

LE JOHN CARRÉ

**THE LITTLE
DRUMMER GIRL**



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JOHN LE CARRÉ, the pseudonym for David Cornwell, was a member of the British Foreign Service from 1959 to 1964. His third novel, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, became a worldwide bestseller. He has written twenty-one novels, which have been published in thirty-six languages. Many of his books have been made into films, including *The Constant Gardener*; *The Russia House*; *The Little Drummer Girl*; and *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*.

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To David and JB Greenway,
Julia, Alice, and Sadie—
for times and places and friendship

FOREWORD

JOHN LE CARRÉ

July 1982

Many Palestinians and Israelis gave me their help and time in the writing of this book. Among the Israelis, I may mention especially my good friends Yuval Elizur of *Ma'ariv* and his wife, Judy, who read the manuscript, left me with my own judgments, however mistaken, and headed me off from several grave solecisms that I prefer to forget.

Other Israelis—in particular, certain past and serving officers of the intelligence fraternity—also deserve my sincere thanks for their advice and cooperation. They too asked for no assurances and scrupulously left me with my independence. I think with special gratitude of General Shlomo Gazit, formerly chief of military intelligence, and now president of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Beer Sheva, who will always personify for me the enlightened Israeli soldier and scholar of his generation. But there are others whom I may not name.

I must also express my gratitude to Mayor Teddy Kollek of Jerusalem for his hospitality at Mishkenot Sha'ananim; to the fabled Mr. and Mrs. Vester of the American Colony Hotel, Jerusalem; to the proprietors and staff of the Commodore Hotel, Beirut, for making everything possible in impossible circumstances; and to Abu Said Abu Rish, doyen of Beirut journalists, for the generosity his counsel, although he knew nothing of my intentions.

Of the Palestinians, some are dead, others are taken prisoner, the rest presumably are for the most part homeless or dispersed. The fighting boys who looked after me in the upper flat in Sidon and chatted with me in the tangerine groves; the bombweary but indomitable refugees of the camps at Rashidiyeh and Nabatiyeh: from what I hear, their fate is little different from that of their reconstructed counterparts in this story.

My host in Sidon, the Palestinian military commander Salah Ta'amari, deserves a book to himself and I hope that one day he will write it. For the present, let this book record his courage, and my thanks to him and his assistants for having shown me the Palestinian heart.

Lt. Col. John Gaff, G.M., acquainted me with the banal horrors of homemade bombs and made sure I was not inadvertently providing a recipe for their manufacture; Mr. Jeremy Cornwallis of Alan Day Ltd., Finchley, cast a professional eye over my red Mercedes car.

INTRODUCTION

JOHN LE CARRÉ

April 1993

When the Cold War ended, people wiser than myself rushed to print with the gleeful declaration that henceforth I had nothing further to write about: le Carré's rice-bowl was broken.

The fact is that of my fourteen novels to date, five have had nothing whatever to do with the Cold War, and that as a writer I am far happier than many of my colleagues that the Wall has finally come down, and I can move to the other passions of our time. Unlike the Kremlinologists, armchair strategists and defence correspondents who are at this moment desperately scratching around for new territory, mine was staked out long ago, and *The Little Drummer Girl*, written in 1981–82 while the Cold War was still running nicely, is a piece of it. Its cast contains no George Smiley and no character I have used before or since. The Cold War is a distant abstraction at best. The novel's theatre of the real, as my protagonist Joseph calls it, is the much longer-running war between two peoples—the Jews and the Arabs. But stop, stop! I have already revealed my bias. The Palestinians, I was repeatedly assured in Israel in those days, are not a people. They are a leftover rabble of peasants and layabouts, whose only task for two thousand years was to keep the Jewish homeland ticking over until its rightful owners returned!

It was a hard story to come to grips with. I began with no firm plot in my head, which is my way, and no preconception about which side had the better case, except that, as a young intelligence officer in post-war Austria, I had interrogated numberless Jewish refugees and their plight was, and is, forever printed in my memory. I had the usual English familiarity with middle-class anti-Semitism—though, Lord knows, it was never a patch on the Continental and East European varieties that I have since encountered.

