiled, and came over to stand by Linda.

"Hi," Bipsey said. "Billy tells me you did fabulously yesterday."

"That's what everybody's telling me, but what I want you to tell me is where I can get that hat."

Bipsey sat down on one of the webbed chairs and said, "From a nice native, who also sells lovely shell necklaces. He walks up and down the beach, carrying a stack of these hats on his head and strings of beads over each arm. The hats are hand-woven, would you believe?"

Howard looked up from his book as his name was paged. He got up and turned to Linda, telling her not to budge, that he'd be right back.

Bipsey took off her hat and handed it to the Grandmaster.

"Here, try it on. Oh, it looks lovely on you."

Debs had to echo that. Linda was becoming even more beautiful as she was disappearing. Her weight loss did not make her look pinched; it only made her look more ethereal.

"This is a perfect time to go looking for the hat man," Bipsey said. "The sandflies won't be out for an hour or more."

Linda got up to go with Bipsey, and Debs invited herself along, saying she was a sucker for shell beads.

What she really wanted was something quotable, and she thought that might come out in the relaxed atmosphere of three women searching for a walking hat and necklace store.

They began strolling along the damp sand, close to the water, but when Linda complained that the sun's rays were giving her skin cancer, Bipsey suggested they walk up near the palm line and continue their stroll in the shade of the trees.

Debs was rewarded with something worthwhile when they were just a short distance from the hotel. Bipsey and Linda were making small talk about clothes, but the small talk turned into quotable substance when Linda began to reveal how she felt about her image: she collected winning dresses for winning games. They made her feel good and her enemies feel rotten. She had ignored her body and concentrated on her head until Howard had made her understand that her body was the temple of her art. She had resolved to eat no more junk foods. Howard had taught her to bicycle, not giving up on her even though she'd been awful at first. She described her athletic awfulness.

Damn. Debs had left her tape recorder back by the pool. Not to worry. These words were going to be easy to remember. Debs saw three divinely muscled men, who obviously hadn't needed a Howard to remind them to treat their bodies like temples, getting ready to snorkel. They were walking among the palms, their heads covered with black rubber wet masks, which reminded Debs that if there was to be time before the end of the Match, she'd get outfitted and treat herself to St. Swillens's beautiful underwater world. With Calvin.

If there wasn't to be time, then she'd perhaps come back someday to this island with Cal. The thought made her happy. A lot of things made her happy today—the news that the jewels had been found, this in-

terview that was going so well with no questions from her, and the fact that she was recognizing she was more than halfway in love with Cal. She'd be sure to tell him first, not her editor. It was one of those moments when one feels like bursting into song, a moment cut short when she felt the gun in her back.

■ NINETEEN ■

Debs was stretched out in the bottom of the boat, along with Linda and Bipsey. None of the three men had bothered to tie her hands. Not necessary, she thought, as she looked at the gun trained on her by one of the black-masked men. Even if he hadn't held a gun, the odds were uneven. All three had strong, muscular bodies. Each could have qualified for a *Playgirl* centerfold. Maybe not, Debs reconsidered. Who knew what ugly faces might be beneath those rubber masks?

Was the sound of the motor loud enough for her to risk talking to Linda and Bipsey? She'd risk it. Debs turned slightly toward Bipsey, whose eyes were squeezed shut, obviously in an effort to close out the sight of that gun. Unbelievably, Bipsey still had on her white hat.

"Bipsey," Debs said.

The honeymooner opened her eyes.

"What?"

"Courage. I don't know, I guess there isn't anything else to say. Do you see a way out of this?"

"I've been thinking, thinking, but all I've come up with is that I should have taken karate instead of yoga. And the classes were taught in the same building."

Debs sighed. She, herself, had always meant to take a class in self-defense but had never gotten around to it.

"Maybe Billy will miss me soon and come searching," Bipsey said wistfully.

Debs didn't want to point out that the probable reason their captors had made the three women lie flat in the boat was so that no one could see them from shore. Poor Bipsey wasn't thinking very clearly. But one of the finest chess minds of the century was lying on the other side of Debs. Chess, an art, a science, a battle. Please, let chess come to their aid.

"Linda?"

"Yeah."

"Try to think of this as a chess problem," Debs suggested.

"Can't. In chess you're matched evenly, given the same number of pieces as your opponent. These men have the gun."

So that was the opinion of one of the finest chess minds of the century. Couldn't argue with it.

Debs's thoughts went to Cal, Howard, and Billy. They'd miss their women but not know where to find them. One of Linda's fans or one of the purple people who had been at her feet might tell Howard, when he returned from his phone call, that the three women had gone in search of the straw-hat and shell-bead man. But what good would that do?

"Lost on a shopping trip"—that would be her epitaph. How awful for a NOW woman.

"Get up." The man's tone was peremptory.

Debs sat up, as did Linda and Bipsey.

"All the way. On your feet," he said. "Jump overboard."

Debs stood still. Bipsey and Linda did not move, either. They were probably as frozen as she.

"I can't swim," Linda said. It was a statement, not a plea, and Debs felt proud of her.

Debs, a born Angelino, could swim and surf like one. She wanted to tell Linda not to worry about drowning, that she, Debs, could keep the two of them going. But to where? The shoreline was far, far away. The man moved forward, menacing them with the gun. A bullet or the ocean? No choice, really. If she didn't jump now, it would be both the bullet and the ocean. Debs took a deep breath and dove into the chilly water. She swam to the surface, turned her head and saw the boat leaving. Its wake mockingly rocked her.

Something white floated nearby. Bipsey's hat. Where was Bipsey?

Debs sighted frantic white arms waving in the air. Linda's dark hair was floating between those arms, her head below the surface. Debs swam toward her. By the time she reached Linda, the arms no longer flailed. Knowing the tiger strength that can come to a drowning person, the burst of adrenaline that can pull the would-be rescuer under, Debs was prepared to knock Linda out before getting into the rescuer-rescuee position. But it wasn't necessary. As Debs pulled Linda's face out of the water, it looked more than half-dead, bluish and translucent, the eyelids locked shut.

Debs, with Linda in tow, began to swim toward the distant shore. But there was no way she could make it. Those masked bastards had seen to that. Her vision blurred in anger, and she could hear her heart beating loudly and hollowly, like the waves around her.

Debs's muscles felt torn as she swam, and her belly

ached from swallowed salt water. The white fangs of the waves bit at her. She wished for an enormous wave, like the ones in Japanese woodcuts, a kindly wave that would take her by its tip and deposit her ashore along with Linda. But there were only cruel waves in this ocean.

Her arms were loose in their sockets, her hands numb. This was the point at which to close one's eyes and give up hope. A school of blue fish scattered at her approach, probably the last living thing she'd see. There was a shadow behind them. The fish were emerging from a coral reef! A coral reef! One close enough to the surface to give her a place to stand? To rest?

No, not quite this one from which the fish had come, but hope made her swim on.

Even without her glasses she could see a taller reef beginning to appear, the hoped-for one so close to the surface. She soon stood victoriously on the coral, but let out a scream because the vicious stuff was razor-edged. Debs almost let go of Linda, but stubbornness had brought the two this far, and Debs was not going to let one of the greatest chess minds of the century float out to the beyond. Whatever it was that swamis think of when they're standing on a bed of needles, she willed herself to think, even though she didn't know what it was.

Like a hiker realizing how exhausted he is only when he stops hiking, Debs knew now that this rest, if standing on needles could be called a rest, was saving her life. Exhaustion would not have permitted her past this point.

She looked down at the bed of pink, turquoise, and yellow coral beneath her. Exquisite. She could distinguish starfish, schools of striped fishes. There was a yellowish plant that looked like human hair, blond hair,

caught among the hard pieces of coral. A chill passed through her. Bipsey? Bipsey?

Debs concentrated on holding on to Linda.

“Yoo-hoo. Are you in trouble?” A dim voice from the shore.

Debs cried out, “Yes! Help!”

The small figure standing on the distant shore began running to the ocean. It seemed like forever before a red head bobbed up next to Debs. Jacqueline Bond, bless her.

“You look like hell,” the editor of the leading feminist magazine told Debs.

“Thank you, thank you,” Debs wept.

Jacqueline relieved her of the burden of Linda and said, “I think I’ll take her in first and come back for you. You don’t look as though you could make it to shore on your own.”

“I can’t make it, I just can’t. Please come back.”

“I will. Don’t worry. But don’t pass out. Promise me. Just you don’t pass out, okay?”

“I promise.”

Jacqueline set off with Linda. Debs, waiting her turn, found it hard to keep her promise. Her feet had gone numb from their bloodletting on the rocks. Thank God there were no sharks around to sniff out the scent of blood. Billy and Bipsey had once told her these waters were shark-free. Poor Bipsey. It wasn’t sharks that had done her in but, rather, the cruelty of man.

Jacqueline’s red head bobbed up in the water, and Debs gratefully let herself become the rescuee. When Jacqueline finally stood her up and helped her walk the last part of the way to shore, she caught a glimpse of Howard leaning over Linda’s body, applying CPR. Debs thought she heard Cal’s voice calling her name just before she passed out.

And it was his voice Debs heard when she opened her eyes.

"You scared the shit out of me," he said.

Debs smiled. She felt cherished, loved. Life was good.

