

On the Road to the Greek Sector, Cyprus

He crested the pass. Cyprus's inner plain stretched to the horizon. Thousands of flickering lights indicated the capital, Lefkosia. On the outskirts of the city, he'd take the B9 peripheral road to the southwest to bypass local streets and cross into the Greek sector. The sight of the Impala and his diplomatic plates would grant him quick entry from the Turkish border guards.

The world drove four-cylinder European and Asian gas misers but politicians still legislated that federal employees drive American cars—as if there was such a thing anymore. He snickered. Permitting U.S. Government personnel to drive “foreign” cars was political suicide and undermined U.S. workers, the logic went. Lobbyists kept tabs and careers were on the line. End result? Washington dictated that Government employees drive American-made cars. Never mind that a 17 mpg V-6 Detroit automobile in a foreign country looked odd, gulped expensive gas, and might as well have an imaginary inscription on its door saying, “Hit here with Molotov.” Sam shook his head. *Terrorists are everywhere and Americans are prime targets*, he thought. At least the Impala was a few generations beyond the old boats of the 1960's. He thought of his father's '72 Galaxie. *Thank God for small favors.*

He entered the plain, and the Impala hit 85 mph. The foothills of Olympus and the climb to the RAF station were half an hour away.

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Ten kilometers back, a short exchange over secure mobile phones ended. A lone rider mounted a rented Yamaha 230 off-road motorcycle. Meticulously, he tugged black leather gloves tight against his fingers and put on a helmet with a visor. He kicked the engine to life and revved it several times. Satisfied with the smooth burn of the gasoline, he started after Sam.

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The light flooded the inside of the Impala before Sam realized someone was behind him. He'd come out of a turn and in the dark was gauging when he'd brake again. The floodlight's glare hit the rear view mirror, filled the interior, and blinded him. He waited for what must be the high beam to dim. Instead, the vehicle blasted past him inches from his outside mirror and disappeared to the right into a tight turn.

Seconds later, a panicked Sam braked hard to avoid a blinding light unnaturally low on the road. Dust and smoke particles swirled in the beam. He noticed a splash of white paint, which,

as he approached, turned into a motorcycle's rear fender. The machine was sprawled on the pavement at an odd angle and its front wheel was spinning. Sam looked around for the driver having visions of his son's chest gasping for air. The next thing he knew, his rear door was open and someone had entered behind him.

It took less than three seconds but the onslaught of unexpected stimuli numbed Sam's cerebral cortex. Before he could make sense of the scene or of the intruder, the most important fact of Sam's life became the sharp pain digging into his neck.

"Park. There," a voice said by his ear. A warm waft of garlic reached him. Sam looked at the dark mass of bushes and felt the pain of the blade between his neck bones. He inched the car off the road onto the dirt and into a mound of overhanging vines.

He tried to place the accent but two words were not enough for a good guess.

Then he heard, rather than felt, the slicing of his windpipe. For an eternal moment, nothing; he entered a timeless plane. The door opening behind him did not register but he felt the force of it slamming shut. Curiously, the sound was muffled and far away.

He lifted his left hand to his throat. He felt a gap in his skin and a hot moistness on his fingers. The roar of an engine crashed into a reality that was now foreign. The noise violated a precious and sacred moment. The frothy waters of a waterfall bubbled over rocks down a wooded hill over a shallow streambed that cut through a green meadow. Cathy was radiant in a sundress. They were in love and it was joyous. He felt a chill. How can such communion, such bonding fade? *Cathy, what happened?*

Anger swelled in him and the image faded. Desperate now, Sam searched for strength. With his right hand, he reached for his shirt pocket, but the hand collided and fumbled against his left, which had somehow gotten in the way. *Why was he so clumsy?* He managed to reach the pen in his shirt pocket and got his thumb and two fingers around it. Trembling with the demand for stamina no longer there, he tossed the pen at the passenger window but was dumbfounded when it bounced back in a downward angle and disappeared under the passenger seat. The unnatural clatter of the pen on the glass stunned his mind and froze the expression on his face like a hit from a sledgehammer.

Blood gushed from his neck. His hand felt heavy and dragged down his chest. It came to rest on his thigh, but Sam did not notice. His eyes were open and locked on the window. He felt a faint surge of anger but there was no response from his body. His mind slammed into a massive gray wall that reached high up into a charcoal sky—the logical and emotional dead end of the closed window.