

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

I walked home feeling pleased that the first part of my mission had been accomplished, but apprehensive that it was now up to Grivas to respond and, if I was lucky, to invite me to his lair. He had a reputation for making quixotic decisions so I knew I must be prepared for anything. He may simply have me shot but I still believed he would not be able to resist the prospect of a full-page spread in a major London broadsheet. I could only wait and hope.

A few days later, I forget exactly how many, I was about to cross the ring road in the late afternoon on my way home from Cable and Wireless, having filed my daily report, when a car stopped in front of me on the crossing. The driver got out and smiled as though he knew me, and another younger man got out of the passenger seat and came round behind me. The first one spoke.

“Mr Ledbetter?” I nodded.

“A mutual friend would like to talk to you.” He gestured towards the boot, which the younger man had opened, and at the same moment I felt something very hard pressing against my spine.

“Please ...” he said with a sarcastic smile as he helped me climb in.

“Do I really have to travel in here?” I asked rather pathetically. He answered by slamming the lid shut on my head. The car moved off with a squeal of tyres. And, I assure

you, it happened just like that ... I was kidnapped on a busy street in broad daylight, and no one seemed to notice.

What followed was very unpleasant. I spent what seemed like an eternity in extreme discomfort in that pitch black sarcophagus of bare metal. My travelling companion was a spare wheel with a bald tyre which moved in sympathy with the driver's erratic cornering and braking. After a while I managed to arrange my body in the foetal position, bracing my shoulder against the wheel to hold it in one place while resting my head on the tyre. The air was thick with exhaust fumes and reeked of fuel. I knew I would slowly suffocate if I was not released soon, and as time passed I fell into a state of semi-consciousness.

When, after what I now know to have been about two hours, the car finally stopped, it was pitch dark. The boot was opened but I was semi-conscious and freezing cold. I was so cramped I could hardly move, and I blinked vacantly at the torch being directed on me. At first I could not focus on what was happening, and from their feverish conversation the two young men seemed anxious they may have harmed me. They almost lifted me out, and sat me on the rear bumper because I could not stand. It took a good ten minutes for me to recover from the effects of the fumes and my cramped position. When they were satisfied I could stand they put a hood over my head and frog-marched me into a house.

Once I was inside I was pushed down into a chair, the hood was removed and my hands were tied behind me. The elder youth had a revolver and my anxiety grew when I saw he was handling it like a toy; it was obvious he knew nothing about firearms. I tried

to ignore him and focus on my surroundings. There was an old woman in the room, and she looked at me, shaking her head as she spoke angrily to my captors.

“You must give him some water. Two hours in that stinking boot would have killed most people. You are too young and too stupid to be doing this sort of thing.”

The elder youth spoke. “It would have served him right if we’d killed him.” He was trying to appear tough and in control and said in an off-hand voice, “You get him water if you’re so worried about him.”

“Just because you’re holding a gun does not give you permission to be disrespectful to your grandmother. When you grow up you’ll have to learn how to behave.” She turned to leave the room muttering, “When all this is over you’ll have to be taught to be civilised and stop behaving like animals.” She reappeared with a glass of water, which she held to my lips so that I could drink. I finished it quickly and whispered to her that I wanted more.

The elder youth roughly pushed himself between me and his grandmother and said while looking directly at me, “Thank you, Grandmother. He can have more water when he’s answered our questions.” The old woman left the room shaking her head.

He turned to me. “We need to know why you want to meet Digenis. Is your plan to lead the soldiers to him so that he can be captured? If that is your plan you must think us very stupid.”

Now the younger one spoke. “Or perhaps it is your friends in Special Branch you are working for?”

“Stop!” I almost shouted to show my irritation. “I can’t answer more than one question at a time. Tell me what you want to know and I’ll do my best to answer. And by the way, I don’t know why you think I have friends in Special Branch. They gave me a very hard time a few months ago because I witnessed the shootings in the hospital.”

“We lost two of our best men in that operation ...”

