

# RACES / RIOTS

by

Bob Mendes

For Jenny,  
with whom the longest day (or night) always seems short  
-- Bob Mendes

## Preface

On earlier occasions I have explained my concept of a faction-thriller: An exciting book wherein important (actual) events are used as the basis for a fictional, but plausible reconstruction of events, using fictional characters and imaginary institutions.

Because of the perceived reality factor the reader will find enough elements in Races/Riots to reflect on the social backgrounds of one of the most serious race riots in the United States since the beginning of the century, provided he or she is not caught up in the (fictional) action.

Because, above all, this is a work of fiction and any names, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations or persons, living or dead, is the result of pure coincidence and completely unintentional.

The idea for this book came to me during a visit to the United States. Around one in the afternoon on April 30, 1992, I left a Shopping Center in downtown Atlanta. Within seconds I was surrounded by a group of young black people who expressed their anger about the acquittal of four policemen accused in the brutal beating of Rodney King. In the nick of time I was rescued from possible harm by a black policeman.

-- Bob Mendes

## 1. Sightseeing in Atlanta

It was two in the afternoon when Linda Rosenquist and I left through the main entrance of Atlanta Financial Center's East Tower. The oppressive heat outside felt soothing after the chill of the air-conditioning inside. While still protected by the black granite overhang, she placed a hand on my arm and asked me to wait a moment.

Hesitatingly, I stopped and watched her leave. With the loose, supple gait of a trained athlete she walked toward the entrance of the underground parking lot and handed her ticket to the attendant. Linda Rosenquist was a beautiful woman in her thirties with long legs that were displayed to advantage by the gray skirt suit she wore. The uniform of the American business woman looked like an exclusive creation on her, enhanced by the white stockings and comfortable, low-heeled shoes.

I had met her just an hour ago during the cocktail party organized by Fazolah C. Yasdiz, a developer with sumptuous offices on the seventeenth floor of the East Tower. The party had been organized in honor of Yuri Mishuta, vice premier of Sakhalin, a Russian island in the Sea of Okhotsk. I had never seen so much power concentrated in one room and the experience left me dazed. I was introduced to too many people in too short a time. The conversations seemed to concentrate on Yasdiz's ambitious plans to transform Sakhalin, less than thirty miles from Japan, into a future Hong Kong.

When I found myself momentarily alone, I worked my way through the crowds toward a corner of the large room, next to a door that led outside. With a glass in one hand and a fixed smile on my face I wondered whether I had the moral courage to simply disappear without taking my leave from the host. As I was debating the question, I was addressed by the woman who was now waiting for her car to be unearthed from the cavernous garage.

"What does a famous Belgian author, an artist, think about when surrounded by nothing but businessmen?" she had asked. Her smooth skin had the expensive look of someone who vacationed in the Caribbean as a matter of course.

I was surprised that she remembered me at all. I had forgotten her name and only remembered vaguely that she had something to do with judicial aspects of something or other.

"My head spins," I had answered. "But you can drop the 'famous', Ma'am," I added, trying to sound southern, but knowing that my atrocious accent betrayed me. "I'm lucky if my barber reads my books."

She smiled. "I like a modest man."

"As the bishop said to the beggar."

She laughed heartily.

"A quote from one of your books?"

"You guessed it." I grinned sheepishly. "I'm sorry, but when

Dr. Yasdiz introduced us, I didn't catch your name."

"Linda Rosenquist," she said while she gave me a searching look. For just a moment I felt she was going to say something significant, but the serious expression on her face vanished. "Call me Linda," she added with a airy gesture.

"All right, Linda. I'm David."

We talked about books and movies and after half an hour she looked at her watch. "I've done my duty. Nobody can say I don't know my manners. Are you staying, or would you like to explore the city?"

"I was just wondering how I could get around to it," I smiled gratefully. "Shall we leave together, or would you rather leave separately?" I asked in a conspiratorial tone of voice.

"I don't care," she laughed. "But you better watch your own reputation. Americans are a lot more prim and proper than you suspect. I'll wait for you in the lobby."

I wrestled a path through the crowded room. Dr. Yasdiz was in a serious conversation with a man I had often seen on TV. I decided not to disturb them. I left the room and picked up my hand luggage from the outer office.