Of Palestinians, of Arabs altogether, I knew next to nothing. In the Foreign Office, where I had served for a few years, Arabists had always seemed to me to have an upper-class slant to them. Even when they were working on other territories, they seemed to remain a club within a club, and outside got to hear little of their deliberations. The Arabists, of course, would have said the same about the pro-Israeli lobby, though it was much smaller. And probably, in the diplomatic theatre of the unreal, as in Joseph's theatre of the real, both sides would have been right.

Somehow, one morning, I began. My first destination was the offices of the League of Arab States in Green Street in London's West End. Is it still there, I wonder, with its security cameras on the

rooftops of adjoining houses, and its bored, fit men lounging in the street? I've never been back. Not to the Middle East, not to Green Street. Once the books are finished, I never do.

The PLO's representative in Green Street, in those days was a Mr. Ramlawi, and I had an appointment with him that midday. I had sent him a copy of *Time* magazine with my engaging features on the cover. On the telephone I had dropped names of people we had in common: "Yes, yes nice fellow," said a brown voice. It was in my mind, if we got along, to take Mr. Ramlawi on to lunch. I wanted everything he could give me—introduction, guidance, warnings, propaganda, lies, I didn't mind. I wanted the treatment from both sides. But because the PLO were strangers to me, I wanted them to have first go.

I pressed the bell, and the bored, fit men in the street eyed me without expression. So did the cameras on the roof. The door opened and I stepped into an armoured glass coffin set on end. The door clicked shut behind me. While I stood in my nice suit, peering through the glass into the very pretty eighteenth-century hallway, two Arab heavies studied me with liverish disapproval. My coffin opened. I stepped into the hall, the men closed on me and patted me down: the long, slow, methodical hand-search of professionals. They do it to you at Lod Airport in Tel Aviv or in the antechamber to Yassir Arafat's permanently temporary headquarters. And they do it to you in Green Street, or they did then. They don't just frisk you, these Arab and Jewish bodyguards. They interrogate you with their hands and eyes, watching you for suspicious body-talk as they move slowly over you. Time is of the essence. Take as much of it as you like. Make the suspect conscious of his genitals, his bad breath, his bad intentions. Writing *The Little Drummer Girl*, I was searched like this more times than I'll ever remember. But you never forget a first time, and mine was in Green Street that midday, on my way to visit Mr. Ramlawi.

And of course, Mr. Ramlawi didn't show up. He left me standing at the altar. There was nothing in his appointments book. His secretary had never heard of me. He was abroad. He was out. He was busy. Try another day. So that was another first time. Countless Arabs have kept me waiting since. I could do a book on the antechambers of the PLO alone. But the absent Ramlawi gave me my baptism of fire which is a bad joke because his predecessor in London had been shot dead, and Ramlawi himself was in due course shot dead in Spain, or perhaps he was blown up, I forget. But the PLO won't.

After Green Street I did what I should have done in the first place and got hold of Patrick Seale, the distinguished Arabist and writer, and gave him the lunch I couldn't give Ramlawi. And through Seale I began to leapfrog, which is how it goes when it is going properly and you are making the inward and the outward journey at the same time: people led to other people, I was passed around, pointed in conflicting directions, my telephone never stopped ringing, everyone wanted to persuade me of something, head me off from some fatal error: my case had finally become active as far as the Palestinians were concerned.

Most significant of all, it turned out, was my encounter with Princess Dina of Jordan, King Hussein's first wife, who was by now married to Salah Ta'amari, chief of Yassir Arafat's young fighters in South Lebanon. Dina popped in and out of London all the time. Salah traveled even more discreetly and was never punctual for anything, perhaps by design. But eventually we all three contrived to meet, for a very late lunch in a grand West End restaurant, where I had my first taste of Salah's fiery oratory over a Dover sole and Perrier water. He spoke a wonderful, passionate, literate English, with great brio. The people at the surrounding tables were spellbound. The lunch was a success. Dina and Salah invited me to stay in their house in Sidon. Salah promised to arrange introductions for me in Beirut. In return, I made it as clear as I could that I was playing with open cards: that I would also be visiting Israel—though I quickly learned to call it Palestine—that I wished

to be entrusted with no secrets, I wished only to hear the arguments and meet the players. Nevertheless, the benign assumptions that I was a conduit to the British Foreign Office which I had once served dogged me like my own shadow, and in the event it may have worked to my advantage, for I wonder today whether some of those who finally received me would have been as generous with their time if they had believed what happens to be the truth: that I was just a novelist looking for his story; and that the Foreign Office, if it thought of me at all any more, did so with cordial distaste.