That was before Lieutenant Murdock appeared on the beach and accused her of murdering Bipsey.

• TWENTY •

Gameliel believed in the Goddess. Being an archaeologist as well as a superb chess player, he was keenly aware of early man's knowledge that God was a woman, and Gameliel agreed. Think of all those early goddess figurines. And Gameliel *knew* the goddess had laid the Universal Egg. He was very taken with Isis, Astarte, Demeter, Artemis, *et al.* He'd finished his manuscript on the newly discovered circular stone bas relief of Coyolxauhqui, the Aztec moon goddess, and had sent it off to his favorite archaeology magazine just before coming to this Match, where he knew he'd play his usual insightful, clever game of chess with everyone, except Linda.

As he crossed the stage and sat down at the chess table, he tried to shake free of superstition. He was going to give this game his best. He sat up a little straighter and made his opening move.

Linda's time clock was running. Where was she? The goddess, uh, woman, was known for being tem-

peramental, hysterical, and bratty but never *late*. Time passed. More time passed. Gameliel remembered a friend of his saying, "What one needs for chess is not brains but buttocks." Some truth in this. Gameliel took the pressure off his buttocks by getting up and walking to the refreshment area just offstage. He poured himself some coffee but was too tense to drink it. He peeked out at the stage and saw that Linda's chair was still vacant. Perhaps luck was with him. He would win by default if she didn't appear, or else beat the daylights out of her if she did show up late for she'd be in time trouble, would be forced to say good-bye to deep-laid plans and just make moves. Time trouble distorted a player's game terribly, just terribly.

Gameliel relaxed and treated himself to a glazed doughnut. When he'd wiped the crumbs from his fingers, he returned to the stage, sat down, and looked at the restless audience, part of which was in the process of walking out. He smiled at one of his fans and then folded his arms across his chest and enjoyed the feeling of time running, running away on his opponent's clock.

Linda walked in, not looking like a goddess. Her lips were cracked, there were long scratches on her arms and legs, and her dark hair was damply clinging to her head. When she came closer, he noticed little red spots all up and down her arms and legs. Sandflies.

Gameliel, congratulating himself on his own unruffled appearance, rose, smiled at Linda, and proffered his hand. Linda ignored it, moved a pawn, pushed the lever that started her opponent's clock and then shook hands with Gameliel on his time. The bitch.

Gameliel sat and made his move. Linda responded immediately, punched the lever, and then leaned forward to scratch her leg. The woman wasn't wasting a second to think through what she obviously recognized as the Kieseritzky gambit. There were well-thought-out

responses that past masters had made, and Linda was availing herself of stored knowledge. Her moves were speeded up, played like the reels of early cowboy movies.

So, if she knew Kieseritzky, he'd think of something else. Gameliel took his time while Linda scratched an arm. It occurred to him that she scratched her arms and legs only when he was on the move. Why didn't she scratch on her time? A ridiculous distraction. The woman shouldn't have gone to the beach when the sandflies were out. There was a warning brochure in every hotel room. Gameliel was not a kvetch, rarely called a Referee, but it was time to make an exception.

The Referee sympathized but explained that Linda's Seconds had informed him she'd just been rescued from drowning and that, over their objections, she had turned down the house physician's offer of a shot of antihistamine. It would have controlled her allergic reaction to the bites but would have fogged her thinking.

What a woman! To have risen from the ocean, like Venus, and come to play this game, scratched by coral and bitten by sandflies! He doubted he could do such a thing. Gameliel looked into her lovely face.

Her eyes were always described as "blue," but they were violet today. Was it, perhaps, the reflection from her lavender dress? No, the disks, themselves, were that lovely shade of light purple. Her hair was beginning to dry and softly frame her serious face. Had her bout with the ocean made her "suffer a sea change into something rich and strange"?

Gameliel looked down at the chess board and resolved not to be distracted by the sea witch. He liked the position of his pieces. He'd centralized his forces. Now it was time to exert pressure. He took twenty-seven minutes to figure out how. Linda left for the refreshment area. Good. Let her scratch in there. When

he moved, to his satisfaction, she returned and made a move that was either dubious or deep. Gameliel thought it out. It was neither. It was just a move. No such thing in chess as "just a move." But that one was.

Damn, that doughnut he'd eaten was lying under his heart, trying to make a permanent home there. He'd love to get something to drink. Soon Linda would slow her moves and he could go for coffee. Perhaps he was overextending himself by using his Knights too freely. No, no, not to worry. But it would be nice to get his Bishop on the . . . no, what he'd really like to do was, yes, no, ah, yes . . . he would shut off Linda's Bishop's action on the long diagonal. He used his Knight to do this. Gameliel was using his horses a lot in this game, rather prettily.

Linda came back and took her time. He left for coffee, with the picture in his mind of where the chess pieces were placed. He liked what he saw. Three-quarters of the way through his drink, he heard Linda punch the clock. Gameliel returned and looked at her face, although he'd resolved not to. There were tears in her violet eyes. Were they tears of pain from her bites or did the tears have something to do with the move she'd just made, hatred of herself for having made it? Boris Spassky had been known to cry over lost games. But Boris's face was usually impassive when he played. Linda, too, was known for controlling her facial expressions. What went on here?

Gameliel looked down at the board. No wonder she was crying. She'd moved her other Bishop where he could take it. All he'd have to do . . . But was it the beginning of an elaborate trap? No, Linda was in time trouble, had no leisure in which to think out magnificent complications. But he checked this out, anyway, didn't reach for her Bishop like a greedy boy.

If she was pretending to cry over a bad move that

turned out to be a good one—well, that was strictly illegal and he'd get her for it. It wasn't the old days, when an opponent could trick you by wringing his hands or smiting his forehead.

But, damn, Linda's Seconds had told the Referee she was in pain. If he, Gameliel, complained of tears over what might turn out to be a "good" move, the tears might not be considered illegal. "You should have played the board, not your opponent's face," his own Seconds would tell him.

The board and Linda's tears told him she'd made a bad move. Gameliel took the Bishop.

Her trap unfolded in a particularly cruel way. Linda moved like an avenging Demeter. Damn, he'd known, deep down, this was going to happen. The Fates were three powerful goddesses who determined the lives of men: Clotho wove the thread of life, Lachesis measured it out, and Atropos cut it off with her scissors of death. When a goddess gives you a squash between her hands, you're done for. Gameliel wrote "Resigns" on his score sheet.

Linda accepted his handshake, then put her hands to her face and wept the tears of pain she had tried so hard to control during the game.

Debs woke up, feeling worn and torn. She looked down at her feet, the part of her that hurt the most, and saw mummy's feet, wrapped in layers of gauze. It came to her now that the house physician had cleansed her coral wounds, salved the sandfly stings and given her an antihistamine shot to halt an allergic reaction to the tormenting bites.

The shot had put her to sleep for who knew how long. Debs wasn't going to make the effort of raising her head to look at a clock. In fact, she was going to damn well close her eyes again. But when she did, she

saw an aquascape of yellow, purple, and pink coral, a school of electric-blue fish, and soft blonde hair caught in the reef. Poor, drowned Bipsey. Tears leaked from under Debs's lids. The news must have reached a heartbroken Billy by now. Such unnecessary tragedy. The murderer had hired the thugs to get Linda and Debs, but Bipsey, who wasn't even a target, had not survived.

Debs remembered that Calvin and the house physician had been hovering over her when Lieutenant Murdock had walked in. He'd questioned Debs and then dashed her hopes that Bipsey had come to shore somewhere else, adding that Debs had turned up around one victim too many. Murdock really knew how to hurt a girl. Calvin had flared up and told him to get the hell out of the room. If he had to bully someone, why not question Linda about the three thugs? The Lieutenant had answered that he couldn't, that Linda was on the stage playing her game with Gameliel.

"She's crazy. She can't play chess in her condition," Cal had said. "Why didn't she postpone the game?"

"Her Seconds told me she didn't want to, because she needs time to gear up to play Botslimik."

Linda was probably losing to Gameliel at this very moment, Debs speculated, but you had to give the girl credit for courage. Speaking of which, she, herself, was now going to courageously open her eyes once and for all and keep them open and face up to reality. Reality was awful. The ceiling of her room was pale puce.

"Oh, God," she said.

"I'm here."

Debs, startled, turned her head and saw Calvin spread out on the other twin bed, notebook and pen in hand. He put these objects down on the nightstand and came over and sat at the foot of her bed.

"It took forever for you to wake up," he complained. "I've been forced to write in longhand. There are some co-authors still working on this book, while others go swimming and sleeping."

"Oh, Cal, I'm so upset."

"We all are. We had a Committee Meeting—Howard, Parnell, Noah, Alethea, Stan, Jacqueline Bond, and myself. We aren't going to let you or Linda ever again be vulnerable. From now until the end of the Match, which, thank God, will be over soon, you won't be left alone."

"Thank you."

"Uh, I now have to inform you of a decision. The Committee voted that I should move in with you because I'm here a lot, anyway, and also because I'm available. I now have my things here. But I promise, vow, swear, pledge, affirm that I won't make any passes, verbal or otherwise. I'll remain fully dressed at all times so you won't be tempted by my bod. Really, Debs, this is a platonic plan, to have someone with you day and night."