This remark made the older youth angry. “Can’t you stop talking? I’m trying to question him.” He asked again, “Now, why do you want to see Digenis? What is your plan? He won’t see you unless he trusts you.”

“If the two of you will stop bickering and listen to what I have to say, you may begin to understand.” I let my frustration show. “I have already explained in a letter to Digenis himself that I want to see him to allow him to put his case to the British people. I don’t think he understands them and I don’t think they understand him. If this conflict is ever going to end there has to be a degree of understanding and respect on both sides.”

The younger one could not resist butting in. “The only way it will end is when the British grant self-determination to the Cypriot people.”

I could see the older youth was getting irritated by his younger brother but I was happy to cause more confusion so I said, “You know that’s never going to happen so why do you persist? It is just costing more and more lives on both sides.”

The young one persisted. “If you said that to Digenis he would probably kill you ...” At that moment the door burst open. A much older man entered the room, dressed all in black with a Sten gun slung over his shoulder. They jumped to their feet; this man clearly carried authority. His skin was heavily tanned and his moustache and black hair

were streaked with grey. He looked at me and then looked at the two young men before putting his weapon on the table, having first removed the magazine.

“What on earth’s going on?” he said in an angry voice. “I told you to bring him here and wait for me. I said nothing about tying him up or interrogating him. Release him immediately, you stupid boys. He’s our guest, not a prisoner.” He turned to me. “I do apologise, Mr Ledbetter. My name’s Michael, and I’m to be your escort. Please forgive these boys; they’re very young and they have much to learn. What they lack in manners and judgement they make up for in enthusiasm.”

As the younger boy started to untie me I said, “Indeed, such an excess of zeal without proper discipline to control it can have dangerous consequences.”

Michael nodded to me as he took the revolver from the older brother, checked the safety catch and placed it on the table. “You’re right, but I’m sure they’ll learn quickly.” He looked at the boys, who had now retreated into a corner, then turned to me. “Have you been given anything to eat?”

“Not yet.”

He opened the kitchen door and called a name I didn’t properly hear. When there was no response he left the room, and after a few minutes I could hear him talking to the old woman in the kitchen. From the open door came delicious smells of cooking and baking bread. He stepped back for a moment. “Our hostess is preparing supper for us. She says it will be ready in about half an hour. We would offer you a bed for the night here but we must move off after we have eaten. It’s safer to travel by night.”

“Do we have far to go?”

“I can’t say anything about where we’re going, and I’m afraid you’ll have to be blindfolded for some of the time.” As he was speaking he opened a cupboard and found two glasses and a bottle of wine. “I hope you’ll take a glass of wine with me?”

“Thank you, I would like that.”

As he filled the glasses he cocked his head towards the boys and said, “They’re too young!” He looked at the elder boy and said, “Go and ask your grandmother for some olives and some nuts.” The boy left the room, returning a few minutes later with a bowl of black olives and another of pistachios. He tried to take a few pistachios as he put the bowl down but received a sharp slap on the back of his hand.

“No you don’t you cheeky boy. Go over there and be quiet, the pair of you.” He pointed to an old sofa against the wall at the far end of the room. After we had drunk our first glass of wine and talked about everything except the political situation on the island he suddenly shivered and said, “Come on, you boys, you can make yourselves useful. We’re cold sitting here; you can go outside and bring in some logs and kindling and make us a fire.” He turned to me and said, “What’s the point of boys if you don’t get them to work for you?” He gave a great, hearty laugh and slapped me on the back.

I realised that I was being treated to Cypriot hospitality and good manners. Controversial subjects were avoided when speaking to strangers, and that slap on the back made me somewhat less of a stranger than I had been half an hour ago. Also there was a nonchalance about the way his Sten gun and the revolver were lying on the table among the nuts and the olives. Perhaps it was a signal that he trusted me. He knew I had a mission which certainly did not include picking up a weapon.