From then on, like Charlie, I rode the emotional pendulum, swaying first this way, then that, as I went back and forth—most often via Cyprus—between Israel and the scattered Palestinians. One week I was with the Palestinians in Lebanon, or Jordan, or Tunisia. The next I was in Jerusalem, or Tel Aviv or the Negev, or (on one disastrous occasion) crossing the Allenby Bridge from the Jordanian side while afflicted with dysentery. My friend David Greenway, then of *The Washington Post*, was with me, and I will never forget watching him, as I crouched miserable in the back of our car, stride confidently down the line of parked lorries to the checkpoint and, by throwing out the name of every Oriental dignitary he knew, persuade the guards to let us go first. On another occasion, Greenway and I had ourselves driven up to an old crusader fort on the extreme southern border of Lebanon. The Palestinians were still in occupation—just. I will never know which I was more afraid of: the sniper fire from the valley, or the driving technique of our Druze driver, who prayed in grunts each time he flung us around another hairpin bend. Greenway was based in Jerusalem in those days and, like myself, covering both sides of the conflict. A few years earlier, when I was writing *The Honourable Schoolboy*, he had been based in South-East Asia, reporting the Vietnamese and Cambodian wars first for *Time*, then for *The Washington Post*.

It was my huge good luck, in the writing of both books to be able to slipstream behind him, for he had a reporter's courage, and a reporter's canniness, beyond anything I possessed.

It took an awful lot of waiting to meet Yassir Arafat. I had wasted the requisite number of infuriating hours in the evil little anteroom to the PLO offices in Beirut, studying the mangy exhibits of Israeli cluster-bombs and napalm canisters while I waited to be received by their spokesman of the day, a M Lapadi. I had nearly asphyxiated myself, breathing the stale cigarette smoke that clouded the offices of Arafat's seemingly numberless deskborne heroes.

There was a Palestinian face in those days. All the fighters seemed to have it, even the fat ones: a taut prison greyness, the haunted sickliness of the permanently homeless, living on junk food, cigarettes, and frayed nerves. Oh, the revolution was rich enough. Look at their new uniforms, boots, new vehicles, new field telephones, new weapons. The deprivation came from something far deeper than money. It had to do with the loss of love and hope and friend and family. For these divorced children no number of gold watches could repair the damage. Even Salah Ta'amari, whose legendary handsomeness turned every head as he strode into a room—even Salah with all his eloquence and humanity—could not escape the Palestinian face. Nor did he want to. And when the Israelis, during the invasion of Lebanon, eventually took him prisoner—their highest-ranking Palestinian prisoner ever—it was Salah's awareness of his tragic inheritance that enabled him, after months of solitary confinement and interrogation, to emerge triumphant on Israeli television as the spokesman for moderation and the common ground.

You will be contacted at your hotel, I had been told: *remain in your hotel, please, and wait.*

Writing is waiting. I hunkered down in Beirut's Commodore Hotel and spent a lot of money in the

bar, where the parrot had learned to imitate incoming and outgoing gunfire. I listened to the evening fusillades, and watched the long slow flashes behind the hilltops from my unlit bedroom window. I ate jumbo spring rolls in the empty Chinese restaurant that the Commodore's extraordinary staff somehow kept running through thick and thin. And I kept a constant ear for the front desk.

It was the limping waiter who finally brought me the summons. I think he had lost most of a leg, but he was so young and agile that it was hard to guess how much of him was missing. I was about halfway into my iron-cased spring roll as he toppled towards me between the empty tables, his eyes burning with excitement.

