

Chapter 1

Olivia Turner stood under the heaters on the marble steps of the Plaza Hotel waiting for the doorman to hail her a cab. She had no money, not even enough to tip the doorman, who came back soaking with her taxi. When the driver asked her destination, she asked him the time. "Twelve ten," he said.

"Eighty-ninth and Riverside," she answered. She looked out the window at the lights on Fifth Avenue. The stores were illuminated even at this hour, bright empty windows along the dark streets. As the driver turned west on 57th Street, she leaned her head against the seat, drew her coat around her and fell asleep.

At Eighty-ninth Street the driver called through the bullet-proof shield between them, "Which corner, lady?" She peered into the rain and pointed to a greystone building across the street. As she got out of the cab, she explained that she didn't have any money but would borrow some upstairs and be right back.

"Christ, lady, you don't take a cab without money," he said.

"I'll be back," she insisted, and dragging her belongings with her, she darted into the rain. The driver opened his door and

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started to follow, but the downpour turned him back. At the doorway Olivia pushed the intercom, identified herself, and when the buzzer granted her entry, she felt a small release inside.

She started apologizing even before she stepped into the apartment. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I should have called, but I couldn't." She moved in quickly. She wore a wrinkled beige pants suit under her raincoat and was loaded down with bags and brief cases and too many appendages even for her broad shoulders. Her short black hair had grown nappy in the rain, and her make-up had long since worn off her smooth sepia skin.

"I didn't even have change for the phone . . ." She dropped her bags to the floor. ". . . and I have a cab downstairs waiting to be paid." She looked at her friends with their arms about each other, and she wrapped her arms about herself in a gesture both insecure and dogged.

In the shadows Jenny Reeder and Mark Rosen looked like one body. Jenny's cheeks were flushed from sleep, and her face showed the slight imprint of the corduroy velvet sofa where she'd been stretched out. On the floor by the sofa were pages of manuscript and drawings. Jenny smiled and bent down for Olivia's bags. The act was friendly, and the anxiousness eased in Olivia's eyes. Mark reached for his wallet on the hall table and handed Olivia a \$20 bill.

"I'll explain everything when I get back," she promised, then disappeared down the stairs.

When she returned, she entered in the same flurry. "At least you're awake. You have any coffee? I'd give all my money if I had any for a cup of coffee."

"What happened?" Jenny asked as the three of them moved into the kitchen. The wide planes of her face spread open even wider with her smile. She felt herself steadying to ground Olivia's scattered energy. She went to the stove and turned up the flame under a pot of coffee.

"When's the baby due?" Olivia asked.

Jenny looked around, brushing her light brown hair from her pale face. She was tall, slim except for the roundness of the child pushing at her belly, obscured for the moment under her husband's faded Harvard sweatshirt. "In May . . . so what happened?"

"I don't know where to begin." Olivia sat down at the table in

the corner. She dumped spoonfuls of sugar into her cup as Jenny poured the coffee. Beside her on the floor two briefcases were crammed full of books and papers, and from her battered suitcase peeked the edge of something red. She leaned back in her chair, took a long breath, and when she started to speak again, she was calmer.

"I flew in this morning. I called Alan at *The New Centurion* last week to see if he wanted a piece on the National Liberation Association's appearance at the UN. This morning at seven I get a call telling me to catch a plane to New York; I at least got expenses guaranteed. I tried you earlier; you weren't home. I called Mark's office. You get my message?" Olivia glanced at Mark now, who stood leaning against the stove, a sturdy, dark-haired man she thought of mainly as Jenny's husband.

"We always expect you," he offered.

"Thank you." She reached into the yellow tiger cookie jar, her gift to them when their first child Erika was born just after she'd returned from four years in Africa. Leaning towards Jenny, she said, "You wouldn't have recognized them. There they were among the crystal chandeliers of the Plaza, sitting on gold-leafed chairs. I kept remembering them around those wooden tables sticky with that awful beer. Do you remember? That's when they first planned a separate state."

"I think I'd left by then," Jenny said, pushing out a chair for Mark to join them. "I only stayed with you a month, remember?" As Mark sat down, Jenny rested her stockinged foot on his knee.

"Oh . . . that's right. That was your mistake, trying to see everything. Instead you saw nothing."