In no time the boys had a wood fire crackling in the grate and the room soon began to feel warmer. When the food arrived, it was a stew of lamb, or possibly goat, with potatoes and carrots in a rich gravy. There was also bread and cheese and sausage and another bottle of wine. We sat down together to eat, and I must say the old lady had cooked an excellent meal. We talked of the cold winter weather, the quality of the wine harvest, the state of the roads and how last week there had been a heavy fall of snow in the highest mountains. There was not a word of politics. To begin with the boys were argumentative and morose, but after Michael had told them to stop they were quiet.

I suppose it must have been about eleven o'clock when Michael stood up and said we should get going. I was feeling quite sleepy but I roused myself when he picked up his Sten, put the magazine in his pocket and said, "These guns are almost as dangerous to the person firing them as they are to the target! They have no safety catch and if you drop it on the stock when it's loaded it can shoot you. Always remove the magazine."

I answered, putting on a serious face, "I hope I never have cause to pick one up."

"They are light and easily carried." He hoisted it on to his shoulder. "Now we must go. Do you have a coat? It's cold, and will be a lot colder where we're going."

"No; I was kidnapped by these two in what I'm wearing."

He turned to the old lady. "Can we find our guest a coat and perhaps some boots? His shoes will disintegrate if they get wet." She disappeared upstairs and a few minutes later came down with a thick kapok jacket and a pair of heavy boots. There were also some knitted socks to go inside them.

“There are gloves in the pockets of the coat,” she said. “If the boots are too big, we can stuff them with newspaper.” I quickly pulled on the socks over the ones I was wearing and my feet slid into the boots as though they had been made for me. I had to leave my shoes, but that did not seem too great a loss; at least I had not been wearing my favourite suede desert boots.

Michael took the car key from the elder boy and told him they must stay with their grandmother and await orders. I thanked the grandmother for the excellent meal and followed Michael outside, where the smell of woodsmoke hung in the air. He used his torch to show me the way to the car, but as I started to climb into the front seat he stopped me.

“We must both take a piss before we set off. I won’t be able to stop later.” He promptly turned his back and I did the same. After a few moments he got into the driving seat and I got in beside him.

“This is more comfortable than the boot!”

“Did those boys make you travel the whole way from Nicosia in the boot?”

“Yes and it nearly killed me!”

“I told them that once you were clear of Nicosia you should be let out of the boot and sit blindfold on the back seat. They think because they have a gun it’s clever to force people to do something unpleasant. They need a lot more training. I am truly sorry and I apologise. You are our guest but they treated you like a captive. If I were to tell Digenis what they did he would punish them severely. Any more disobedience after that and he would have them shot.”

“Wow, that’s a bit harsh.”

“Perhaps, but it’s the sort of unambiguous discipline that even children understand. In our situation one piece of seemingly innocent indiscipline can endanger the lives of all your comrades and cannot be allowed.”

“But such punishments can be misused and false allegations can be made to get rid of people!”

“Digenis is very tough but scrupulously fair. Only he can order such punishment.” I was about to say even the great men can make mistakes when Michael added, “He would always know if an accusation was false,” which made my remark pointless.

He negotiated a difficult bend and then pulled off the road on to the verge.

“Now I must fix your blindfold. You will have to wear it until we arrive.” He secured it for me with a gentleness I was not expecting. He seemed anxious to make sure it was comfortable.

“I expect the boys just put a bag over your head.”

“Only to go into the house. Remember I was in the boot!”

“Of course. In fact, it’s so dark now there is little point in the blindfold, but you might see a signpost in the headlights which could tell you where we are.”

“You don’t have to worry about that, I’ve given the Colonel my word that I will never reveal his whereabouts. You must remember I’m a newspaper man, not a soldier.”

“I know, but orders are orders!” I did not demur.

We drove on for perhaps half an hour and it must have been close to midnight when we stopped and allowed traffic to pass before turning on to a main road. The

surface was smoother and the corners were fewer. Then suddenly, after only a few minutes, Michael swore as he braked hard.