"Our chairman will see you now," he announced in a conspiratorial murmur of immense significance. "Now, please."

But it was my evening to be stupid. I saw that he meant me to stand up, so out of a kind of courtesy I did so. I supposed he was proposing to take me to see the chairman of the board of the hotel. I wondered whether I had stayed too long without paying my bill. Or perhaps Our Chairman wanted me to sign a book for him. Or perhaps he proposed to throw me out for some real or imagined offence against the hotel's propriety: in Beirut, nobody's behaviour, including my own, was predictable.

I followed the boy across the lobby as far as the front door, and it wasn't till I saw the little group of fighters with their coats worn like capes over their shoulders, and their hands out of sight in the folds and their two sand-coloured Volvo saloon cars waiting, that it dawned on me that I was being taken to see the Chairman of the PLO.

Somewhere in *The Little Drummer Girl* there is a description of a similar journey through Beirut at night—the repeated switching of cars, the lying low, the ninety-mile-an-hour burst before we bump across the central reservation of a dual carriageway in the wrong direction, and continue with our lights flashing, down the opposing lane. It was the journey we made that night. Our final destination was a half-bombed, halfrestored high-rise apartment house, the tenth or twelfth floor. And here at last as the fighters came forward to frisk me for the umpteenth time, I lost my temper and announced rudely that I was sick of being searched. Smiling apologetically, they drew back and bowed me into Arafat's presence. He was wearing a silver-coloured pistol, and a perfectly pressed uniform, and smeared with baby powder. The stubble on his cheeks as we entered the traditional embrace was silky, not prickly.

"Mr. David, why have you come here?" he demanded, unexpectedly using my Christian name while he placed his hands on my shoulders and studied my eyes like a worried doctor.

"Mr. Chairman, I have come to put my hand on the Palestinian heart."

He seized my hand and pressed it to his breast. His hand was as soft as a girl's.

"Mr. David! It is here! It is here!"

Arafat too had the Palestinian face. He could light it up like a beacon, fool with it like a clown, let it lapse into statesmanlike severity. He could make his eyes dance so merrily that you had to be a churl not to respond in kind. He talked in soft rushes of enthusiasm, puncturing a standard act with inspirational leaps to suit his audience. He could lecture you like a schoolmaster, or stare at you like a spellbound disciple while he listened to your wisdom. But the face that appeared between times was the face of an over-sensitive little soldier who had lost his horse, and you felt an irresistible urge to go and find it for him. I was enchanted by Arafat, which is what I wanted to be. I wanted to be as seducible as my Charlie. I wanted her to be a twice-promised woman, serving both loyalties, and therefore doomed to betray them also. So I went with the flow, as we say these days: but with both flows; with both opposing currents. When I was in Sidon, staying in Salah and Dina's beautiful, war-shattered house with its goats and lemon trees and cats and dogs, and I listened to Salah's fervent but

compassionate rhetoric, and the tales of the fighting boys who made up my escort, I experienced—an experience again as I write now—that mixture of pity and militant outrage which Charlie's controller Joseph was able so deftly to exploit.

And the *terror*? you ask indignantly. The *violence*? The bombs on Jewish school buses? Was I really so starry-eyed, so soft-headed, that I didn't even *realise* what was going on beneath my *nose*?

Oh, I realised all right.

You didn't have to be in Beirut very long in those days to smell the terror outside the door. It didn't take a trained eye to see that half the people you laughed and chattered with should be stretched out on the psychiatrist's couch; that their lives since infancy had been so displaced and violent that they had learned to identify "normal" society as a hostile target. Those who are treated as pariahs become pariahs—just as, to quote Auden, those to whom evil is done do evil in return.