"What about when you need to cover the games?"

"Noah, Parnell, Stan, or any of the others might relieve me once in a while. The two Seconds are downstairs with Linda right now, covering the Gameliel game, which will obviously be a win for that man in view of the condition Linda's in. They've offered to share notes with me, something that isn't normally done, but we're all cooperating."

"Take a letter to the Committee and tell them I'm grateful. Damn, I can't get the image of those strands of Bipsey's hair waving in the coral out of my mind."

"Wipe it out now, you nearsighted idiot. Those weren't strands of hair; they were coral, itself. More than one species looks like hair. The odds of Bipsey's

winding up caught in the particular reef you were standing on are not discussable."

"I guess my myopia also made me think the shoreline was even farther away than it was when Jacqueline rescued me. It's a good thing I lost only my sunglasses and still have my regular ones; otherwise, we'd never get this book done. Hey, I had meant to ask you before I gave way to sleep, how come you and the other men showed up?"

"Number One, the shoreline was plenty far away from the reef. Those men meant you to die, no question about that. Number Two, Howard called Linda's room for help from Noah and Parnell. I happened to have been there with them. We had Gameliel papers spread out all over her room. After Howard had taken Linda out to the pool area, he was planning to come back with her when Parnell and Noah had finished analyzing Gameliel's possible opening move. The two Seconds were taking some time out to give me some info on the 'Game of the 80s,' when the phone rang. I heard Parnell say, 'Sounds harmless enough to me, Howard, three women going off in search of some hats.' . . . Parnell gave Noah a here-we-go-again look . . . then the expression on Parnell's face changed as he listened and said, 'We'll be right down.' Parnell told us to move our asses and wouldn't stop to explain until we ran out and got into the elevator. He told us that Howard had been paged to what turned out to be a phony call. Howard had gone back to where he'd left a now-missing Linda. One of her fans said she'd gone off with Bipsey and you to look for the hat man. The fan pointed out the direction. Howard followed but saw no one there so headed back in the other direction. Again, no one. But the fan had been honest because when we burst out of the elevator and joined Howard and went

off in that direction, we did find Linda, looking like a beached seal, and saw Jacqueline towing you in."

Debs groaned.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" Calvin asked.

"Yes. Find out who wants to kill me. I'd also like a diet Cola and a grilled cheese sandwich."

"First things first," Calvin said, and called room service. After he'd placed the order, he turned to Debs. "We'd have to figure out why Isaac was murdered and by whom before we could get to you. Everything hinges on Isaac's death. Why don't the three of us think it out?"

Debs raised her head to look for a third person but realized Calvin had meant his typewriter when she saw him go over and pull up a chair to it. Raising her head had hurt. She moaned, then complained, "I have a headache."

"Where?"

Debs began to raise her hand to indicate her head, then stopped and said, "Cal, I was almost suckered. Do you realize how weak I am?"

"Um hum."

He typed for several minutes and then sat back and looked at the paper that was still rolled in the machine.

"What did she say, what did she say?" Debs asked.

"She says we should get a profile of the murderer, include everything we know or think we know about him, so far. Her contribution is that: One, he doesn't speak Russian and, Two, he stole Alethea's jewels to use as a bribe for the Soviets."

"How does she figure that?"

"Well, she says Kilroy—that's what she calls him now—went to the opening night chess party, ready to make some kind of deal with the Russians. Here's Kilroy, the black Knight wanting to become white, or

vice versa (we know that Kamkoff was the other Knight), hot to find himself a Russian to speak to. He finds one he considers ideal, Isaac, who is speaking Russian with the Soviets smoothly, beautifully, laughing and joking with them—after all, it is his native tongue. When Isaac does speak English, it's with the accent retained from his youth. The perfect Soviet citizen, Kilroy decides. Kilroy needs to make contact with a Russian who speaks enough English to understand him when he says he wants to go to Russia, for certain reasons which you and I haven't been able to figure out. I, Kilroy, speak English only and wouldn't be able to make myself understood by some of these Russians standing around, like Kamkoff and his Seconds, who are speaking not such great English when they speak to Americans at the party."

"Tell her that Kilroy was in need of money. That's part of his profile," Debs said.

"How do you figure that?"

Debs's sandwich arrived, and she ate it avidly, permitting no interruptions. Ocean water, fatigue, the headache—all had given her a monster appetite. She ate the sandwich, the potato chips that surrounded it, the olives and the pickles, before she took her first sip of diet Cola.

Cal drank coffee and watched her.

"You have an appetite that would please even my mother. Should I order you another?" he asked.

"No, thank you. What was I saying? In need of money. Yes, Kilroy definitely needed money for some reason other than normal greed."

Cal went back to the typewriter and hit the keys as Debs dictated, "If he were rich, he'd have offered his own money as a bribe, wouldn't have wanted to call attention to himself with a jewelry robbery. His first choice would have been to give his own money."

"She buys it." Calvin patted his typewriter, looked up, and nodded. "Isaac is amused but aloof, saying he can't be of any help to Kilroy. Isaac, of course, doesn't pay any attention to the bribe and certainly doesn't realize it consists of Alethea's jewels. Kilroy, as you say, doesn't want attention called to himself, so he asks the desk clerk for the key to your room and plants the peacock pin in your jewelry folder."

"Why pick on me?"

Calvin turned back to his typewriter and typed out a single sentence. He read it to Debs, "Because you're the press and the press is corrupt."

"Your typewriter doesn't like me. She never has."

"That's not true. She does like you. What she meant was that in Kilroy's mind the press is corrupt."

"There are other journalists staying in the hotel."

"But you're a writer *and* a friend of Alethea's. You'd been seen with her. As a friend, you'd be more apt to have access to her room."

"Both Kilroy and your typewriter have mean minds. But, getting into that next day, can you imagine what an awful moment it must have been for Kilroy when he found out Isaac was Linda's chief Second?"

Calvin said, "Kilroy probably approached Isaac and said, 'I'd like to talk to you,' and Isaac, being a kind person, may have told Kilroy, 'Don't worry, I won't tell anyone you're trying to contact the Soviet higher-ups. It's not my business, but I, personally, think you're making a mistake if you expect something good is awaiting you in the Soviet Union.'"

"Kilroy has no intention of defecting to Russia as Isaac so innocently believes. He wants to go there for another reason, which we haven't figured out just yet. Kilroy realizes that soon the news of the robbery will be all over the hotel. He still has the key to my room in his pocket, and he invites Isaac into *my* room, pretending

it's his, Kilroy's. Isaac is busy, doesn't want to go, but is swayed because Kilroy is rather charming, appealing in a way, and Isaac wants to tell him he's foolish, that Isaac's own parents left when he was young, and he considers himself fortunate to be a U.S. citizen and that opting for Russia doesn't make sense."

Calvin typed, then looked up and said, "Kilroy murders Isaac, using your monk's belt, being consistent about pointing the finger at you. He has no idea you're going to be with people all morning and will have an alibi. He schleps Isaac's body to the bathroom and leaves. But why does he bother to drag his victim to the bathroom? I guess to buy a little time, maybe? So that when we come in, we might not discover it for a while?"

"Perhaps," Debs said. "But we do discover it, call Lieutenant Murdock, and get told to keep our mouths shut."

"Kilroy, in the meantime, goes off and finds himself an authentic Russian, giving him the jewels but keeping out the firefly pin, which he plans to plant on you because he's miffed that nobody did anything about the peacock pin being in your folder. He's consistent about pointing to you. The Soviet accepts the remaining jewels, planning to black-market them when he gets home. He promises Kilroy the contact he so desperately wants."

"I think we could call Kilroy naïve. He's also nuts, going from one crime to another, trying to kill Linda with the strobe lights, not realizing that whatever Isaac had told her had gone over her head. Then, Kilroy tries for Linda and me together, although how he timed that I cannot possibly fathom, unless he always has three thugs waiting in the background for such opportunities."

Calvin said, "And where are the jewels? In an ob-

vious place, as far as Murdock is concerned. He's shown them to Alethea and Stan. By asking the owner to leave them in their hiding place, he's either trying to keep from embarrassing the Soviet chess delegation or else hoping to catch Isaac's murderer with the jewels as a lure."

"Probably the second reason," Debs said. "For all we know, the jewels may not have been passed to the Soviet yet, and if they had, I doubt that Kilroy would know where the Russian hid them or would want to check them out, even if he did know."

"Everything gets a little hazy about here, especially the thugs on the beach part. Your encounter with Linda and Bipsey was far too casual for the setup to have worked so smoothly. But we'll work that out another time." Cal patted his typewriter and said, "Do you realize she's told us a lot?"

"Oh, I don't know. I think I contributed, too."

"We've got a nice profile here," Calvin said.

"But not a name. Unless you want to count 'Kilroy.' Does she have any other name to offer?"

Calvin sat staring at the paper in the roller and finally had to say, "No."

"Damn, I can't confine myself to this room until she finds out. As soon as my feet heal, I'll bribe my way onto the Committee and vote in favor of letting me out of here."

Calvin came over and sat on the edge of her bed. "Things are serious," he said. "And dangerous. Kilroy isn't sane. You're supposed to be scared."

"I am scared."

"Then I can stay?"

"Only on one condition."

"What?"