In the elevator I contemplated Linda's remark about the puritanism of Americans. Her remark could be interpreted as either a warning, or an invitation. Either way she didn't have to worry. I had come to America to gather material for a new book and not to get involved in any fleeting affairs.

But that did nothing to suppress the feeling of excitement that came over me as I watched her closely from the shadow of the overhang. Her black, sleek hair hung loosely over her shoulders and every once in a while she would toss her head and throw her tresses backward. She was in bright sunlight and her tanned skin seemed less dark, more the color of terra-cotta. I was highly flattered that such a gorgeous woman apparently found me interesting, but I have reached the age where phantasy and the urge to conquer are no longer primary motivators.

Linda was being accosted by a wide-shouldered man in a gray suit. He had long, dark wavy hair and his back was turned toward me. He was well over six feet and weighed at least two hundred pounds. Apparently he was trying to pick her up, but Linda's attitude showed she was not interested. When the parking attendant drove up with a tan Dodge Caravan, she tried to get in, but the big man took her by the arm and stopped her. Linda pulled loose and climbed behind the wheel. She laid down some rubber in the short distance to where I was waiting.

She braked hard and threw open the door on the passenger side. I tossed my hand luggage and my laptop on the rear seat and sat down next to her. As soon as I had closed the door, she leaned over and locked the door on my side.

"Sorry," she said, "but in Atlanta we keep the doors locked."

I though her nervousness might be related to the incident I had witnessed and I glanced through the rear window. The large man was getting into a dark-blue Camaro and left at once in the opposite direction.

Linda, too, had seen him drive away and she seemed

reassured. She took her foot off the brake and for a few moments all her attention was focused on merging with the stream of traffic.

"We treat cars different than Europeans. We lock them when we drive and we leave them unlocked when we park." She lowered the window and fiddled with the air-conditioning. "This is Peach Tree Street," she said. "It's the longest street in Georgia."

"Georgia?" I asked.

"A joke," she explained. "Peach Tree Street roughly divides Atlanta into East and West. It's so long you always seem to be crossing it. People joke that it reaches from border to border."

It suddenly dawned on me that she was talking about the State of Georgia and not the former Soviet Republic. Again I was awed by the sheer size of this country. This one state was more than half the size of Great Britain and almost six times bigger than my native Belgium.

She drove easily with one hand on the wheel and used the other hand to point out special landmarks, while she explained the central functions of Georgia's Capital. On the roof of one of the buildings I saw the number 3,010,200 in lighted numbers.

"The number of citizens in Atlanta," said Linda. "The sign is connected to the Municipal computer system."

I studied her from the side. She had a wide, chiseled mouth and dark, expressive eyes and whenever she looked in the mirror, she frowned with well-shaped eyebrows. She felt I was studying her and she threw a glance in my direction.

"Well, Davey, where do you want to go? Do you really feel like sightseeing. I don't mind showing you around. I have plenty of time."

"Excellent," I said contentedly. It seemed a perfect opportunity to hear another opinion about Dr. Yasdiz. Also, of course, with the exception of some modern skyscrapers, I had seen little of the real Atlanta. "What sort of things are worth seeing?"

"We have the Georgia State Museum and the Gone with the Wind Museum, but I would particularly recommend the Martin Luther King Historical District. And you shouldn't miss Stone Mountain."

"Well, you're the skipper."

"In that case, let's go to Stone Mountain. It's about eighteen miles east of the city." She turned into La Vista Road. The traffic thinned out and although she kept dividing her attention between the road and the rear-view mirror, the frown disappeared from her forehead. Her hands were relaxed on the steering wheel. I admired the slender fingers and the long red nails.

"How long have you been working for Dr. Yasdiz?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Not very long. Two months ago I was still living with my sister in Simi Valley, that's near LA, Los Angeles in California," she added, remembering she was talking to a foreigner. "One day," she went on, "Dr. Yasdiz called and offered me a job with the Sakhalin project. He had found out that I spoke some French and Russian. Actually, I didn't want to leave my sister. But Dr. Yasdiz can be very persuasive."

"You can say that again." Apparently Yasdiz looked upon

himself as the protagonist in my new book. During the past week he had spared costs nor effort to impress me. The Atlanta Financial Center controls economic resources that exceed the Gross National Product of Belgium. I had been allowed to sit in on discussions and meetings that dealt in billions and at his cocktail parties I had been introduced to people with a net worth that was simply staggering. But after a whole week of his company I felt brainwashed and needed to get away for a few days.