I talked to the spokesman of one of the extremist splinter-groups that had allegedly broken away from the PLO and set up a terror shop of its own. His fighters, boys and girls, lounged around the walls, armed to the teeth. Behind my host's head hung a framed, high-quality photograph of a Swiss jumbo jet standing on a desert airfield. The center of its fuselage was splitting apart as the bomb inside it exploded. On that occasion, they had evacuated the passengers and crew before blowing up the plane. The mood inside the room was excited. A pretty girl handed round little cups of Arab coffee. The handsome young warriors scowled and helped themselves. Someone earnest started explaining how beautiful it was to cross the Sea of Galilee at dead of night in a rubber boat. And the killings? I asked. My host appeared puzzled by my question. He drew a breath and launched upon a standard speech: one Israeli bomb, falling on one camp in South Lebanon, killed more Palestinians in one afternoon than all the Zionists killed by Palestinians in a year . . . this wasn't killing, this was war . . . this was self-defence . . . I stepped into the fresh air. Or as fresh as you can get in Beirut traffic.

And of Israel? Why do I say so little of my experiences there? Well, because in a sense they were predictable, and structured, and because Israelis are accessible, they have doorbells and telephones that work, and nice houses and schools and passports. If you want to talk to someone in Israel, you can do so, and in almost every case you can. The official arguments are familiar, and fall more easily on our Western ear. Nobody kept me waiting. Generals in shirtsleeves leapt to their feet, clapped me on the shoulder, had all the time in the world. Politicians, intelligence officials, newspaper editors, chatted and argued together in an atmosphere of assured normality which the Palestinians, as a matter of philosophy, refuse to let into their lives.

It is not the Israelis' fault that victory does not bring popularity; that the romantic in us instinctively espouses the underdog. The Palestinians like to get themselves up as exiled partisans, as a popular and spontaneous movement of a people that has become a pawn in the world's game. But Israel can no longer conceal its identity as a hugely impressive, American-armed military power, arguably the best fighting force in the world. In the tug-of-war of public relations, the Palestinians have become the David, and the Israelis the Goliath. It was easy enough to see why European terror groups had nailed the Palestinian flag to their mast. Easy enough too to understand how Charlie's heart could be swayed in each direction in turn.

The reception of the book three years later was as paradoxical as had been my experience of writing it. By then I expected no different. The Israelis were relaxed and gave it a good press. In America, when

no popular novel had presumed to suggest that the Palestinians were human beings with a legitimate case, it created a brief furore. I endured, pretty much in silence, the cheap jibe that anyone who criticizes Israel is by definition anti-Semitic. I received some foul letters from American Jewish organizations, but some remarkably moving ones from individual Jews. The most influential American reviewers, Jewish and non-Jewish, gave the book a good time. A leading Arab-American dismissed it as "the usual stuff about Arabs as terrorists." In the Arab press, the book was praised and damned in the same haphazard way. An important Arab critic declared it anti-Palestinian, on the grounds that, in the novel as in life, the Palestinians lost.

As to myself, looking at it for the first time after ten years, I find that I am uncharacteristically at ease with it, my main regret being that we spend a little too long with the Germans at the beginning. My sadness is that, with few changes, the story could be played today, tomorrow, or the next day, and Charlie my heroine would still come out of it, as I did myself, torn to pieces by the battle between two peoples who both have justice on their side.

PART I

The Preparation

It was the Bad Godesberg incident that gave the proof, though the German authorities had no earthly means of knowing this. Before Bad Godesberg, there had been growing suspicion; a lot of it. But the high quality of the planning, as against the poor quality of the bomb, turned the suspicion into certainty. Sooner or later, they say in the trade, a man will sign his name. The vexation lies in the waiting.

It exploded much later than intended, probably a good twelve hours later, at twenty-six minutes past eight on Monday morning. Several defunct wristwatches, the property of victims, confirmed the time. As with its predecessors over the last few months, there had been no warning. But then none had been intended. The Düsseldorf car-bombing of a visiting Israeli arms-procurement official had been preceded by no warning, neither had the book bomb sent to the organisers of an Orthodox Jewish congress in Antwerp, which blew up the honorary secretary and burnt her assistant to death. Neither had the dustbin bomb outside an Israeli bank in Zürich, which maimed two passers-by. Only the Stockholm bomb had a warning, and that turned out to be a completely different group, not part of the series at all.