Debs took Calvin's head in her hands, pulled him to her, and said, "That you don't make your stay pla-

tonic." She kissed him thoroughly and thoughtfully. They proceeded to heavy necking. Debs stopped for a second to say, "Cal darling, do me one small favor."

"Anything."

"Cover your typewriter."

"What? Oh, maybe you're right. It's better she shouldn't see this."

· TWENTY-ONE ·

Their lovemaking had been exquisite, and Debs snuggled happily in Cal's arms. She shifted slightly and said, "Ouch, the gauze on my mummy's feet is beginning to scratch. You didn't get to sleep with the ideal woman."

"You may not be perfect, but parts of your body are excellent."

The phone rang. Cal said, "Damn," and picked it up. "Oh, hi, Lieutenant I hope you're calling to apologize to my fiancée. Yes, we're engaged to be married. Thank you."

Debs hissed at Cal, "We are not, and just in case we are, how come you're telling Murdock before telling me?"

"Just a minute, Lieutenant." Cal put his hand over the mouthpiece and hissed back, "I have middle-age values. You don't think I mess around, do you?"

"We've got to think this out, Cal. I don't do well

with marriage. If I had Woody Allen's talent, I could make a fortune writing about my ex-mate."

"So could I. Let's co-author a book on former spouses." Cal took his hand off the mouthpiece and said, "Sorry, Lieutenant. . . . Oh, you did talk to Linda. Was her game adjourned? . . . Won! Fantastic!" Cal sat up. "Thanks. We told you Linda's story would match Debs's. My fiancée accepts your grudging apology. No . . . no . . . yes, she'll keep away from future victims because she's holed up here, anyway. . . . Thanks. Yeah. Good-bye." He put the phone down and said, "We've got to get dressed. Linda's on her way up to thank you for saving her life."

As they threw their clothes on, Calvin said, "You'll love being married to me. I'm very domesticated."

"What does that mean?"

"That I'm faithful and that I hang around the house a lot."

Debs stopped for a minute to kiss him. "I know you'd be faithful, Cal. You have a beautiful relationship with your typewriter. You're not the kind of man who'd desert someone over a few wrinkles. But I don't know if hanging around the house a lot is good for a marriage."

"Sure it is. I type, I tinker, I pace until I get ideas, and I have lunch at home."

Debs groaned.

There was a knock. As Debs stretched back out on the bed and Cal opened the door, she was tempted to groan again. The entire Don't-Let-Linda-or-Debs-Ever-Be-Vulnerable-Again Committee was arriving. Linda was escorted by Howard, Noah, and Parnell. Alethea, Stan, and Jacqueline Bond were a second behind them. Apparently, now that the game was over, people were ready to play social "catch up."

"Let's have a party," Cal said and was about to order drinks when Howard stopped him. "We'd love

to, but we're only going to stay a second. We've got to get the doctor to our room for Linda."

Alethea went over to Debs and pecked her on the cheek. "You look lovely. Rested. Glowing. What have you been doing to yourself?"

Debs fought back a blush.

Noah and Parnell were giving Calvin a copy of Linda's game with Gameliel and pointing out the trap. Cal said, "Poor guy. I can see why he suckered. It looks so tempting."

The Grandmaster who had set the trap approached Debs and held out a limp, transparent, blue-veined hand that was covered with sandfly bites. Debs, thinking she was supposed to shake that hand, reached out but realized Linda was thrusting a paper upon her. Debs took it and read the dedication at the top of the scoresheet. "To Debs" was written in Linda's childlike writing.

"Thank you, thank you very much, Linda. I hope someday I'll learn enough about chess to fully understand the beauty in your games. The beauty of my name being on one of them is something I certainly understand and appreciate."

"Yeah," Linda said, and turned and walked out, followed by Howard, who stopped first, briefly, to kiss Debs on her forehead and tell her he'd love her all his life for what she'd done.

"I didn't hear *her* say thank you," Jacqueline Bond said as the door closed.

"She did, she did. I may have been more effusive when I thanked you on the beach, Jacqueline, but Linda gushed forth a game dedicated to me. And under what circumstances."

Jacqueline sat down on the edge of Debs's bed and said, "That lavender lollipop is made of steel. Can you believe how incredible *she* is? After Howard admin-

istered CPR, he carried her to their room, where she rejected a doctor, changed her clothes, screamed at her Seconds, telling them she was not going to postpone today's game, ran a comb through her wet hair, and headed for the stage, at the foot of which someone named Lieutenant Murdock, wanting to question her about the murder attempt, waited. She glared at him, ran up the steps, made her opening move, and punched the time clock. I learned all this from Howard, who, you're right, is a living doll, a true Leonard Woolf."

"There's a softness in Linda, Jacqueline, otherwise Howard wouldn't love her so much. Do you realize she came to thank me just now *before* going to her room to see the doctor?"

"Good point."

There was a knock, and Calvin opened the door. A huge, elegant bouquet of tropical flowers was brought in by a bellboy, whose hands were not free to shut the door behind him. Calvin was reaching for the flowers and everyone was "oohing" and "ahhing." Debs couldn't imagine a more inappropriate moment for Billy to step through the open doorway. Damn. She felt awful. If she'd known he was still at the hotel, she would have limped to his room on her cut feet and paid a condolence call.

Calvin had put the flowers on a table and opened the card. "This cheap bouquet is from Alethea and Stan, and they say . . ." He looked up and trailed off guiltily as he, too, saw Billy.

The young man smiled cheerfully at everyone, came over to Debs, and held out his hands to her. "I haven't given up hope," he said. Up close, the cheerful smile was shaky.

"Billy, I would have done anything I could, but . . ."

"I know you would have. You were rescuing Linda. Bipsey knows how to swim. You had your hands full and had no way of knowing how treacherous certain tides can be even for good swimmers like Bipsey."

"I'm so terribly sorry."

"Don't be. The fact that you and Linda made it gives me reason to hope."

There were contradictions in what both of them were saying, but Debs wasn't about to point them out.

"I'll be staying on St. Swillens a couple of days longer," Billy said. "Everyone's been very kind, but I feel close to you because you were with Bipsey. Please come visit me. It gets kind of lonely."

"I meant to before, but I didn't know you were still here." Oh, that was awful, sounded as though she'd assumed he'd gone home in defeat, hadn't waited for the "treacherous tide" to deposit Bipsey safely on an uninhabited island, or something. "I will come see you, Billy."

Alethea and Jacqueline began chattering away at Debs, fast, as Billy spent some time with Noah, Parnell, Calvin, and Stan. It was good of her friends to distract her.

"Will your feet be well by the time of the closing party, heeled enough to get into heels? Ha, ha, I made a pun." Jacqueline laughed.

Debs sighed. "I don't know what they look like under the gauze, but I'll be at the party, sandaled or not. I deserve it."

"I hope you'll wear that lovely blue revealing dress you got at the boutique," Alethea said.

"I haven't seen it," Jacqueline told Alethea. "Is it a dress for success?"

"And how," Alethea said. "One of those lucky things that Debs fell upon."

"She was lucky if she found it here. My big complaint is that it always takes such time and planning to dress for success."

Debs felt a tingle, a chill, that went from her head to her mummified feet. "You've just said something profound," she said, looking at Jacqueline.

"I did?" The redhead looked startled and then mockingly annoyed. "I see you haven't been reading my latest articles. I think I come on far more profound in those."

"I mean it, Jacqueline. Please repeat it."

"All I asked, when Alethea mentioned your blue dress was, 'Is it a dress for success?'"

"Go on."

"I'm jealous," Alethea said before Jacqueline could go on. "I said, 'And how,' to Jacqueline's question. Don't you find that profound?"

"No, Alethea. But what you said next, dear friend, was almost as profound as what Jacqueline said after."

"I'm flattered. What did I say next?" Alethea asked.

"You said," Debs told her, "and I quote, 'One of those lucky things that Debs fell upon.'"

Alethea said, "Debs, honey, I may not be Martin Buber, but I have made more profound statements than that in my lifetime."

"Ditto for me," Jacqueline said. "But if you want a repeat, I said, 'She was lucky if she found it here. My big complaint is that it always takes such time and planning to dress for success.' Now, if you can solve a mystery with that, don't quote me. I'll deny the credit. You'll set the women's movement on its ass."

"I want out, too," Alethea said. "No offense."

"You've distracted me," Debs said. "Now the god-

damn clue has evaporated. I almost had something. I swear I did."

"Maybe it will come back to you when we leave," Alethea said.

But when everyone did leave, Calvin began kissing Debs, and she forgot to think about the elusive clue.

· TWENTY-TWO ·

Two days later Noah yawned and dialed at the same time.

"Hi," he said to his wife.

"You did it. You did it," were her just-short-of-screaming words. "I watched on TV."

Noah yawned and corrected, "You watched the highlights. There isn't a television station in the world that would have stuck with that boring, miserable, but, thank God, won game."

"Everyone's in a fever over Linda. The first woman in the world to qualify to play the champion. And you're her Second, Noah. How does it feel to be a Prince Consort?"