"What's your opinion of Yasdiz?" asked Linda.

"He sees himself as a man with a mission and can go on for hours about Zarathustrianism and the Triumph of the forces of Good over those of Evil."

"Wasn't that an old Persian religion?"

"Yes. When you visit his house the first thing you hear is the Berliner Philharmoniker rendition of *Also sprach Zarathustra* by Richard Strauss. It's a continual background music. Yasdiz doesn't believe in God, but in the power of his forefathers and in Integrity and Immortality. He's breaking new ground in Sakhalin and if he succeeds he'll bring prosperity and social development to a backward population group." I fell silent.

"So, you really don't know him," concluded Linda.

"No," I admitted. "You know, Yasdiz told me that the greatest sin among Persians is lying, closely followed by incurring debts. Yet, at the same time he's investing a lot of money in the Sakhalin project of which the origins, to say the least, are a bit murky. Although I assume he's on the level, privately I have not been able to decide if he's a pioneer, a successful businessman, or a ..." I swallowed the rest. I had wanted to say: an international crook, but I didn't know the woman next to me well enough to express that thought.

"A high level con-man?" asked Linda.

I remained silent, a bit shaken because she seemed to have read my thoughts.

"Did you know him in Belgium?" she asked.

"Just from the headlines. He was regularly in the news."

"Then, how did you get into contact?"

"Through his accountant, after I had written a book about corruption and Mafia practices in politics. Yasdiz owned a European airline and had grandiose plans to transform the Antwerp Airport into an international hub."

"I heard about that. As far as I know the airline went bust and Dr. Yasdiz supposedly left a mountain of debts. Am I right?"

"According to Yasdiz he came into financial difficulties because of political conspiracies. That's one of the reasons he instructed his accountant to contact me in order to write a book about him. Yasdiz, I mean, not the accountant. Yasdiz wants to justify himself, clear his name. I'm considering his request."

"Are there other reasons?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I don't know. Injured pride? Revenge? A message?"

"Mmm," said Linda, "vanity seems an obscure motive. Do you think he's the sort of man who's worth writing about?"

"I'm not concerned with the man, Linda. I too, am a man with a mission. The purpose of my books is to find the guilty who so

often get off scot-free and to expose them. It's immaterial if that turns out to be Yasdziz, or a general, or an ex-premier. But it's never a little man, never an average man ... and you know why."

We stopped for a traffic light and Linda turned her head toward me. Her eyes shined.

"Yes," she said, "the little man, just plain Joe Blow, is immediately punished when he goes wrong." She looked serious and I realized that we needed few words to understand each other.

"That's I why I wanted to talk to you," she continued. "Maybe I even have a subject, a theme, for your book." She touched my hand briefly and then drove off. She wore rings on two of her fingers, but neither was a wedding band.

We now drove along Route 78 East. I wanted to get off the subjects of books. Linda seemed relaxed behind the wheel, although she never let up looking in the rear-view mirror. She kept to a careful fifty-five miles per hour, a snail's pace when compared to European driving habits. But then, Americans seem to take both speeding and conservation of energy a lot more seriously than is generally believed.

A little later we reached Stone Mountain Park. Linda paid five dollars at the entrance and found a place in the large parking lot. Before leaving the car, she again looked searchingly all around. I was just about to ask her if she was afraid the large man had followed her, when she took me by the arm and pointed at a dome shaped mountain of gray granite that towered at least seven or eight hundred feet above the flat surroundings.

"Stone Mountain," she said, "a geological marvel."

## 2. Biggest in the world

We took the Scenic Railroad, an authentic steam-engine pulled train, through the enormous Stone Mountain Park to the square at the foot of the mountain.

"This is Memorial Plaza," explained Linda. "Stone Mountain is the world's largest single block of granite."

From where we were standing we had an excellent view of the colossal bass-relief that had been carved into the steep face of the mountain. Robert R. Lee, Jefferson Davis and Stonewall Jackson had forever been preserved in the unyielding stone. A gray-haired guide explained at length the time and energy that had been necessary to complete the enormous sculpture. We listened patiently to the droning voice and a little later we climbed the path that had once been used by the Creek Indians. Although her breathing did not increase perceptibly, Linda's reddish-brown tan seemed to increase as we ascended the steeper spots in the trails and from time to time she placed a hand on my arm for support. When we reached the top I looked down and I suddenly realized the gigantic proportions of the project. The

bass-relief had been carved so deeply into the hard granite that there was enough room to drive a car across the back of Lee's horse.