At twenty-five minutes past eight, the Drosselstrasse in Bad Godesberg had been just another leafy diplomatic backwater, about as far from the political turmoils of Bonn as you could reasonably get while staying within fifteen minutes' drive of them. It was a new street but mature, with lush, secretive gardens, and maids' quarters over the garages, and Gothic security grilles over the bottle-glass windows. The Rhineland weather for most of the year has the warm wet drip of the jungle; its vegetation, like its diplomatic community, grows almost as fast as the Germans build their roads, and slightly faster than they make their maps. Thus the fronts of some of the houses were already half obscured by dense plantations of conifers, which, if they ever grow to proper size, will presumably one day plunge the whole area into a Grimm's fairy-tale blackout. These trees turned out to be remarkably effective against blast and, within days of the explosion, one local garden centre had made them a speciality.

Several of the houses wear a patently nationalistic look. The Norwegian Ambassador's residence, for example, just around the corner from the Drosselstrasse, is an austere, red-bricked farmhouse lifted straight from the stockbroker hinterlands of Oslo. The Egyptian consulate, up the other end, has the forlorn air of an Alexandrian villa fallen on hard times. Mournful Arab music issues from it, and its windows are permanently shuttered against the skirmishing North African heat. The season was mid-May and the day had started glorious, with blossom and new leaves rocking together in the light breeze. The magnolia trees were just finished and their sad white petals, mostly shed, afterwards became a feature of the débris. With so much greenery, the bustle of the commuter traffic from the trunk road barely penetrated. The most audible sound until the explosion was the clamour of birds, including several plump doves that had taken a liking to the Australian Military Attaché's mauve wistaria, his pride. A kilometre southward, unseen Rhine barges provided a throbbing, stately hum, but the residents grow deaf to it unless it stops. In short, it was a morning to assure you that whatever calamities you might be reading about in West Germany's earnest, rather panicky newspapers—depression, inflation, insolvency, unemployment, all the usual and apparently incurable ailments of a massively prosperous capitalist economy—Bad Godesberg was a settled, decent place to be alive in,

and Bonn was not half so bad as it is painted.

Depending on nationality and rank, some husbands had already left for work, but diplomats are nothing if not clichés of their kind. A melancholy Scandinavian Counsellor, for example, was still in bed, suffering from a hangover brought on by marital stress. A South American chargé, clad in a hairnet and Chinese silk dressing-gown, the prize of a tour in Peking, was leaning out of the window giving shopping instructions to his Filipino chauffeur. The Italian Counsellor was shaving but naked. He liked to shave after his bath but before his daily exercises. His wife, fully clothed, was already downstairs remonstrating with an unrepentant daughter for returning home late the night before, a dialogue they enjoyed most mornings of the week. An envoy from the Ivory Coast was speaking on the international telephone, advising his masters of his latest efforts to wring development aid out of an increasingly reluctant German exchequer. When the line went dead, they thought he had hung up on them, and sent him an acid telegram enquiring whether he wished to resign. The Israeli Labour Attaché had left more than an hour ago. He was not at ease in Bonn and as best he could he liked to work Jerusalem hours. So it went, with a lot of rather cheap ethnic jokes finding a basis in reality and death.

Somewhere in every bomb explosion there is a miracle, and in this case it was supplied by the American School bus, which had just come and gone again with most of the community's younger children who congregated every schoolday in the turning-circle not fifty metres from the epicentre. By a mercy none of the children had forgotten his homework, none had overslept or shown resistance to education on this Monday morning, so the bus got away on time. The rear windows shattered, the driver went side-winding into the verge, a French girl lost an eye, but essentially the children escaped scot-free, which was afterwards held to be a deliverance. For that also is a feature of such explosions or at least of their immediate aftermath: a communal, wild urge to celebrate the living, rather than to waste time mourning the dead. The real grief in such cases comes later when the shock wears off, usually after several hours, though occasionally less.