Noah yawned again. "Sorry. Didn't mean to yawn in your face. I'm zonked beyond belief. Of course, I'm thrilled that she's entered the throne room. And Parnell and I have, too, I guess. But the game, hon, the game was the most boring ever. It'll probably be written up as 'a classic example of building a small advantage into

a winning one,' but that won't describe how many hours we sat on our asses. And in mausoleum silence. The excitement over the game was at fever pitch here at St. Swillens, too, so obviously the crowd was dead quiet. It's funny, at every other game in the world the crowd shows enthusiasm by being boisterous. In chess it's the opposite. Today's silence was stupendous."

"Linda must have been pleased."

"Very. She complained about 'crowd noise' only once, a kind of record for her. And the once may have been justified. How do I know? Perhaps a man swallowed his saliva or a kid blinked his eyes, something Parnell and I may have overlooked that Linda picked up on. All in all, it was a quiet game. It added to my fatigue to have to listen to the sounds of silence. When Linda finally got to the mopping-up operation, she . . ."

"You used to call it the End Game, Noah."

"When Linda finally got to the mopping-up operation—screw this End Game stuff—Parnell put his face in his hands and trembled with weariness. I was too tired to pat him on the back and say, 'There, there, old buddy.' In fact, I was ready to cry because no one was patting me on the back and saying, 'There, there, old buddy.' I'm dying, more than halfway dead."

"There, there, old buddy. And I love you for calling, even though you're so tired."

"I love you, too, and I love Alethea for paying for all these phone calls."

"Don't fall asleep until you tell me if there've been any more attempts on Linda's life."

"None. Parnell and Howard are with her now. Howard's writing a gracious acceptance speech for her to deliver at tonight's farewell party. Parnell is sleeping on Linda's couch, and Linda is asleep on her bed. I'll go relieve Parnell after my nap."

"Linda looked gorgeous, I'm sorry to say, in that dress. It televised as orangey-red."

"It was orangey-red. 'She came to the stage, a burning flame of energy and brilliance,' to quote one of the newsmen here. I expected her to come on strong in the game, breathing fire to match the dress, but she played like an old lady, a crazy, cunning, mean old lady."

"Keep thinking of her as an old lady, Noah. That's a good image. The kids are fine. They ask about you, too."

"I'm glad. I love you."

"Me, too. You, I mean. Can't wait to see you at the airport tomorrow night."

"And I can't wait to get home. Did I tell you how tired I am? I'm dying. Am I repeating myself? I love you."

Calvin rushed into Debs's room, grabbed and kissed her, reached for Stan's hand and shook it, then said, "She's won, our Linda, the dragon lady in the red dress."

Stan grinned and said, "Shee-it, as they say in Watts, am I glad." He folded his *Wall Street Journal* and tucked it under his arm. "I'll go see Alethea. She must be hysterically happy."

"That she is," Calvin said.

"Thanks for baby-sitting." Debs gave Stan a farewell peck on his cheek and then adjusted her eye-glasses.

"All this protection won't be necessary soon," Stan said. "We'll be off this damn island and safe in the City of the Angels."

Calvin said, "Thanks for giving me the chance to see the end of the game, the only good part, I gather, from the comments in the Analysis Room."

"It was no sacrifice for me to leave it and come up

here since it was the most put-a-spectator-to-sleep game I've ever witnessed. I was glad to read the *Journal* while Debs computerized. The last thing I expected was to have you return and tell us Linda won. I thought you'd say each player had lulled the other to sleep over the board. See you at the party tonight."

Left alone, Debs kissed Cal and said, "Stan is a good friend, but a child gets used to her own special baby-sitter. I've missed you."

Calvin proved how much he'd missed her by adding flourishes to the kiss.

Debs said, "I'm happy for Linda, America, Alethea, and our book. It'll be a success. I figured out when you were gone that it's about eighty percent done and Mod-emed. Every writer should have her feet bound. Look at the mounds of work we've produced in the last couple of days since I've been confined. Even taking a certain amount of waste into account, paper that you've chewed on and spat out, we've still covered a lot of pages with printout."

"One cigarette and I'd be able to finish off the book with one hand and solve the mystery with the other. But I'm not going to smoke, nope, not me. You'll be marrying a man of great character."

"Uh, Cal, I love you, you know I do, but I haven't said I'll marry you."

"That tears it. I'm going downstairs to buy a pack of coffin nails."

"Don't give in to nicotine craving, not over a mere woman, even if the woman is me. I do love you, Cal."

"I'm dealing with a crazy. You lead me on. If I so much as loosen the top button of my shirt, you jump into bed with me, bite my ears, claw my back, and whisper that you love me. I hate to think what you'd be like if you were in love with one of those calypso sing-

ers, who wears his shirt unbuttoned to his navel. But you say you won't marry me."

"I didn't say I won't marry you, all I said was that I haven't said I'll marry you. The odds are that I will. My mind is three-quarters on its way there. But marriage is deadly serious, and I was awful at it."

"Our marriage can be shallow, if you want it to be, Debs. You can't ask for a nicer offer than that."

"No, it'll be serious, Cal, but it won't be deadly serious."

She kissed him and unbuttoned the top button of his shirt. The phone rang.

Calvin said, "Don't forget where we left off," and picked up the receiver.

"Oh, hi, Quentin. Glad you could break away from lunch to call. Yeah, can you hang on? I want Debs to hear this, too."

Calvin motioned her to the bathroom, where she picked up the extension.

"Congratulations," their editor said. "Everyone in New York is talking about Linda. The book'll do well, and I want you two to do the even bigger one that'll come out when Linda plays the world champ."

"You've got more to congratulate us on, Quentin," Cal said. "Debs and I are three-fourths engaged to be married."

"Wonderful. Hi, Debs."

"Hi, Quentin."

"Can't wait to meet you in person," the editor said. "We've had just those New York-L.A. phone calls in which to get acquainted, but I liked what I heard. You'll enjoy being married to Cal . . . uh . . . or three-quarters married or engaged or whatever that means. Don't tell me what it means. I don't want to know

about today's couples. Anyway, congratulations. Where are you two kids going to live?"

"New York," Calvin was saying as Debs was saying, "Los Angeles."

There was a brief silence, which Calvin broke by saying, "She's kidding, of course. Can you picture me, Quentin, living in California, trying to tune in to the laid-back lifestyle, as they so fondly call it? In a few months I'd be saying things like, 'I know where you're coming from' and 'I need my space.' At dinner parties they'd check out my karma, want to find out if I'm a Pisces or a Leo. In New York I've never once told anyone my sign. It's private, unlisted. Out there they find ways to make you tell."

"You wouldn't fit in, I'll grant you that," Quentin sympathized.

"Californians are so self-absorbed," Calvin whined.

"On that basis, maybe you *could* fit in," the editor said.

Debs said sadly, "Quentin, Cal advertised himself to me as domesticated, so I assumed he was portable, that he could just as easily hang around my little house in California as he could in a scuzzy New York apartment. I have friends in Los Angeles. My message machine is probably jumping off my desk by now. My car is crazy about L.A.—it knows just where to go."

"Shortening your lifespan every time it drives through the smog," Calvin threw in.

"Children, children, don't fight," Quentin said. "I can see you both have a lot to work out. But nothing is insurmountable. Maybe you can commute. Young couples do it all the time now."

Calvin said crankily, "We're not a young couple. Well, she's a young couple, but I'm a middle-aged one."

"The fact that the two of you have fallen in love in

St. Swillens, on my time, time that should have been devoted to the book, is something I'll overlook because I'm not a hardhearted editor, but can we get down to business for just a minute? How far along are you on the book?"

"Eighty percent," Debs answered. "Which is more than the three-quarters we're at on the engagement. Cal has to do the analysis of today's game, and I have to do some interviews at the party tonight, if I can get my awful feet into some shoes."

"Why are you marrying a woman with awful feet, Cal?" Quentin asked.

"Because the rest of her is perfect. She has a face that will melt even your hard heart. Somebody tried to kill her, which is why her feet are bad, but that's a long story."

"She's trouble, Cal. Get rid of her."

"How did you do with the police procedural writer?" Calvin asked his editor.

"Very well. I've got tons of useless information for you, all in front of me, neatly typed. My Modem can talk to your Modem, Debs, later when my gal comes in, but in the meantime here's information the old-fashioned way. The police procedural writer loved doing bios on your list of people because he expects the St. Swillens mystery rights to be handed over to him, whatever they may be."

"Tell him," Calvin said, "he won't like this mystery because the police haven't figured very big in it so far. Shoot with the info."

Quentin began by saying the insurance man hadn't shown up at St. Swillens because no theft had been reported, and was interrupted by Calvin saying, "We figured that out when we solved the Kamkoff caper."

Quentin said, "As for the cult, it's your basic, all-American perfectly normal one, reactionary and worth

a fortune. After members 'renounce worldly goods' and hand over their evil money to the leader, he invests it wisely, 'for the good of the group.' Guess what one of the investments is."

"Oil? Newspapers? Yachts?"

"Nah. They already have all that stuff. Hotels is what. Chains of them, of course. You two kids are staying in one. Yep, the very resort on St. Swillens, where you bed down at night and do whatever three-quarters-engaged people do, I don't want to hear about it."

"This interests me," Cal said.

"Sex interests me, too."

"No, Quentin, I mean it. I'm really tremendously interested in why a rich, reactionary cult would invest in a hotel in the Caribbean, a hotbed of unrest."