“Shit! We’ve run into a roadblock.” I pulled off the blindfold and saw a line of cars and a lot of bright lights on both sides of the road. I could hear the drone of a big generator, which meant this was a serious operation. Michael seemed upset. “Why did I have no warning? Now it’s too late. I can’t even turn round and make a run for it. If the soldiers search the car they’ll find my gun and I’ll be arrested.”

I felt nervous, and for the first time seriously frightened, but I knew I had to deal with this or my meeting with Grivas would never happen, so I said, “Leave this to me. Is the gun well hidden?”

“Yes, I always take that precaution.”

“Now listen, I can bluff this out using my press pass. You are my driver and I am on a mission to report on an incident.” I stopped and thought for a moment. “I am afraid I must know where we are or I will have no credibility with the soldiers.”

He hesitated but then he said, “We’re south of Larnaca, just outside the village of Choirokoitia on the road to Limassol.”

“Has there been trouble in Limassol today?”

“No more than usual. There’s trouble in Limassol every day!”

“OK, I’ll do my best. You speak no English and are a simple country boy who knows nothing of politics. That is why I am employing you.”

A soldier carrying a rifle came walking down the line of cars. I showed my press pass and asked him if they had made any useful finds in the roadblock.

“Not yet, sir, but we are expecting a big fish to come this way later tonight. I think he’s a bishop or something and he’s been sheltering *EOKA* men in his monastery.”

“Well good luck with that. I really need to get to Limassol because it’s very late and I’m knackered. I’ve been up for the last two nights on various wild goose chases. I can vouch for my driver. He doesn’t speak much English but he’s a good man and he’s been my driver for the last two months. We’ve been on the road for a long time.”

“OK, sir. Tell him to follow me and drive up beside the line of cars, and I’ll speak to the sergeant.” We did as he suggested and overheard his conversation.

“Hey Sarge, this bloke’s English and he’s got a press pass. He’s on his way to Limassol; should I let him through?”

Before he could answer an officer came up. “What’s this car doing out of the line?”

“The passenger has a press pass, sir.”

He bent down to my window. “Let me see your press pass, please.” I held it out and he took it. “Please step out of the car for a moment, sir.” I did as he asked, and he said in a confidential voice as he handed back my pass, “If you want an exclusive you can stay here and see us arrest a bishop. We’ve been told he’s heading this way.” This was one thing I really didn’t need; an enthusiastic young ex-public school boy running a roadblock thinking he was about to be a hero. It was more likely that his intended quarry was miles away heading in the opposite direction.

“When do you expect him to come through?”

“Hard to tell. The last we heard was that he set off from Larnaca about an hour ago, and by that reckoning he should be here any minute.”

I shook my head. "I'm sorry but I don't think you'll see him tonight. If he'd been coming this way he'd have been here half an hour ago. Even on these roads it can't take more than half an hour to get here from Larnaca." His face fell as I was speaking. "Thanks for the offer but I don't think I'll wait. I've been up for two nights already and I desperately need some sleep." I could see the young man had been looking forward to having me report his moment of glory. His expression was resigned, but he would have to keep up the pretence that he was about to make history until he was told to stand down.

"OK, if you want to get on your way, just let the corporal here make a note of the details of your press pass and of your driver's identity card, and then you can go."

The corporal had listed everyone who had passed the checkpoint, and with fear and foreboding I saw Michael's name being added to the list. I just wanted to get the hell out of there, so I yawned as I thanked the officer and said, "Thank you and good luck." By now I was sweating and having difficulty keeping my voice steady, but once we passed through to the other side of the roadblock and were on the road again I relaxed. I turned to Michael and spoke in Greek.

"That was a closer call than you could imagine. I would have had a lot of explaining to do and you would have been arrested for carrying a firearm; and at the moment that carries the death penalty! I was terrified that they would search the car as a matter of routine."