We followed a footpath to the top, visited the Plaza of Flags and some original plantation buildings and then took coffee on the terrace built into the rock wall. The restaurant itself was almost fifty yards away from the terrace, in a wooden building. The hottest part of the day was over and we enjoyed the view. From below we heard the sound of an electronic carillon.

Linda had taken off her jacket and placed it over the back of her chair. She opened the top buttons of her salmon-colored blouse and I saw a diamond-studded gold cross between the swelling of her breasts. She pointed toward a tower on the peninsula in the lake. "The Bells of Stone Mountain," she said. "There are 733 bells and the sound is amplified more than a million times through a special system. You can hear them for miles." She smiled. "I can almost hear you think. *Everything in the States is a superlative.*"

"Well, in the words of Gregory Peck: *it's a big country.*"

"Gregory Peck?"

"Never mind, a movie by that name with Peck, Charlton Heston and others. The recurrent team in the movie was ... it's a big country."

"Yes," she agreed, "big and beautiful. I'm very proud to be an American. And yet ..." Her dark eyes flashed and became melancholy at the same time. "Sometimes I so long for Paris that I could leave it all behind."

"Paris?"

"I studied at the Sorbonne for two years. French and Russian. You know Paris?"

"Yes and no." Then I asked the question I had been dying to ask. "Are you married?"

She did not seem to mind my curiosity.

"I was. For six years. Six years of mistakes. For both of us. What about you?"

"I'm happily married."

"Uhuh."

We stared at each other, a bit awkwardly.

"Paris was the best time of my life," said Linda. "It was after the divorce. I lived with a man who was almost thirty years older than me. He was the architect who designed the Jubilation Park of Persopolis for Reza Pahlawi, the former Shah of Iran. His name was Ignace Eduardo Saporta, an American of Italian descent. We had a good time. We actually *lived Hemingway's movable feast*. Artist's cafe's, bistro's, long conversations with painters, models, authors. Saporta was, still is, a writer himself. Not fiction, like you, but he writes beautiful books about landscapes, atmosphere, environment."

Despite myself, I came more and more under the spell of this fascinating woman. Her nose was slightly bent, like a Roman nose, but she had wide nostrils. Her full lips gave a hint of a subtle, but strong sensuality. There was something Etruscan about her.

"And after two years?"

"We parted as friends. His commission in Paris had been

completed and he was going back to his wife and children. As a matter of fact, he lives in Atlanta. If you're interested, it would be easy to arrange a meeting. He's almost seventy, but still quite energetic."

"And you? What did you do?"

"I came home, a disillusion, no ... that's not right ... a lot of experience richer."

"And now? Are you on your own?" I was thinking of the man in the gray suit. "Or do you have a friend?"

Slowly she took her eyes away from the pedestrians in the park and slowly she turned toward me. She looked at me for a long time.

"Sorry, Linda," I said uncomfortably. "You don't have to answer me."

"It doesn't matter," she said. "I don't mind discussing it with you." She laughed. "Who better to tell my story to, then a writer?"

I nodded encouragingly.

Absent-mindedly Linda stared at the panoramic landscape.

"You know how it is. Once you're past thirty, you get picky. Especially when you're financially independent and have an interesting job. And that was exactly my situation, until a few months ago. I had a number of affairs after Saporta, but nothing ever came of it. Strangely enough my preference seems to be for foreigners. A Lebanese, a Frenchman, a Persian ..." She looked me straight in the eyes and smiled half-heartedly. "You're my first Belgian, so watch yourself, stranger."

I grinned, flattered and self-conscious. "Once warned, twice ready."

For a moment she looked amused, but she was soon serious again. "The day after my arrival in Atlanta, I met Bazil Cambiz, a soft-ware specialist who works for the giant California computer firm that's responsible for the Sakhalin data processing. Cambiz is an naturalized Iranian, who prefers to be called a Persian. I knew nobody at the time and felt lonely and lost. Cambiz was friendly, helpful, helped me find a place to live and ... well, I thought there was something between us, or could be. Until two days ago ..." Her voice trailed away.