"I guess the cult figured that while the men on the other islands dress in army fatigues and sport beards like Castro's to do their social justice, denounce Imperialism, grass-roots thing, it's a good time to get a bargain in resorts. But I don't really know their motive. I can have our friend check this out."

Debs and Cal listened as Quentin went on with information about individuals Cal had asked about. They didn't find the report of items such as Linda's difficult childhood and the fact that it was America's hope to see her walk off with the prize money and medal, Stan's making "more money in one year than our publishing house makes in five," Howard's having a good reputation in his law firm hot, up-to-date information.

Calvin said, "We thank you but very grudgingly. If there's a clue in that junk, it's well hidden."

"Right on," Debs agreed. "But Cal and I will have a high-energy rap with his typewriter and see what we can come up with." When this was greeted with silence, Debs said, "Just kidding, fellas, I was trying to scare you both with some California talk. I figured

maybe Cal would withdraw his proposal. No, honestly, Quentin, we are going to get married. We'll settle somewhere in Nebraska. And I do thank you for the info. There's a clue in there and I can feel it teasing me."

After a three-way good-bye, Calvin began teasing Debs about her "teasing clue," saying, "If you found anything in that pile of horseshit, Nurse Watson, you're a better man than I am, Gunga Din."

"You're mixing literary references. There is something in this mess." Debs held up the paper on which she'd taken notes during the phone call. "And there has been something tickling the back of my mind for a while now. Something about clothes."

"I know. You told me but I was afraid to feed that information into my typewriter because she's never been vain, never been a clothes horse," Calvin said.

Debs put the paper on her desk. The clue went deeper than vanity, she thought, but how the hell could she really know that? She began putting her mind at ease, purposely. For a cunning reason. If you tuck a clue away, it will come back, when least expected, with a solution. But she didn't know which clue of Quentin's she should tuck away. Well, she wasn't Wonder Woman. She couldn't write a book, stop to make love to Calvin, and solve a mystery, all at the same time.

Calvin said, "I was wondering when you were going to notice that you've just unbuttoned my top button."

"I noticed, I noticed," Debs said, proceeding to the second one.

· TWENTY-THREE ·

The house physician removed the bandages from Debs's feet and pronounced her, "Fit. Well, maybe not to run the Marathon, but then we've never had a Marathon on St. Swillens." He put soft, adhesive pads on her soles to cushion her feet for when she would attempt shoes. She thanked him effusively and added, "I was afraid I'd have to wear house slippers instead of my gold sandals to the party tonight."

When he left, Debs told Cal that now that her feet could get her places, she wanted to visit Billy, if he was still registered at the hotel.

"Me, too," Cal said. "Wherever thou goest, I goest, and a loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou."

Debs dialed the registration desk. Yes, Billy was still at the hotel. She called him and he said he was glad to hear from her because he was leaving late that afternoon. Debs knew that meant a total giving up of hope,

so she tried to sound especially cheerful when she said she'd be right down.

"It really isn't necessary for you to go everywhere with me, Cal," she said as she got into her slippers.

"It is. They'd throw me off the Committee if I let you go alone. It'll be different after we're married and you're living in Nebraska and I'm living in New York."

"Oh, Cal, my own truest love, we didn't settle that issue, did we? I can tell that you don't think Nebraska the perfect compromise. Why don't we shelve the whole discussion until you've seen my house in L.A., which is perfect for a domesticated person."

"And you've seen my apartment in New York. It is not, I repeat, *not* scuzzy."

But their brief visit with Billy, whose face looked ravaged (even his beard looked sad and limp) so depressed them that Debs and Cal fell into each other's arms once they were back out in the hallway and swore that since life was too transitory, each would go live where the other wanted.

They went upstairs and packed. As they were dressing for the party, Cal stopped for a moment, went to Debs's desk, and picked up her page of Quentin's notes and studied it.

"I knew I should have shared this with my typewriter," he said. "Something just leaped out at me."

"What?"

"I don't know what. It went away. Your handwriting is bad."

"Nagging, nagging, always nagging, and we aren't even married yet."

"Damn. I can see what you meant by a clue teasing you. Do I have time to run this list through my typewriter?"

"No, we've got to get downstairs for the interviews. And besides, I want to wean you from your typewriter.

Gradually, Cal, I promise. I am prettier and younger than she is. That's my weapon."

Cal glanced at Debs in her blue dress, then turned to his typewriter and patted it on its chassis. "I wish I could take you to the party, old girl," he told it, "but you don't measure up to the vixenish, brash types I like to be seen with. I'll be back, I promise."

When they stepped out of their room, Debs was glad that Billy had left their hotel that afternoon. Cheerful dance music filled the corridors, the elevators. By the time she and Cal approached the dining hall, she could have done the samba, conga, rumba, whatever it was they were playing, several times, but when they got near the dance floor, Calvin denied her the use of his body, saying she'd have to do her interviews first.

"You're a crank," she accused.

"And I'm going to get crankier if that tropical storm keeps up. I'll sleep with my eyes open tonight, worrying about our plane taking off in this typhoon tomorrow."

Debs looked out the picture windows. True, there was a strong breeze, but one could hardly call it a storm. There were quite a few purple people milling around on the hotel grounds, their bald heads hooded tonight, protected from the winds. They were in a festive mood over Linda's win. Debs could see several of them shaking tambourines and one playing a lute, but she couldn't hear the sounds over those of the orchestra.

"I'd love to talk to a couple of cult members," Debs said, "and tell them we now know the facts of life. They're rich and influential. How naïve we were to think the hotel was sweetly tolerant about letting them hang around. They own the place. But I think I'll save them till last, so I won't get my hair blown."

"Our plane can drop out of the sky tomorrow and

you're worried about getting your hair ruffled. I think we're in the Bermuda Triangle. When we go to bed, you'll have to cuddle me all night."

"I promise, but don't worry. The receptionist once told me that every day is a beautiful day on St. Swillens. It's a good thing ours won't be a commuting marriage, Cal. I see that I would have had to be the one to do all the flying." She paused and then said, "We swore undying devotion to each other this afternoon outside Billy's room, said we'd each live in the other's choice of place, but which place is that to be?"

"We didn't get that far in the discussion," Cal said. "And I can't talk about it now. My mind is on tomorrow's flight."

Debs breathed into her tape recorder and played her breaths back. Seemed okay, but she might yet louse it up. Ah, there were Alethea and Stan, being photographed. She approached them, with her bodyguard, Calvin, right behind her.

"I got most of your happy thoughts on the phone when I called to congratulate you today," Debs said to Alethea. "But feel free to add."

Alethea said, "I will if you turn the tape off." She whispered, "I'll have my jewelry back by tomorrow, just before I get on the plane. Bless Murdock. But the Lieutenant doesn't want me to wear any until I'm safely home."

Debs congratulated her friend, who now turned back to the impatient photographer. Debs spotted Rimsky, the spoon bender, talking to one of the Russians. The parapsychologist had been barred from the games ever since the strobe light incident but, obviously, not from the party.

"Why didn't you bring your own tape recorder tonight, you speaker of Russian?" Debs asked Cal.

"Because, dumbness, I have to be with you every

minute. I can share yours, if need be." He sighed. "It would be so easy to let my guard down now that it's the last night. I should be concentrating on worrying about our pilot's safety record instead of fussing over you."

"Stay calm, Cal. I'm sure his record's good."

"That's what I'm worrying about. His turn is up."

Debs spotted Murdock at the bar and told Cal perhaps the Lieutenant could keep an eye on her if Cal wanted to borrow the recorder. He turned her down, saying that the Lieutenant hadn't been voted on by the Committee.

Jacqueline Bond walked by, a tape recorder of her own in her hand. She doubled back and said, "Hi, Debs, you look lovely in that blue dress. I see what Alethea meant. It is a dress for success."

"She won me over in it," Calvin said. "We're engaged."

"Ninety-eight percent engaged," Debs corrected.

"Congratulations to both of you. Fight him on that last two percent, Debs, and remember you got the advice from me. I'm having a terrific time interviewing the defeated chess candidates. I wondered how I could approach them with 'How does it feel to be beaten by a woman?' without sounding awful, but I haven't had to do it once. I just go up to a candidate, give my name and the name of my magazine, and POW, they start right in with a remark like, 'All you feminists must be crowing' and go right into their song and dance about what it feels like to have been defeated by Linda."

"What fun," Debs said, sounding vague. "Your dress. It's emerald green and goes with your hair. You must have planned it for the party."

"Yep. Grabbed it weeks ago. My favorite color. If anything's green and fits, I buy it. If it's green and doesn't fit, I have it tailored."

"That's very profound, Jacqueline." Debs was feeling a mental tingle.

"Oh, please, not again."

"It is, it is profound." The tingle was stronger.

Jacqueline turned to Calvin and warned, "Think twice about marrying her. She may be like the Last Duchess, too easily impressed." She patted Debs on the arm and said, "I have a friend at Princeton. I'll have him send you some of Einstein's papers. If you think I'm profound, you'll be gassed out of your mind."

"It was profound," Debs told Cal after Jacqueline moved away. But her mental tingle was dimmed by applause.

Linda was entering the room, escorted by Howard and followed by Noah and Parnell. People cleared a pathway for the entourage. Linda graciously acknowledged the applause with a half smile.

