

“Don’t count on those losers to give you dope on what’s going down,” Arbie said, filling my wine glass with Chilean red. “Most of them were following orders—creeps really—destroyed ballots, stuffed the boxes, erased marks and replaced them with the opposite. The surviving members on my board, who believed the District Council was always right, must blush every time they think back. But do you really believe you’re on the right track? Any one in government could have ordered the hit on Berta.” Arbie raised her wine glass in a *salut*. “I mean any government, not just the American or Czech or Israeli. You should check Slezowicky’s contacts at the United Nations.”

“You’re making my job harder,” I complained, glancing at the dinner table.

“Just a few minutes to go,” Arbie laughed. “I know how hungry this detective stuff makes you.”

“I smelt the roast beef,” I said. “Look, sweetheart, give me a name who is likely to unburden himself.”

Arbie sighed and thought for a minute while she sipped her wine. I thought back to those days when we’d retire to the bedroom before dinner. Just thinking about it now was as exciting as doing it.

“One of the weak-kneed slobs who got a high posting in the union— because he was a yes-man, Jewish, and sold out his local in negotiations— might confess,” she said. “He has a half-dozen children to support beside the couple he had by his wife, so he’d do anything to get his prison term shortened. I worked with him organizing a librarians’ local, so I know his character.”

“Sounds good,” I said encouragingly.

“Name is Morley Wrench. He’s sloppy looking. A hang-dog face, probably made doggie in prison. Thinning red hair last time I saw him, but maybe grey now. A real creep and, I’m sorry to confess, a former librarian and treasurer of his local.”

“Treasurers seem to rise to high positions,” I remarked. “I want to see Tedeschi too.”

“They call him Teddy. He’s slippery like an eel. I think it’s ready, Rudy. Come on.”

Our meal tasted much better than anything I could cook. We discussed other personalities that Arbie had known from her union days. She remembered Abel Bratwurst as a spoiled brat who used to come to his father’s office as a teen-ager

and demand that his secretary get him ice-cream sodas. That this smug little opportunist became a legal criminal did not surprise her.

“He doesn’t have the guts to murder anyone face to face,” Arbie growled. “He just murders at a distance, like those pilotless drones in Afghanistan.”

“You are bitter,” I said. “In the old days your sarcasm was not without some optimism.”

“Things have got very very bad, Rudy. Our political leaders the world over are power-hungry peacocks who work with criminals to rip off the rest of us. The rot is showing. Countries are falling apart—multiple murders of innocents, government massacres of protesting citizens, constant raping, rigged elections, right-wing erosion of liberties and decency, starvation, and worst of all the kowtowing to industrial predators by facilitating international investment at the expense of global warming. On top of it are jihadists blowing up citizens in subway trains, on planes and in market places as a mad protest against what they consider as insults to God, which is weirdest of all.”

“Could be a shrinking world,” I smiled indulgently. “Centuries of Western philosophical and scientific advancement crashing into medieval superstition.”

“That doesn’t explain the political robber barons,” she expostulated. “I know you can show me many historical precedents—popes, kings, tyrants— who ripped off their subjects, but these “democratically-elected” criminals have the whole world to play about in while they encourage their police forces and armies to beat and kill any one wise enough to understand and protest what they are doing.”

“I don’t think you’re getting us closer to solving the Czernick murder.”

“In a way it is, Rudy. Its international implications—international banking, U.N diplomats, Zionism—have got you investigating on a level you could not have dreamt of back when. The murder of a sweet middle-aged lady is leading us to high crimes and misdemeanors.”

I laughed. “Right to the International Criminal Court—which the United States refuses to join, so Mrs. Czernick’s case will have to stop short of that.”

“Well short of that,” Arbie retorted sarcastically. “You’ll be lucky to get it to a City Court.”