Jenny exchanged a smile with her husband. Olivia had made this point before, in fact retreated to it as a place of security: that Jenny had mistaken geography for knowledge in her six months in Africa. At the tip of the point was always the suggestion that anyone who knew and studied less than Olivia risked superficiality. Yet because Jenny understood both the truth and the burden of Olivia's point of view, she didn't argue.

"They looked like bankers in pinstripe suits," Olivia complained. "They had a full court press: Peg from *Newsweek*, Guy Rhodes from *The New York Times*—Do you know him? We met years ago at the Ellsberg trial when I got trapped into introducing

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Kay around, and he was lusting after her. Nyral told the press conference he feared a civil war if the U.N. didn't act. I think he's going to call for partition."

"Did he say that?" Jenny drew a pencil from behind her ear as if she would take notes.

"No. He was circumspect today, but that's my instinct. Anyway, after the press conference Jamin told me to come up to his room for an interview. No hello, how the hell are you after four years, just an order to come to his suite. When I got there, Jamin and Nyral and some men I didn't know were standing by the window looking down on the park. All of them except Nyral were laughing like school boys as if they'd just pulled off a great prank; but when they saw me, they got serious. Jamin came over and put out his hand. As I took it, I couldn't help but smile; then he smiled too." "So what do you think, Olivia Turner?" he asked. "Did I not tell you we would get here, and you did not believe me."

"He introduced me to the other men: the Finance Minister and his aide, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Transport. 'Olivia is a friend from the camps. She will write nice things about us for the Americans,' he told them. And the men all smiled patronizing smiles as though I were Jamin's lady friend they were to amuse. Then Nyral came over. He's the one real statesman among them, but before I could talk to him, the Transport Minister said he had something to give me . . ." Olivia smiled. "You won't believe this; I've got to show you . . ." She started rummaging through her case, extracting papers and books until she produced a little plastic box which she handed to Jenny.

Jenny opened it. "What is it?"

Mark leaned over. "It looks like an amoeba."

"That's it. I've been trying to figure what it looked like. He was so serious when he handed it to me, but I didn't know what to make of it." She took back the box, and from pink cardboard velvet she lifted up a black enameled shape on a cheap silver chain. "What it's supposed to be . . ." she said, "is their new country. A pendant in the shape of their new country."

"It's a piece of dime-store jewelry," Jenny said.

"Exactly. He opened his briefcase to show me it was full of these enameled . . . amoebas. My god, I thought, surely he's not going to go around giving them out. But he had pendants for women

and cuff links for men. I looked over at Jamin to see what he thought, but he was busy making himself a drink. Nyral just looked on as though these souvenirs didn't concern him.

"I told the man—he was strange, short and squat—I told him that in America if he went around showing off his goods out of a suitcase, he'd be called a traveling salesman. But he just smiled this obsequious smile, and said, 'Yes. That is what I am, a salesman of the revolution.'"

Mark, who'd been leaning back in his chair, rocked forward now and laughed. "My god, who are these people? Why are we taking them so seriously?"

Olivia turned and looked at him. "Because they are serious," she answered. She wished suddenly she hadn't made Mark laugh. She took off her glasses and rubbed the bridge of her nose. Her dark brown skin was freckled. She had a thick nose, a gentle, elaborate mouth, features which some might call plain except the intelligence in her eyes lighted her whole face. "Only something's wrong," she said. She slipped the trinket back into her bag; then she reached up to the stove and poured herself another cup of coffee.

"They're acting the way they think they're supposed to: sipping scotch at the Plaza, giving out cheap jewelry as though if enough people wear it, they'll be recognized, hoping the world at this level of sophistication will believe them. But believe them or not, they are serious."

Olivia cupped her hands around the coffee mug, and a sadness passed through her dark eyes. She looked away from Mark. She wasn't sure of her relationship with him. She was suspicious of bankers and wealth and power. Though she didn't understand all that Mark did, she knew he worked on Wall Street, raising money and buying companies. He and Jenny lived modestly, yet she dwelt with the possibility that at any moment they might slide to the other side and join those protected by money and its privilege. This fact made her feel tangential to Jenny's life.

"The distance is enormous, isn't it?" Jenny said.

Olivia glanced at her. She nodded at this bit of mind reading. "Amen."

Mark reached to the center of the table and plucked a pear from a wooden bowl. "So what happened next?" he asked.