Michael was also sweating, but was philosophical. "I wouldn't have just been arrested; I would have been given the treatment by Special Branch. You did very well, Harry, I owe you a lot."

"They took down your name, which may appear on a wanted list, but I doubt they'll discover that until morning."

"Don't be too sure." Michael drove on as fast as the little Ford would allow and we had not covered more than five miles when he spoke.

"They've probably worked out who I am by now, and I can see lights behind us."

"Damn, that's not good."

"No it's not. This car is far too slow. We must not allow them to get close to us so I must find a forest track. I think I remember one a little further on." We were now screaming round the corners and struggling up hills in low gear. The Land Rover chasing us was gaining steadily. The army driver was not as skilful as Michael; if he had been they would have been on our back bumper very quickly. After a couple more miles they had not gained much, but Michael was sweating again. I remember that we struggled to the top of a steep incline and I looked round as we began the descent on the other side; much sooner than I expected, the Land Rover's lights appeared at the bottom of the hill. They were no more than one hundred and fifty yards behind. We sailed round several hairpin bends and then suddenly Michael went straight on at a hairpin. He switched off the lights and we were blind while the car bounced and bucked along a rough track for thirty yards.

"I'm sorry about the bumps but I have to use the handbrake; the brake lights would give us away." When we came to rest we were deep in the wood and invisible from the road. Michael spoke quickly and I could feel the tension in his voice.

"Get out and hide in the trees. Now!" This was an order. I opened the door and ran as far as I could, which was probably no more than twenty yards. Meanwhile Michael had found his Sten and I heard him snap a magazine into place. I wondered if he was preparing to shoot it out with them. I hid behind a thicket and felt helpless, waiting motionless and sweating.

The Land Rover's lights seemed to take ages to appear. They flashed by and immediately Michael called out, "We must hide the car. If they come up here they'll never find us in the dark, but they might find the car." He climbed back behind the wheel and put the side lights on for a few seconds before driving on another twenty yards. Then he called to me, "Just let your eyes become accustomed to it and you'll be able to see well enough; it's not that dark." He pointed. "Do you see that gap in the trees?" By screwing up my eyes I sort of saw it. "We'll put the car in there and cover it with brush wood. They'll never see it in the dark unless they walk into it."

He drove into the side track, which was scarcely visible. When he had covered about thirty yards he got out and produced a large hunting knife and cut a number of small branches from an overhanging conifer tree. He used these to cover the car and then he cut two more and handed one to me.

"Just do what I do; we must brush away the tyre tracks. It wouldn't fool anyone in daylight but in the dark they won't know where we are." We continued brushing up

to the main track, which had become a small watercourse during the earlier rain, and the tyres had made clear prints in the sandy silt. A bit more rain and it would all be washed away. When we reached the main road and had obliterated the car's progress down the track, Michael led me across the road and up a narrow path along the slope in the crook of the hairpin. The moon was now lighting our surroundings when there was a gap in the clouds, but we were well hidden in thick undergrowth. The Land Rover reappeared within about fifteen minutes, driving very slowly and stopping every few yards to examine the sandy verges for fresh tyre tracks with powerful torches. A soldier jumped out where we had left the road.

"There's a sort of track here, sir." The officer jumped out now and together they examined the ground.

"It must have been about here that they pulled off the road. The sand is still a bit wet after the rain. Their tyre tracks would show up very clearly but I can't see anything. Let's walk a bit further down this one." An older voice came from the back of the Land Rover and then a sergeant jumped down.

"Be very careful, sir. You could be walking straight into an ambush. If this is where they turned off they will have their guns trained on us right now." The officer looked up and quickly moved back towards the Land Rover.

"My God you're right; we'd be sitting ducks. We'd better get back. We'll come and have a good look round here in daylight. I kick myself for letting them go. That press pass was so realistic and the bloke spoke such perfect English. I thought the driver would be just that, not a convicted *EOKA* killer."

“We were all taken in, sir ...” The sergeant was talking as the driver ground his gears and they slammed the doors.