"Is Cambiz the man who bothered you earlier?"

"Yes." She gave me a searching look. "I really don't know if I should bother you with my problems."

"What did he want?"

She hesitated. "It's a long story. Perhaps difficult to understand ... for a European."

"Try me."

She pulled her chair closer and leaned across the table in a conspiratorial manner.

"Ever heard of the King trial?"

I frowned. "If I remember correctly, King was killed in 1968. Was there a trial connected with that?"

"No, no. Not Martin Luther King, Jr. I'm talking about Rodney King from Los Angeles. The videotape of his arrest was shown all over the world."

"Oh, yes, the negro who ..."

She did not let me finish.

"The word 'negro' is no longer politically correct in the United States."

"I didn't mean it in a denigrating way," I protested.

"Here we speak of black people, or African-Americans. Sorry, I don't want to sound obnoxious. I just want to make sure you'll not get into trouble."

"I understand. But we were talking about Rodney King."

"Yes. Well, after a long car chase, Rodney King was dragged from his car and surrounded by four white policemen. On the videotape, which lasts a total of 81 seconds, you can see how the uniformed savages commit mayhem on a defenseless man. You can see how he is kept under control with a tazer and systematically beaten with night sticks. At least sixty-five separate blows were counted. Some clearly meant to break bones."

"I remember the images. The tape was shown several times, even in Belgium. It was horrifying."

"Yes." She paused and looked attentively at a group of tourists who had just emerged from the cable car station at the other side of the terrace. Then she continued. "Listen, Davey, the entire world is convinced that it was horrifying. But when you put your ear to the ground here in the States, you'll soon learn that blacks and whites live in two different worlds. A white man, when seeing the tape, *might* say: 'Just look what they're doing to that poor man.' A black person's immediate reaction is: 'My God, that could be me.' You see, *that's* the difference."

"Are you telling me that the police is prejudiced? That blacks are more in danger of being treated unfairly than whites?"

"At least seventy-five percent of the Afro-American population is absolutely convinced on that point. Polls have been taken and have shown that race relations have not improved since the Reagan era. On the contrary. There's a definite unrest among the black population. Black leaders have accused the LA police for years of systematically brutalizing and torturing blacks. That's why the outcome of the King trial is so important."

"But surely, with the existence of the videotape, there can be no doubt about the outcome. Those four cops will be convicted."

"You never know. Three years ago a jury decided that no excessive force had been used during the arrest of Don Jackson, a lack private detective who had been stopped after a routine traffic check in Long Beach. The arresting cop threw Jackson with his head through a store window. There was an amateur video tape available, but even that could not convince the jury."

She fell silent as the waitress came to re-fill our coffee cups. Linda had touched upon a subject that was close to my heart. During the war, as a child, I had experienced at first hand the debilitating effects of persecution and blind prejudice, after my father had been arrested by the Gestapo. But that was more than forty years ago. And this was America! They had the Statue of Liberty here! I wanted to tell her that when I noticed that her attention remained riveted on the people who now approached the terrace from the cable car.

"Listen Linda," I interrupted after the waitress had left. "I don't get the connection between the delicate racial situation in the United States and a spurned lover. Or am I missing something? I mean, Bazil Cambell is ..."

"Not Cambell, Cambiz," corrected Linda. "And you're right, Davey. I'll come to the point. But first a few more words as explanation, as background. As I told you, until a few months ago I lived with my sister in Simi Valley. It's a bedroom community in Ventura County with largely white, middle-class population. Mostly people who have escaped LA because of the air-pollution, high rents and race problems. But also because of the ever increasing, high incidence of gang violence. Believe it or not, but the gangs practically run, and certainly terrorize, entire neighborhoods. Last year, on November 26 to be exact, the 2nd District Court of Appeals decided to grant a defense request for a change of venue and moved the King trial to Simi Valley. The immediate result was that on a new list of approximately four hundred potential jurors, there were only ten blacks. The jury selection started on February 5 and took four weeks. Two black came as far as the final selection, but were challenged by the defence. The final selection came up with ten whites, six men and four women, a *filipino* and a *Hispanic*." She paused, obviously interested in my reaction to the next words. "The name of the *Hispanic* is Miguela Gutierrez, my sister."