"She looks like a goddess," someone behind Debs said.

Debs turned and saw the Archaeologist—Grandmaster. "Oh, hi, Mr. Gameliel. I agree, she does."

"It's that white Grecian gown she's wearing, with one marble—uh, I mean ivory—shoulder exposed," Gameliel said.

"Yes, all she needs is a laurel wreath."

Linda's exquisite dress bothered Debs, brought back the tingle, all through the dinner, the Governor's speech, the awarding of the medal, of the check, during Linda's acceptance speech, the glare of photographers' flash bulbs. The dress bothered Debs even when the orchestra began to play and Linda, a nondancer, and Howard walked away from the party. The dress was no longer there for Debs to stare at, but the tingle was stronger than ever.

"Oh, my God," Debs said, and groaned.

"I'm here," Calvin reassured her.

"Your dumb typewriter didn't tell us that Kilroy is two people." Debs got to her feet and pulled Calvin after her. "We must hurry. Linda and Howard went off alone. Howard can't handle two murderers by himself."

· TWENTY-FOUR ·

Noah and Parnell were talking to two Brazilian Seconds, and all were laughing at Noah's quandary: he had been trying to tell fellow chess nuts that he'd had nothing to do with Linda's "game of the '80s." It was all hers. But everyone knew of his expertise with the Caro-Kahn defense and thought he was being modest, trying to reinforce Linda's mystique, so word would get out and make the Soviet world champion even more fearful of having to deal with her soon.

Parnell offered to give Noah a certificate swearing that he'd witnessed Noah's rejection and his own. "I've never felt so unloved in my life as I did on that day," Parnell said. "But, after her beautiful win, I began to think maybe some elements in the chess world are right when they say Seconds should be eliminated. There was something especially enchanting about that game coming entirely out of her head."

One of the Brazilians said, "I can't imagine a tournament without Seconds, any more than I can picture a

prizefighter going back to his corner of the ring between rounds to find it empty. He's got to have someone there to sponge him down and someone else to tell him, 'Keep your punches low, watch out for his left,' or whatever else he needs to be told."

The other Brazilian said, "I expect a medal to be minted for me soon in honor of my having gotten my Grandmaster to the auditorium on time. Whatever deep analysis I might have contributed during adjourned games was nothing compared to that feat."

"Linda has a reputation for promptness," Noah said. "Due entirely to me. She owns a wristwatch, but I've never caught her looking at it."

The first Brazilian said, "She's so beautiful, bratty, and brainy. I wish I could add 'Brazilian.' Where is she and why isn't she dancing?"

"Because she doesn't know how," Parnell said.

"All young ladies in Brazil know how."

"Linda is, to put it mildly, one-dimensional," Noah said.

"There are many Grandmasters here with extra talents," the first Brazilian said. "Gameliel is an archaeologist, Seti a journalist."

"True," Noah said, "but I forgive Linda her monomania. People sometimes ask about a chess champion, 'but what else can he do?' Yet you never hear anyone ask if Mozart did anything but fool around with music, or if Georgia O'Keefe contributed anything to the world other than her paintings. When I say I forgive Linda, you understand, I'm speaking from strength now. A few days ago I was wiped out and ready to . . ."

Noah felt someone rudely clawing his arm. He looked down at his sloshing drink and then up into Debs's frantic face. Calvin was standing beside her.

"Linda. Where is she?" Debs asked.

"It's okay. She's with Howard," Noah said.

"I know but that's not enough. Where are they now?"

Noah turned to Parnell, who shrugged and looked guilty. Noah was beginning to feel pangs of guilt, himself, now. Perhaps they shouldn't have let down their guard, but the Match was over and . . .

"Think, think," Calvin demanded. "You two know her better than anyone else. Where could she have gone? I called her room and she's not there."

"No," Parnell said. "She wouldn't be. Her chess board is packed for tomorrow's flight."

"He's right," Noah said. "She must be somewhere where there's a chess board."

"You're crazy," Debs accused them both. "She's the winner, doesn't need to prove a thing."

"No," Parnell said. "But she does love to relive a game, to analyze it. That's her form of recreation."

"Then where, oh, where, is an unpacked chess board?" Debs asked.

"I don't know," Noah said. "But Linda would sniff it out."

"Think, think," Calvin demanded.

The first Brazilian volunteered, "I saw one just a while back, in the Analysis Room, over in a corner. They've already packed the large magnetic board, but maybe the one in the corner belongs to the hotel."

Parnell said, "Sounds like the best bet."

Calvin said, "Then that's where Debs and I will be. Lieutenant Murdock was at the bar a while back, but we haven't seen him since. We'll need help. Try to get him."

The thin soles of Debs's gold sandals hit the tiled floor. In spite of the foot pads the house physician had applied, she felt foot abuse. It was a long run from the dining hall and through the loggia to get to the Analysis

Room. Calvin was right beside her. Palm trees, whipped by the winds, brushed their wet fronds against the walls of glass that comprised half of the loggia.

Debs did not take her first deep breath until she and Calvin stood in the doorway of the Analysis Room. She combined payment of her oxygen debt with a sigh of relief. The two innocents, Howard and Linda, were sitting there, where Noah and Parnell had predicted they might be. The music of the dance band could be heard in the distance, but it didn't seem to be breaking Linda's concentration over the pieces on the chess board anymore than Debs's and Calvin's presence did.

Howard looked up from a magazine and said, "Hi."

"Hi," Debs said casually.

"Hi, Howard," Calvin said. "Hi, Linda." At the sound of *his* voice, the Grandmistress looked up, Debs noted, and mentally added, She always did like Calvin better than me.

"Glad to see you're practicing, Linda," Cal said. "We're counting on you to sock it to the champ."

Linda smiled at him and then looked back at the board. Cal took Debs's arm, led her to a dark corner of the room to a small couch, and pulled her down on it. He plunked himself beside her and said, "Whew." Debs looked over at Howard, who winked at her. So he understood that members of the Committee were still looking out for his Linda.

Debs whispered to Calvin, "I'm sorry I didn't get a chance to explain the solution of the mystery to you, Cal, but I couldn't do that and run at the same time."

"I won't accept your apologies, Debs. You called my typewriter dumb. Besides, I figured it out for myself after you said the murderer was two people. The thing on Quentin's list that leaped out at me once, then flickered, leaped out and stayed this time."

"Quentin's list? No, it was Linda's dress that . . ."

Calvin poked her. Debs looked up and saw two hooded purple people silently enter the room. Moving gracefully on bare feet, they stationed themselves behind Linda, whose head was bent over the board, and behind Howard, whose head was bent over his magazine. The purple figure behind Linda raised its arms, long, feminine arms that reached for Linda's neck.

"Bipsey, stop!" Debs screamed.

As Bipsey jerked her head back, the purple cowl fell away and her long blonde hair spilled over her shoulders. Calvin was halfway across the room, yelling, "Billy, don't move or I'll kill you," to the other figure, while Debs was thinking she couldn't make the same threat. What did she know about self-defense, much less aggression? She moved forward, anyway. Howard was on his feet now and had a grip on Bipsey. A bus-boy and chambermaid entered the room and proceeded with a professional mopping-up operation, using the sides of their hands on Billy and Bipsey, giving a demonstration of high karate that was utterly enchanting to Debs. She blessed Murdock for what he'd in the past referred to as his "assistants."

Linda, inarticulate even when horrified, was staring at Bipsey's now prone body.

Debs said, "It's all right, Linda. She's not a ghost. We never did see her in the water, only her white hat. She didn't leave the boat, but you and I were too busy to notice. If she had thought we were looking, she would have jumped, pretended to thrash around, and then gotten back on board with her fellow conspirators. Bipsey expected you and me to drown, Linda, so anything she did, such as throwing her hat in the water, was just so much extra insurance, in case, by some wild miracle, the St. Swillens version of the Coast Guard might happen by."

"The real miracle," Calvin said, "was that Bipsey was dealing with a Los Angeles gal who learned ocean swimming early. The men who kidnapped you had covered themselves in scuba diving suits so they'd be unrecognized if anyone happened to see them. Debs described them as 'well-muscled.' But that wasn't much of a clue. The fact that their faces were covered made me think at first that they were simply hiding their faces as any good kidnapper might, but when I finally got to thinking, I realized it was their beards they were hiding. That was what leaped out at me from Quentin's list, that so many of the Marxists in the area affect the Fidel Castro beard."

Calvin walked over to Billy's prone body and pulled back his cowl. "You fooled me because your Castro beard and hair were accompanied by preppy clothes and a well-manicured look, but I—oh, what am I doing talking to an unconscious man?"

Howard said, "So Billy and Bipsey were outside tonight, disguised as purple people, and what a great disguise. Those hooded robes covered a lot of sins as they watched us through the windows. The two hairy murderers blended in because any purple person's bald head was covered on this windy night."

Lieutenant Murdock walked in, followed by Noah and Parnell, who had picked up Stan and Alethea along the way in their search for the Lieutenant. Two busboys came in behind them and helped the chambermaid and first busboy cart Billy and Bipsey away.

"Damn," Debs said. "I'm exhausted." She sat down. "Calvin and I were going to continue to show off with our explanations, but I'm too tired."