The actual noise of the bomb was not a thing people remembered, not if they were close. Across the river in Königswinter, they heard a whole foreign war and drifted around shaken and half deaf, grinning at each other like accomplices in survival. Those accursed diplomats, they told each other, what could you expect? Pack the lot of them off to Berlin where they can spend our taxes in peace! But those at hand heard at first nothing whatever. All they could speak of, if they could speak at all, was the road tipping, or a chimney-stack silently lifting off the roof across the way, or the gale ripping through their houses, how it stretched their skin, thumped them, knocked them down, blew the flowers out of the vases and the vases against the wall. They remembered the tinkling of falling glass all right and the timid brushing noise of the young foliage hitting the road. And the mewling of people too frightened to scream. So that clearly they were not so much unaware of noise as blasted out of their natural senses. There were also several references by witnesses to the din of the French Counsellor's kitchen radio howling out a recipe for the day. One wife, believing herself to be rational, wanted to know from the police whether it was possible that the blast had turned up the radio's volume. In an explosion, the officers replied gently as they led her away in a blanket, anything was possible, but in this case the explanation was different. With all the glass blown out of the French Counsellor's windows, and with no one inside in a condition to turn the radio off, there was nothing to stop it from talking straight into the street. But she didn't really understand.

The press was soon there, of course, straining at the cordons, and the first enthusiastic reports killed eight and wounded thirty and laid the blame on a dotty German right-wing organisation called Nibelungen 5, which consisted of two mentally retarded boys and one mad old man, who could not

have blown up a balloon. By midday the press had been forced to scale their bag down to five dead, one of them Israeli, four critically injured, and twelve others in hospital for this and that, and they were talking of the Italian Red Brigades, for which, once more, there was not a shred of proof. Next day they did another turnabout and gave the credit to Black September. The day after that, credit for the outrage was claimed by a group calling itself the Palestine Agony, which laid convincing claim to the previous explosions also. But Palestine Agony stuck, even if it was less of a name for the perpetrators than an explanation for their action. And as such it worked, for it was duly taken up as a headline for many ponderous leading articles.

Of the non-Jews who died, one was the Italians' Sicilian cook, another their Filipino chauffeur. Of the four injured, one was the wife of the Israeli Labour Attaché, in whose house the bomb had exploded. She lost a leg. The dead Israeli was their small son Gabriel. But the intended victim, it was afterwards widely concluded, was neither of these people, but rather an uncle of the Labour Attaché's injured wife who was here on a visit from Tel Aviv: a Talmudic scholar who was mildly celebrated for his hawkish opinions regarding the rights of Palestinians on the West Bank. In a word, he believed they should have none, and said so loud and often, in stark defiance of the opinions of his niece the Labour Attaché's wife, who was of Israel's liberated left, and whose kibbutz upbringing had not prepared her for the rigorous luxury of diplomatic life.

If Gabriel had been on the school bus, he would have been safe, but Gabriel was on that day, as on many others, unwell. He was a troubled, hyperactive child who till now had been regarded as a discordant element in the street, particularly during the siesta period. But, like his mother, he was gifted musically. Now, with perfect naturalness, no one in the street could remember a child they had loved more. A right-wing German tabloid, brimming with pro-Jewish sentiment, dubbed him "the Angel Gabriel"—a title that, unknown to its editors, did service in both religions—and for a full week ran invented stories of his saintliness. The quality papers echoed the sentiment. Christianity, one star commentator declared—quoting without attribution from Disraeli—was completed Judaism or it was nothing. Thus Gabriel was as much a Christian martyr as a Jewish one; and concerned Germans felt much better for knowing this. Thousands of marks, unsolicited, were sent in by readers and had to be disposed of somehow. There was talk of a Gabriel memorial, but very little talk of the other dead. In accordance with Jewish tradition, Gabriel's wretchedly small coffin was returned at once for burial in Israel; his mother, too sick to travel, stayed in Bonn until her husband could accompany her, and they could sit *shiva* together in Jerusalem.