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Olivia put back on her glasses. She frowned. Then shifting her weight at the table, she continued: "The Transport Minister made an excuse to leave, and the other ministers followed. One minute I was speaking to Nyril, then even he was leaving. I thought I must have offended them when I turned and saw Jamin smiling. I realized he'd orchestrated the whole thing. He was standing by the bed with a drink in his hand watching me. He's changed, Jenny. He looks much older—his hair's half grey; he's thinner. He still towers, even over me, but . . ." she hesitated, "he seemed somehow tenuous.

"He moved over to me and looked out the window on the park. 'Ah, America, how easy life is here,' he said. He put his hand on my shoulder, then stared at me for almost a minute as if trying to remember who I was. Finally I asked if I could have a drink. At first he didn't move, just kept his hand on my shoulder, holding me within reach. I couldn't tell what he was thinking, but I felt sure he knew what I was, including the fact that I was still attracted to him. He laughed as if this is what he wanted to see. He let go then and went over to make the drink. As I watched him, it occurred to me that he'd invited me up there precisely for that purpose: to prove to himself and his colleagues that he was still in control, even in America.

"I started trying to interview him. He answered two or three questions but glanced at his watch and said he had to get ready for the reception. That's when I knew I'd been used."

"Are you sure that's why he invited you up?" Jenny asked.

"The more I think about it, I'm convinced. He needed a boost before facing all those people tonight, and he brought me— member of the American press—up there to give it to him. It was all very subtle, very understated, but I know Jamin. And as he told me goodbye at the door, we both knew what had happened, and there was nothing I could do about it."

Olivia cast a sidelong glance at Mark, drawing up her shoulders as if ready to deflect his judgment, but he didn't speak. His mouth opened slightly as though he might, and she remembered when she'd first met him here at the kitchen table playing his harmonica, his head leaning against the wall, his hands flapping wha-wha-wha-wha while Jenny cooked supper. That night

she'd understood why Jenny had married him. She studied his eyes now—spirited, direct, shifting regularly to his wife—and in them she saw no judgment of herself. Silently she thanked him for that.

"You know we have mines over there," he said instead.

"What? We who?"

"Afco. An investment group, in partnership with the government, there and in other countries. We reopened several of the mines that had closed down."

"Shit." Olivia reached into the bowl of fruit and took out an apple. "You picked a hell of a partner. I hope you haven't invested much."

"More than we could afford to lose, but I don't think they'll hurt the mines. That's their lifeline."

Olivia laughed abruptly. "Who is 'they'? They don't think that way, Mark. A mine is a hole in the ground."

"The government's assured us we'll be protected should events get out of hand."

"You're aligned with Bulagwi?" Olivia bit into the apple.

"I'm not aligned with anyone. I simply don't want our investors to get hurt."

"You should have thought of that before you invested," she said dryly. "You know, there are a few other issues at stake here."

"I'm aware of that."

"Like the rights of half a million people."

"I'm not involved in the politics," Mark repeated. "I just raised money for a company."

"Ah-h . . . And did you invest yourself?"

Mark glanced at Jenny, who had stayed out of the conversation. Jenny took her foot off his knee. She picked up her blue and white mug and went to the sink. She wondered that Mark didn't know better than to debate Olivia on his investments in Africa. "Jenny was against it so we passed," he said.

"But your investors are in with Bulagwi? How much is Bulagwi getting?"

"I can't tell you that." He started to peel the pear. "I don't know how much worse the other side might be. Personally, I think the only hope for some of these countries is to get businesses going,

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partnerships with the developed world. If the partners aren't perfect, well, they never are."

"Shit," Olivia said.

But Mark turned towards the door now for a cry stirred somewhere in the back of the apartment. Jenny also looked up. Small, quick feet padded down the hall, then in the doorway the sleepy face of their daughter blinked into the light. As Jenny stepped forward, the child ran across the blue tiled floor into her mother's arms.

"What's the matter?" Mark asked, rising and going to his daughter whose tiny bare feet hung out from under a ruffled pink gown.

The child reached out to him and held both parents around their necks with her arms. "Snakes," she whispered. Yet already her dream was fading, and she was beginning to look around, interested to find herself here, with her parents and this other person in this lighted room, at this unexpected hour of night.

"There are no snakes," Mark offered.

The little girl peered at her father with dark, serious eyes. "Yes. There are," she affirmed. "In the corners."

Jenny shifted her daughter onto her hip. "Come, I'll take you back to bed. We'll turn on a light, and it will eat the snakes."