"It's this disgusting room," Stan said, "reverberating with a murder attempt. Alethea and I have a good suite with a view going to waste. Why don't we all go up, and I'll send for drinks."

When they settled into chairs in the suite, Debs took Perrier in hand and began, "It was your dress, tonight, Linda, that lovely Grecian gown you're wearing, that told me something about Bipsey. You knew you'd lose weight at the Match, so you'd planned for that, like a good general, bought something with soft folds in it that would gather around your thinning body. Jacqueline was the first to make a remark about dressing for success, that it takes planning. And tonight, she said, 'If it's green and fits, I buy it. Otherwise, I have it tailored.' Tailoring is planning. And what event does a woman plan for most?"

"Her wedding and honeymoon if you're of my generation," Alethea said. "And your wedding and honeymoon if you're of the younger generation, too."

"Exactly," Debs said. "I kept stumbling across Bipsey's wardrobe at the hotel's boutique—Bipsey's Monarch butterfly blouse, Bipsey's bikini. In fact, I passed on the bikini because I didn't want to duplicate Bipsey. Then I saw her in the hallway, coming out of Linda's room, dressed in a pink skirt and flowered pink top—another boutique item. On a honeymoon one might pick up one or two things at a resort, for the fun of it, but the basics of a wardrobe would have been thought out and bought in advance." Debs turned to Calvin. "I didn't mean to insult your typewriter by calling her dumb. She isn't. But she's never been married, so she wouldn't know these things. I had to conclude that Bipsey had lived on this island, dressed in something other than resort clothes. Had she been living on a commune dressed in purple robes or had she been part of the small Marxist faction on the island, who dress in fatigue outfits and army boots? Commune or communist? I figured whoever killed Isaac was . . ."

Loud sobs stopped Debs cold. They were coming from Linda. Debs called herself an idiot. In the excite-

ment of showing off, she'd forgotten that Linda didn't know about Isaac.

"I played to make him proud," Linda said between sobs. "I knew he would have found a way to congratulate me even if he were in an oxygen tent. I thought something was worse than what you people told me, but I still played to make him proud."

Howard put his arms around his wife and said, "We'd better go, dear. You'll need time to absorb the bad news."

"No. I want to stay, and I want to hear everything about those evil people." She turned to Debs. "Did you know that Billy called today and invited me to his room to pay a condolence call? I would have been like a fly in his spider's web, but Howard and Noah insisted on coming along. Billy acted truly depressed when I was there."

"The sorrow was genuine, I'm sure," Debs said. "But it was because you showed up with bodyguards. The same thing happened to me, Linda, only I was stupid enough to invite myself because he'd played on my sympathy. I phoned Billy, to see if he wanted company. He assumed I'd be alone. His face was glum, I thought because of Bipsey's 'death,' but it was because of Calvin's presence."

"To start from the beginning," Calvin began, "Billy and Bipsey, American radicals who came to witness experiments in Caribbean socialism on St. Swillens's next-door island, fell in love with the idea of a revolution. They became an important part of the Marxist faction. When our government invaded their island, the two escaped, bloody but unbowed, coming to St. Swillens to gather themselves together."

"It would be the perfect place," Debs said. "An international chess tournament was about to be held here, and they could make contact with the Soviets and

others who were friendly to their cause. It was easy for them to pass themselves off as well-to-do former preppies because that was just what they had been before becoming radicalized. They had a contact here in the hotel, one of the members of the faction that the Governor once told me is a small part of St. Swillens's population. Lieutenant Murdock may not have known about Billy and Bipsey, but he did know the contact, someone the Governor or his aides had told Murdock should be watched. Am I right, Lieutenant?"

Murdock said nothing.

"I finally realized," Debs said, "that you knew just where to go to get Alethea's jewels once you realized that they'd been stolen as a possible bribe for a Soviet. And wise to the ways of the world, as you are, you knew that someone wanting to get into Russia for whatever purpose would find a bribe to be an appropriate offering. After all, it's a country where its citizens have to bribe their way even in hospitals in order to get proper care. You figured the person you'd been watching so carefully at the hotel, a native of St. Swillens, would have accepted the jewels from Billy because he'd been asked to hold them until the day the Russian would leave with Billy and Bipsey's bribe."

"It was probably this same person," Calvin said, "who blended in the background, perhaps helping set up the coffee and cake for the chess players when they went backstage, so that when he was instructed by Billy to give the strobe lights a final push, he could do so and not be noticed. Billy was convinced that Isaac had told Linda about the offer to put up a bribe to get to Russia. Billy and Bipsey never dreamed that Isaac would tell Linda in a conversation involving "black" and "white" chess pieces. Linda didn't relate it to the real world. Their efforts to kill her were totally unnecessary but they had no way of knowing that."

"And speaking of the strobe lights," Debs said, "can you imagine how frustrated Billy and Bipsey were from the unsuccessful strobe light attempt onward? Howard didn't leave Linda's side. Not until the day he was paged to come to the phone. The oh, so casual hat scene by the pool took me in completely," Debs confessed. "But it was a lucky accident for Bipsey. If it hadn't been that, it would have been another opportunity she'd have grabbed. When Linda expressed interest in the hat, Bipsey signaled Billy with some kind of prearranged hand signal, and he went inside and had his hotel contact page Howard on the loudspeaker."

Stan said, "You're great with the explanations, Debs and Cal, but shouldn't there have been some arrests taking place? How come this 'contact' wasn't arrested after the Lieutenant realized he'd received stolen property—my wife's jewels, to be exact?"

Since Murdock didn't answer, Debs said, "He was using the old let-the-guilty-person-lead-me-to-the-mastermind-behind-it-all trick. Weren't you, Lieutenant?"

For a man who'd wanted only "yes" or "no" answers from her those many days ago, Murdock wasn't being generous with his share. But he did incline his head slightly, and Debs decided to interpret that as a nod.

He smiled. Debs realized, with shock, that he'd just actually smiled at her. A first. Feeling as though she'd been awarded the medal of valor, she smiled back.

· TWENTY-FIVE ·

Linda shifted her shoulder bag and clutched the long-stemmed red roses that had been presented to her by the Governor of St. Swillens, in one hand, and waved to the airport crowd with the other. She managed a faint smile, but her thoughts were with Isaac. When Howard saw large, crystal tears forming in her eyes, he led her onto the plane.

"Congratulations," the flight attendant said. "It was a giant step for womankind. Would you like me to put your bouquet on ice?"

Linda nodded and let Howard lead her to her seat. She looked out the window at the waving crowd and then at Howard.

"I used to think I played chess only for me, but I found out I play it for Isaac and now for you, too, and for other people. When I dedicated my game to him as a kind of, you know, 'get well' card and then one to you and Alethea and Debs, I played better."

Howard said, "I can't wait for the plane to lift off

and leave this troubled island. I want to get back to Los Angeles and start taking care of Isaac's legacy to me, his whooping crane."

"His what?"

"You," Howard said.

Stan and Alethea always held hands whenever a plane taxied down a runway. It had become such a habit over the years that they were afraid to risk a crash by not holding hands.

Stan said, "I can't say you don't live life to the fullest. Look what you got out of this tournament; the world's next chess champ and a Russian cousin, Kamkoff, who can't wait for us to come home so we can start teaching him English and find a nice bourgeois dentist to cap his teeth."

"Beats being a docent," Alethea said.

As soon as the plane was in the air, Debs opened her notebook and turned to Calvin, but she could see by the expression on his face that he didn't think successful takeoff was everything. She put her hand over his white-knuckled one and said, "Cheer up, Cal, we've got work to do. It'll be great therapy, take your mind off the pilot."

"If I take my mind off the pilot, he'll never get us home."

"What *is* going to be our home, Cal? I may be a feminist, but I believe in married couples' living in the same city. Possibly even in the same house. Yes, definitely in the same house."

"You're catching me in a weak moment, Debs. If we land safely, I'll live anywhere you want."

Debs decided it would be unfair to hold Calvin to promises made in midair. It would be fairer to talk about it after they'd landed. He was going to love being

married to her. She traveled well. She kissed his ear, then made conversation to distract him.

"Why wouldn't Murdock tell us what the 'intricate international problems to be considered' were from the beginning? Why did he make us keep quiet about Isaac's murder?"

"Because," Calvin said, "he himself didn't know what the problems might become. All he knew was that he was supposed to keep anything from happening at the Match. The KGB people were playing pretty much that role, too, I'd bet. All anyone wanted, really, was to get the U.S. and Soviet players through the chess games on that peaceful island without any problems, international or otherwise. If one of the Grandmasters had been killed, that, of course, couldn't have been covered up, but with a Second, like Isaac, Lieutenant Murdock must have figured it wiser to conceal that temporarily."

"Tacky. Makes me shudder. If you let go of that armrest, you could put a comforting arm around me."

Linda took a fresh Kleenex from her purse, dried her tears, and said to Howard, "As soon as I'm through studying for the championship, I'd like to, you know, become well-rounded, like you once said, maybe read some literature."

"Great. Poetry, history, novels, plays?" Howard asked.

"Novels. That's where I'd like to start. Are there any good novels about chess?"

(continued from front flap)

Romance, murder, and mystery are real-life moves involving both the players and their audience in a game of survival.



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The Right Moves

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