Michael turned to me and grinned, “If you hadn’t been with me, Harry, I would have killed them all and stolen their Land Rover. They are pathetic. They know nothing of guerrilla warfare. The first rule is you never expose yourself in the open when you know the enemy might be close, particularly not at night when they can see you but you can’t see them. They were a perfect target!”

I felt embarrassed and uncomfortable that he was able to mock my fellow countrymen like that. That young officer was very green and no match for Michael, but then the same could have been said of me if I had been accepted by the army and put in a similar position. I hoped I would have done better than he did, but I was not at all sure about that. I said defensively, “The sergeant was the one with common sense.”

“Perhaps, but the most obvious mistake they made was to chase after us at all. A smart guerrilla will never get caught like that. That young officer would have got them all killed if you hadn’t been with me.”

“He’ll be in deep trouble. He should have held you until your identity card had been checked out. Had he done his job you would have been in handcuffs and God knows how I would have explained myself!”

“The important thing is that you were convincing and he trusted you. We have been very lucky, but let’s stop congratulating ourselves and get on.” We extracted the car from the bushes remarkably easily, but before we pulled on to the road Michael stopped and leant towards me.

"I'm sorry, and it hardly seems worth it, but I must follow orders and blindfold you again."

An hour later we entered a house and the blindfold came off. I assumed, wrongly as it turned out, that we were in Limassol. We had to wake the old man and his wife who lived there, and Michael apologised for being so late, explaining what had happened. We slept on proper beds for what was left of the night, and in the morning twilight, with the cock crowing in a steady drizzle, I looked out of the window and saw that we were in the foothills of the mountains. I went out into the yard to wash and shave with a borrowed razor, but just as I was about to apply the blade to my chin the old man appeared with a jug of hot water, a luxury I was not expecting. I thanked him effusively.

Ablutions complete, I went inside and was given coffee and freshly baked bread. Michael appeared similarly refreshed and said, "Today we will go to Digenis." He spoke quite openly in front of the old couple. "I've sent him a message about how you got me away from that roadblock. It went by courier about an hour ago. I'm sure he'll be looking forward to talking to you. I told him about the 'big fish' who would have been warned of the roadblock almost before it was erected. I'm sure he kept well away." I felt acutely uncomfortable that I had been complicit in an *EOKA* operation, but I had to keep up the pretence of strict impartiality.

"I'm ready to go when you give the word," I said.

"We'll go in the car to start with but we must walk the last few miles. You have some good strong boots now so we should be fine."

We got in the car and once again he fixed my blindfold. We were soon driving on gravel roads and seemed to have been climbing steadily. I had to clear my ears several times, and when Michael told me I could remove the blindfold we were in cloud, with visibility of about thirty yards. For half an hour we continued along the gravel track in what seemed to be a massive plantation of mature conifers. The rain was falling steadily, and when the track became steep he pulled up.

“From here we must go on foot. The road is steep and further on it will be very muddy. This car will get stuck. It will get cold later so put on your coat.” I nodded and pulled my coat from the back seat. “Now we must hide the car.”

I climbed out. “I’ll help you manoeuvre. Where do you want to put it?”

He was pointing to a gap between two trees. “I’ll back in there; just tell me before I dent the car. The pine needles will not be good for traction but if I don’t spin the wheels I shouldn’t sink in.”

He reversed slowly between the trees and managed to do so without losing traction. The car came to rest in deep shadow and was hard to see. It was a clever manoeuvre, and although it was only about twenty yards from the gravel road it was almost invisible. To complete the exercise we cut small branches from the trees and covered the car as we had done the previous night, and then I started to remove the tyre tracks.

“Don’t bother with that, the rain will get rid of the tracks better than we can.” As he spoke he slung the Sten over his shoulder. We each carried a rucksack and he sported a black beret, which made him look rather French. I found a woolly hat and gloves in the

pockets of my coat and fancied I looked like a football fan on a wet Saturday in the north of England.