I did not disappoint her. My surprise was genuine. "Your sister? A Hispanic? How's that possible?"

"Actually she's my half-sister. My mother is Mexican and Miguela is the child from her first marriage. After the death of her first husband, she married Saul Rosenquist, an American from New Mexico. I was born two years later."

I looked closer at Linda. Her 'roman' nose was the result of an Indian heritage. It also explained the reddish brown color I had attributed to expensive vacations in the sun.

"Do you mind?" asked Linda.

"Mind what?"

"The fact that I'm a half-blood."

I laughed.

"On the contrary. You're all human and that's all that matters. I look forward to meeting your sister."

"Wait, I have a picture of her." She rummaged in her purse and when she could not immediately find what she was looking for, she upended it on the table.

"Please don't bother, Linda. Your sister's skin color is hardly an issue and certainly doesn't explain why ..."

I fell silent as Linda looked at an object the size of a lump of sugar. Her eyes were wide and disbelieving as she held it up against the light.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

She placed the object on the table as if she expected it to explode at any moment. "A bug," she whispered. "I recognize this. It's a high-tech microphone. Cambiz is close by and is listening to us." She shoved her possessions back in her purse and looked around.

Suddenly she seemed to see something behind me, outside my

field of vision. Abruptly she stood up, slung the purse over one shoulder. "Let's go."

I looked around. Half hidden by the group of visitors from the cable car, I saw a man with dark, wavy hair approach us purposefully. He was taller than most of his fellow passengers.

"Come on," whispered Linda. She grabbed for her jacket and hastened away in the direction of the restaurant. The microphone remained on the table. Linda made a swerving movement and took care that the building remained between her and the approaching group.

"Hey, wait. I haven't paid the bill." I tried to get the attention of a passing waitress and when that failed, I left a five-dollar bill on the table and ran after Linda. I found her behind the restaurant, her back against the wall, like a child playing hide-and-seek. I stopped next to her, slightly perturbed. "I don't understand. You behave as if that man would attack you."

"Please," said Linda. "Help me. I'll explain everything later."

She peered around the corner, oblivious to the curious looks of some of the visitors. "Get ready," she ordered. "As soon as he turns the corner at the other side of the building, we'll make a dash for the cable car."

Like a typical northern European I was about to object to this melodrama when she suddenly took me by the hand. "Now!" I ran as if my life depended on it.

The distance was about two hundred yards, but Linda set such a pace that I'm sure we covered the distance in record time. Without stopping she plunged down the few steps to the platform. A big man with a bigger stomach and the words *Stone Mountain Park* on his cap, leaned against the door of the cable car, slowly chewing something, either tobacco, or chewing gum. Slowly he turned his head towards us as we came down the stairs two steps at a time.

"Take it easy, folks," he said pleasantly.

"Please, mister," panted Linda, "can you leave right now?"

"We're in no hurry," he smiled slowly.

"My wife has to get home urgently, sir," I interrupted. My panting and strange accent seemed to add extra urgency to the request. "Somebody's health is in danger." It was the first thing I could think of, and it sounded pretty lame.

But apparently it was enough. For a moment the man looked as if he was thinking it over, then he said: "Ok, folks. Tickets?"

I gave him some dollars, without counting them.

Again he hesitated, looking at the money. Again it looked as if he was thinking it over. Then he put the money in his pocket, hitched up his belt and gestured us toward the door.

He followed close behind and pushed a button. A bell started to ring and the doors started to close as Cambiz appeared at the top of the stairs leading to the platform. Cambiz descended the stairs at leisure, fully convinced that the conductor would keep the doors open for him. But at the last moment the doors closed in Cambiz' face. The driver pointed to a sign; *No access when bell rings!*

Cambiz grabbed the handles on the outside and tried to force

his way in. But the attendant leaned his not inconsiderable weight against the inside and locked the doors irrevocably. He pushed a second button and the whining sound of large gears filled the station. Another second and the cabin began its progress down the mountain.

Cambiz was black with anger. He followed the train as far as the platform would allow, screaming at the top of his voice. But the noise of the cables deprived us of the benefit of his oratory. As the cabin increased speed, he was soon lost to sight. My last view of him was as he was talking into a walkie-talkie.

I smiled at Linda.

"So, we're well rid of him. We're gone more than twenty miles by the time he's down there."