As they moved out of the kitchen towards the dim corridor of bedrooms, Mark reached out for his daughter and kissed her on the cheek. "There," he said, "that will keep the snakes away." The child smiled now, pleased with the magic bestowed and with the conversion of her father.

When Jenny returned, Mark and Olivia were arguing over railroads. "That's why Afco paid a fee to the government, to protect the rail lines during the trouble and keep extra trains running to ship the ore."

"Bulagwi's pocketed that fee, I guarantee. He doesn't even have control over some of those lines, Mark. The NLA does."

"I agree it's a risk being there," Mark conceded. "But your alternative is for us to stay out of the country entirely."

"Now that's an idea," Olivia said.

Jenny poured herself another cup of coffee and sat back at the table. "So, did you go to the reception?" she asked.

Olivia glanced at her. She hesitated, but finally she yielded

to Jenny's direction. She heaved her shoulders forward in a sigh. "Whoever's imagination created that had no idea of these people. There was more food than a village eats in a month. Shrimp. Lobster. Prosciutto. There were baskets of flowers. And a player piano tripping out show tunes. The whole thing was so jarring, I expected the earth to crack right down the middle of the White and Gold room and swallow us all up. I don't know who was paying the bill. Not the U.N. And the NLA doesn't have those kinds of funds. When I asked a UN official, he just stared at me as though I'd inquired about the color of his underwear.

"I never did find out because the delegation arrived. They were as out of place in that room as slugs on the silver trays. The Minister of Transport strutted in, fitted out in a military uniform with medals weighing him down like ballast, and he was carrying his briefcase. I almost wish I'd stayed till the end to see how many people left wearing amoeba cuff links and pendants, but I lost sight of him and didn't see him again. Next came Jamin and Nyral. They were whisked away to meet some dignitary. Several junior members of the delegation found their way to me. They were feeling lost and were glad to see a familiar face.

"We were standing around gossiping when Guy came over. Well, when Guy found out I actually knew these people, he latched onto me for the rest of the evening. There I was telling Guy about Jamin and the others as though they were old school buddies. I had to keep reminding myself that to many people these men were terrorists. Not Nyral. And Jamin takes pains to distinguish between a guerrilla and a terrorist, but to most people, the distinction's lost."

Mark leaned forward on the table, the small pen knife in his hand peeling an unbroken chain of brown skin from the soft, white pear. "They *were* the ones responsible for the bombings in the Capitol, weren't they?" Jenny cast him a warning look.

But Olivia answered matter-of-factly. "Yes. In spite of Nyral's nonviolence and Jamin's definitions. That's what's frightening." She set down her coffee mug and frowned, her thick penciled eyebrows meeting in a V over her nose. "It's so easy, or at least convenient, to abstract the violence, politicize it and forget it's part of these people I know. Yet I don't forget. Tonight I saw a man at the reception I remember from Angola, a mercenary. What was he

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doing there? When I tried to go over to talk to him, he disappeared. At least I couldn't find him. I don't know if he recognized me, but I remember he had a bad left eye. I'm sure he was the same mercenary I'd interviewed once in Angola.

"Jamin stepped over to me then. I asked him about the man, but he shrugged off the question. Then Guy came trotting over. Before Guy could introduce himself, Jamin put his arm around my shoulder and told me I'd left my purse in his room. He spoke with a familiarity . . . no, an intimacy Guy picked up right away. I knew Jamin was still using me to bolster himself, but Guy didn't know that; and by the look on his face, I saw he assumed what my relationship was with Jamin. I saw too what that meant to him. I wanted to shake off Jamin's hand and make my role clear. Then I thought the hell with Guy. And then I thought the hell with Jamin. Because as soon as Jamin found out Guy was from *The New York Times*, I might as well not have been there.

"I left them to each other. I went to try to find the man; I looked in the hallway, but he was gone. I tried to get one of the younger delegates to take me up to get my purse, but no one was allowed into Jamin's room. The reception went on and on. I would have had to wait until Jamin went back himself, and I refused to be put in the position of following him to his room at one in the morning. All my money, my credentials, everything is in that purse. So you see why I'm here . . . and broke . . . and in a state."

She leaned back in the chair and threw open her hands as if depositing the story with Jenny and Mark to do with as they pleased. She kicked off her heavy leather flats and began rubbing her toes. "I've been on my feet all day . . ." she exhaled. And putting her feet on the extra chair beside her, she leaned her head against the wall and finished her coffee.