For more than an hour the rain was relentless as we trudged along, looking neither to the left nor to the right. We had to keep our eyes down to avoid tripping when the track became steep and heavily rutted. Rocks and stones were exposed where the water had washed away the sand and silt.

The rain eased to a drizzle as we reached a plateau where the trees were more spread out. After a while the track became indistinct, but before it disappeared altogether Michael made a left turn and we started along a scarcely discernible deer trail. Later we followed the edge of another plantation of conifers with an area of rocky, open country to our left. Further on, where the plantation ended, the land was strewn with boulders and stunted trees. As he negotiated the boulders, Michael spoke for the first time since we had left the car.

“We have come to know this terrain pretty well but it’s still very easy to get lost up here. Once you leave the road you have to navigate carefully because you can easily find yourself on the wrong side of the ravine, which can mean retracing your steps for hours. You’ll see what I mean in a minute.” I understood very clearly when we reached a place where, to our left, the ground fell away steeply. The depth of the gorge was hard to judge because I found myself looking down on the tops of large conifers growing close together.

“We’ll soon be following the river that flows down at the bottom of that gully, but in the meantime we must keep back from the skyline. We don’t want to be spotted by some keen young soldier who could take a shot at us.”

We continued to walk just back from the ridge for half an hour, and every so often I had a glimpse of a swollen torrent that I could sometimes hear rushing over the rocks far below. The rain had ceased and I was beginning to enjoy the fresh mountain air suffused with the scent of pine.

Michael climbed up on to a rocky outcrop, taking care to keep below the skyline, and I followed. We both crouched low. From that vantage point we could see a series of waterfalls where the stream tumbled between lichen-encrusted rocks before disappearing deep into the gorge.

We turned right and headed steeply uphill, following the watercourse. We had to clamber over huge boulders beside waterfalls, and ford side streams over slippery, weed-encrusted rocks. After another hour we stopped to rest and Michael pulled some cheese and bread from his rucksack. We sat on a rock and munched. The cloud base had lifted, allowing a watery winter sun to brighten the scene.

“We have about another hour’s march before we will reach the place where we will find Digenis, assuming he has not been forced to move on by an army patrol looking for him.”

We continued up the valley and in about an hour, just as Michael had said, a man came out of the trees and embraced him. He came up to me and smiled, shaking my hand.

“My name is Alex. I hear you saved Michael from being arrested at a roadblock.”

“I think it was a poor decision on the part of the British officer that allowed us to get away with it.”

“Whatever it was we are all very grateful!” I smiled but felt embarrassed, though for very different reasons to those assumed by Alex. It was of course convenient to me that we had not been detained, but I was deeply conflicted about it.

We followed Alex into the trees and came to a rocky place where there were few trees taller than a man. Before us was a range of high pinnacles of jagged grey rock with many fissures and cracks. Trees had taken root in the crevices but had grown stunted and low. The rocks and trees made it hard to get a comfortable footing, but we were following a path of sorts. As we moved closer Alex pointed out a deep fissure in the vertical face of the rock through which a man could pass, but which was almost entirely concealed by two conifers. It was hidden to anyone who was not very close to it.

As we approached, Grivas appeared from behind the trees and stood for a moment, blinking in the winter sunlight. He was a small man with a salt and pepper moustache and a black beret on his head, and was well wrapped up against the winter cold. At that moment he looked to me to have the arrogant bearing of a latter-day Napoleon pleased with all he surveyed; only the horse was missing. Slowly and carefully he stepped down from his vantage point among the rocks to greet me. He was followed by a man dressed in black with a craggy face and a similar moustache. This, I learnt later, was the personal bodyguard who never left his side. Grivas held out his hand.

“Mr Ledbetter?” His cordiality took me by surprise, but reflecting on it afterwards I knew it was what I should have been expecting. I stepped forward and took his hand.

He held mine in a vice-like grip and looked deep into my eyes. Doubt crept into his voice. "You are an Englishman?" That was a question, no doubt prompted by my dark colouring.