She was not convinced.

"Unless he's got an accomplice down there. You never know with Cambiz. Why else would he need a walkie-talkie?"

"Perhaps to tell his butler how many there are for dinner," I joked.

Linda looked at me as if I was speaking a foreign language. She took my hand in both of hers and that seemed to encourage her somewhat. Her face relaxed and a fleeting, wan smile appeared. "You're right," she said. "Perhaps I'm taking it all too serious."

During the descent we again had an unobstructed view of the magnificent bass-relief. The trip took only four minutes. It was busy in the lower station and we progressed with difficulty through the crowds, at any moment expecting to be intercepted by one of Cambiz's accomplices. In the event our fears were unfounded and we reached the parking lot without encountering any trouble.

It was hot as blazes in the car. I lowered my window, but Linda said: "Don't do that. It's dangerous if I have to stop at traffic lights. They'll pull you right through the windows."

She did not explain who 'they' were and I closed my window as she pushed buttons for the air-conditioning. I was more than a little disgusted. The whole thing was starting to bore me.

Linda placed the tip of her index finger on my knee. It was hardly a contact, but it awakened an unexpected, heart-throbbing desire in me. I took her hand and carefully pushed it away.

"Please," she said.

I felt sorry for her.

"Let's go," I said brusquely, "before you know it, Cambiz will be banging on the windows."

### 3. The American Way

We left Stone Mountain Park. In order to shake any pursuers, we did not drive straight back to Atlanta, but turned north along Sandes Ferry Drive in order to return to the city from a

different direction. Whenever we came to a turn-off, or a side street, Linda would wait until the last possible moment, before changing direction. I was charged with keeping an eye out for anyone who might be following us. After a while we were virtually certain we were not being followed and Linda relaxed. She turned on the radio.

We listened to the music in silence. Ever since leaving the park, we had hardly spoken a word and the silence was becoming oppressive. Linda cleared her throat and started to drive a little slower.

"I do hope you have a reservation, Davey. Atlanta is a convention city and if you want to stay downtown, you have to book weeks in advance."

"I'm booked into the Peachtree Plaza Hotel for three nights."

"Excellent. Does Yasdiz know?"

"No. As far as he knows I'm using the suite in the Embassy Hotel. He's paying for that one, you see." I looked at the dashboard clock. "Quarter past seven, Linda. You feel like having dinner with me? We could eat in the hotel. The Sun Dial Restaurant comes highly recommended. It's ..."

Linda leaned forward and turned up the volume of the radio. She looked apologetic. "It seems that background music makes it harder to be bugged."

I laughed mockingly.

"Let's not exaggerate, Linda. Who can listen in on us? Cambiz? He's miles away. Anyway, what do we have to hide?"

"Nothing. But Cambiz is very clever with electronic gadgets. He doesn't know where we're going and I just as soon keep it that way."

I could not help but think she imagined things, but nevertheless I felt ill at ease and caught myself watching the rear view mirrors. My nervousness seemed to infect Linda all over again and she too, started to watch the traffic more closely for eventual pursuers.

But with all our precautions, neither one of us noticed the Camaro until it was almost too late. We were in the curb lane and suddenly I heard Linda gasp. I looked at her side and saw a dark-blue car that paced us. Because of the reflection on the windows I was unable to identify the occupants.

Then a window came down and I recognized the grinning face of Cambiz.

He looked at Linda and with a authoritarian gesture motioned for her to stop. Instead of obeying the command, Linda increased her speed.

A contemptuous look came in Cambiz' eyes. He leaned his elbows on the window sill and showed her a revolver.

Linda swallowed in fear. "Good God, what should I do?" With a suppressed sob, she increased her speed. "Davey, tell me what to do."

I slid down in the seat and racked my brains. Nothing in Belgium had ever prepared me for this situation. We rapidly approached the Toco Hill exit and just before the exit was an emergency parking strip. I slid further down in the seat, pushed

my head between the two front seats and peered toward the other car. I saw Cambiz aim a long barrel at Linda's head.

"Slow down," I hissed, "and stop as close to the beginning of the exit ramp as possible." I wiggled between the seats, placed my hand on the door knob and prepared to get out of the car. "Try to stop in such a way," I continued, "that the Camaro is forced to stop on your left side. Keep the engine running and don't get out. Try to keep their attention."