By early afternoon of the day of the explosion, a six-man team of Israeli experts had flown in from Tel Aviv. On the German side, the controversial Dr. Alexis, of the Ministry of the Interior, was imprecisely charged with the investigation, and made the airport pilgrimage to meet them. Alexis was a clever, foxy creature, who had suffered all his life from being ten centimetres shorter than most of his fellow men. As a compensation for this handicap, perhaps, he was also headlong: in both his private and official lives, controversy attached to him easily. He was partly lawyer, partly security officer, partly power-player, as the Germans breed them these days, with salty liberal convictions not always welcome to the Coalition, and an unfortunate weakness for airing them on television. His father, it was vaguely understood, had been some kind of resister against the Hitler thing, and the mantle, in these altered times, fitted the erratic son uncomfortably. Certainly there were those in Bonn's glass palaces who found him insufficiently solid for the job; a recent divorce, with its disturbing revelations of a mistress twenty years his junior, had done little to improve their view of him.

If it had been anybody else arriving, Alexis would not have bothered with the airport at all—there

was to be no press coverage of the event—but relations between Israel and the Federal Republic were going through a trough, so he bowed to Ministry pressure and went. Against his wishes, they saddled him at the last minute with a slow-mannered Silesian policeman from Hamburg, a proclaimed conservative and tortoise, who had made a name for himself in the field of “student control” in the seventies and was accounted a great expert on troublemakers and their bombs. The other excuse was that he went down well with Israelis, though Alexis, like everyone else, knew he was there primarily as a counterweight to himself. More important, perhaps, in the fraught climate of the day, both Alexis and the Silesian were *unbelastet*, meaning that neither was old enough to bear the remotest responsibility for what Germans sadly refer to as their unconquered past. Whatever was being done to Jews today, Alexis and his unwished-for Silesian colleague had not done it yesterday; nor, if further reassurance was needed, had Alexis senior. The press, with guidance from Alexis, made a point of all this. Only one editorial suggested that as long as the Israelis persisted in their indiscriminate bombing of Palestinian camps and villages—killing not one child but dozens at a time—they must reckon on this type of barbaric reprisal. A white-hot, if slightly muddled, retort from the Israeli Embassy’s Press Officer was run hastily the next day. Since 1961, he wrote, the State of Israel had been under constant attack from Arab terrorism. The Israelis would not kill a single Palestinian anywhere if only they could be left in peace. Gabriel had died for one reason only: because he was a Jew. The Germans might possibly remember that Gabriel was not alone in this. If they had forgotten the Holocaust, perhaps they recalled the Munich Olympics of ten years ago?

The editor closed the correspondence and took a day off.

The anonymous Air Force plane from Tel Aviv landed on the far side of the airfield, clearance formalities were waived, and collaboration began at once, a night-and-day affair. Alexis was under pressing orders to deny the Israelis nothing, but such orders were superfluous: he was *philosemitisch* and known for it. He had made his obligatory “liaison” visit to Tel Aviv and been photographed with bowed head at the Holocaust Museum. As to the ponderous Silesian—well, as he did not tire of reminding everyone who would listen to him, they were all looking for the same enemy, weren’t they? The Reds, clearly. By the fourth day, though the results of many enquiries were still outstanding, the joint working party had put together a convincing preliminary picture of what had happened.

In the first place, it was common ground that no special security watch had been kept on the target house, nor by the terms of the agreement between the Embassy and the Bonn security authorities was any provided for. The Israeli Ambassador’s residence, three streets away, was protected round the clock. A green police caravan stood guard outside it; an iron fence comprised the perimeter; pairs of young sentries far too young to be troubled by the historical ironies of their presence dutifully patrolled the gardens with submachine guns. The Ambassador also rated a bullet-proof car and an escort of police outriders. He was an ambassador, after all, as well as a Jew, and here in double trust. But a mere labour attaché was different fare and one must not over-react; his house came under the general protection of the mobile diplomatic patrol, and all that could be said was that as an Israeli house it was certainly a subject of particular vigilance, as the police logs showed. As a further precaution, the addresses of Israeli staff were not printed in official diplomatic lists for fear of encouraging the impulsive gesture at a time when Israel was being a little hard to take. Politically.

At just after eight o’clock that Monday morning, the Labour Attaché unlocked his garage and, as usual, inspected the hubcaps of his car, as well as the underparts of the chassis, with the aid of a mirror fixed to a broom handle issued to him for the purpose. His wife’s uncle, who was riding with

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