"Yes; my father is English but my mother is half Indian."

"You look almost as if you could be Greek!" He chortled at his own joke and the others laughed politely.

"How did you learn to speak Greek? It's a bit archaic but it's good enough." I explained how it had come about. He did not seem to believe my explanation but just said, "Follow me." I learnt later that his apparent disbelief was his normal demeanour.

He led me up the rocky slope, between the trees and through the narrow gap in the rocks. The fissure, for that is what it was, had been spanned by fallen branches and brushwood to create a crude shelter from the elements which had probably been used by shepherds for centuries. It had probably suffered occasional roof collapses but it was a natural formation. Further on, the fissure widened out into a broad bowl in the rock. Ingenious *EOKA* men had cleared the area of debris and had inserted the trunks of whole pine trees, which spanned the width of the bowl. Above the tree trunks a stout tarpaulin had been spread and the whole structure had been concealed by fallen pine branches piled on top; a few years' accumulation of debris and needles made it appear entirely natural from above. An almost flat floor had been created by using stamped earth to even out the jagged undulations of the rock.

I marvelled to myself at the total concealment this refuge afforded a wanted man. The only light came from a recess in the rock which had been left open to the elements.

There was a camp bed in one corner next to a washstand with a makeshift screen around it, and on the other side of the room several stacking chairs were arranged round a trestle table, on which hissed a powerful Tilly lamp.

Grivas waved me to a seat and sat down at the head of the table in an upright armchair. His bodyguard sat behind us, which I found disconcerting.

All four men were wearing the black beret so beloved of revolutionaries. Grivas removed his as he sat down and the others followed suit. His hair was grey and thinning and his face was deeply lined. His heavy moustache gave his face a humourless severity, as though nothing could ever make him smile or laugh. His body was lean, with no hint of the belly that was carried by most middle-aged Cypriot men. He was known to be an ascetic, and to follow a regime of self-denial as ruthless as the harsh discipline he imposed on his followers. Anyone who thought his fifty-eight years would have slowed him down would be mistaken. I looked him in the eye and said in Greek, "Thank you for seeing me, Colonel, I am very keen to have our talk."

There was a flintiness in his eye which made his outward cordiality seem disingenuous. I could see that he would not hesitate to send a bullet my way if he felt I presented any sort of threat. "Welcome my quarters," he said. "They are simple and sparse but sufficient. I live in such places all year round." He indicated with his head, "My bodyguard will be with us at all times but he will not interrupt our discussions. He is here purely for my protection in case there is an attack."

He had been writing what I assumed to be his journals by the light of the Tilly lamp, and he carefully tidied his papers away. He said, by way of conversation, "I am

recording every detail of the campaign and one day I shall publish a record of each event in this historic but tragic conflict.”

“You have a profound sense of destiny, Colonel,” I answered with a grave expression on my face, while wondering why.

“It is my belief that any serious commander engaged in a campaign must recognise his duty to record for posterity every important decision and his reasons for taking it. In this conflict the records kept officially by your military historians will be heavily influenced by the belief that we are simply terrorists with a grievance and this conflict is an irritation, and of little importance in the greater scheme of things in the history of the British Empire. Such a conclusion must someday stand to be corrected, because it does no justice to the integrity of my country’s reasons for pursuing this cause.” He handed a pile of papers to his bodyguard, who carefully placed them in a leather briefcase. He went on, “I have no quarrel with the British people. You are a nation with a distinguished history for which I have the greatest admiration. I fought shoulder to shoulder with your army against Germany and later against communism twelve years ago. My quarrel is with your ruling politicians. They are a political clique who live in the past. Their era ended in 1914 and they seem blind to the realities of the modern world. They believe the British can still command an empire populated with subject peoples who must do their bidding. The succeeding generation will be forced to realise this folly.” I began to feel distinctly uncomfortable. I did not come to receive a lecture and knew I must halt his tirade.