"Why!? What are you going to do?"

I pulled out my trusty Swiss Army knife and opened the short, stubby blade of the tin-opener. "I'm getting out and I'll try to get behind them. As soon as I yell at you, you take off. Full speed. Understand?"

"No. Yes. And what about you? What will happen to you?"

Dear Linda. Even now, thinking of me.

"They don't want me. I'm just a coincidence. They'll come after you as soon as you take off. I'll make sure they won't be able to follow you for long. As soon as you've lost them, turn back and come get me."

Her eyes, wide with fear, darted from Cambiz to me. "What are you going to do?"

"Just do as I say. No time left. Just distract them."

The exit ramp was now very close and Linda was going to pass it. A bullet bit a hole and a network of little cracks in the window behind her.

Bits of the glass shattered around my ears as I crouched down on the back seat.

Linda screamed and stood on the brakes. Before the Dodge had come to a complete stop, I opened the door on my side and jumped out. Of course I stumbled, I'm no paratrooper. In order to break my fall, I stretched out both hands and lost my knife.

I heard the sound of ripping metal. At the last moment Linda had jerked the wheel and the Dodge crashed into the Camaro. Both cars stopped about thirty feet in front of me. They were so close together that Linda, nor Cambiz, could open a door between the cars. Linda had managed the perfect distraction.

Gasping with pain, I came to my feet. I heard Linda scream accusations. Cambiz stuck his head out of the window and waved the revolver under her nose. "Keep your mouth shut, girl."

But Linda's Latin-American temperament had taken control and she was not to be denied.

I found the knife a few feet to my right. I stumbled toward it. As I picked it up, I heard Cambiz instruct the man behind the wheel to get Linda out of her car. At that same instant Cambiz realized that someone was missing. "Where's the scribbler?" he growled at Linda.

From my position close to the ground I saw the feet of the driver who was ready to walk around the cars. Quickly I crawled toward the right rear wheel of the Camaro and pushed the knife between roadbed and tire in such a way that the steel would have to penetrate the rubber as the car took off.

"Drive, Linda!" I yelled.

She immediately drove off, skidding as she went, forcing me to close my eyes in order to avoid the gravel that was thrown up

by her tires. The rear bumper of her car hooked behind the front bumper of Cambiz' car and made a shrieking noise as the two bumpers tore each other of the bolts. A broken side mirror rattled along the ground as Cambiz shouted something in a language I did not understand. The driver ran back to his place behind the wheel and took off with screeching tires and the smell of burning rubber.

I scrambled to my feet. My plan had failed. I had seen the knife being tossed aside. The steel point had not been strong enough to penetrate the rubber, or the wild take-off had tossed it aside before it had a chance. The Camaro took the turn at the bottom of the exit and already it seemed that the distance between it and Linda's car had been reduced. Then I lost sight of both cars.

I found the knife, the blade broken off, at the edge of the grass strip. Limping I followed the road to the point where I thought Linda would most easily spot me when she came back to pick me up, if she came back. She could already have been overpowered and ...

And *what?*

Perhaps, I thought cynically, this was the American way for lovers to decide the end of a relationship. I was reminded of the fact that almost every American owns a firearm and is well able to handle it. Perhaps waving a revolver around doesn't have the same meaning here, as it does in Europe. Which does not mean to imply that Europe is more civilized, merely that the use of firearms is not as wide-spread.

But, then again, Cambiz was *not* an American. He was an Iranian, or, as he preferred to be called, a Persian. Is it normal for a jilted Persian lover to bug the purse of his girlfriend?

I stood still and let my eyes rove over the landscape. No Linda. Perhaps I'd better warn the police before it was too late.

But how?

IN Europe there are telephones along the highways that immediately connect to the emergency services. I had heard that they had them in some places in the United States, but since almost every American also had a cellular phone, the practice had never proliferated to the extent it had in Europe. From where I stood I could not see any housing, or buildings of any kind. The only sign of life was provided by the passing traffic.

I started looking for cars with extra antennas, figuring they probably had telephones on board. Every time I saw such a car, I waved my arms like a maniac, but nobody stopped.

I was getting hungry and my knees hurt. Despondently I wondered how I had gotten in such a mess. I never even heard the car approach.

"Miller time, stranger," laughed Linda from behind the wheel of the battered Dodge.