

THE  
T<sup>h</sup> C HAMELEON  
FILE

LEIGH JAMES  
III

WEYBRIGHT AND TALLEY  
*New York*

TO MY BEAUTIFUL LADY  
WHO GAVE ME ENCOURAGEMENT  
AND THE TITLE

FICTION

68X14921

495

© BY LEIGH JAMES, 1967  
*Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 67-20362*  
Published by WEYBRIGHT AND TALLEY, INC.,  
3 East 54th Street, N.Y. N.Y. 10022  
Published Simultaneously in Canada  
by CLARKE, IRWIN & COMPANY, LIMITED,  
Toronto and Vancouver.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

THE PROSaic BLACK SEDAN with United States Government license plates, moving rapidly through the countryside of northern Virginia, passed the green and white road sign reading "B.P.R." and, obeying the arrow beneath, swung to the right off George Washington Memorial Parkway. Slowing, it followed the curving paved road into the pin oaks, pines, and sycamores that are the natural cover of the Potomac River Valley. The sedan stopped briefly at a guard post near a forbidding ten-foot-high wire fence upon which a metal sign, dripping in the cold mists of early February, read U.S. Government Property Official Business Only, and then made a left sweep toward a massive gray concrete structure which loomed ahead.

The two passengers in the automobile scrambled awkwardly out of its narrow, low rear door, designed to accommodate some obscure theory of aerodynamics, and entered the typically austere entrance of a "Federal

5

3611 136

Building." The guard immediately inside the entrance looked up appraisingly at the two men in slightly damp, wrinkled raincoats, vaguely soiled over the color of dull putty, recognized the faces beneath the gray snap-brimmed fedoras, and waved them on with only a perfunctory glance at the proffered identification cards.

They walked purposefully across the lobby, past a large official seal in the floor with the legend "Central Intelligence Agency," and over to a bank of elevators. Emerging still silent and intent on the seventh floor, they moved down a deserted passageway, through an unmarked door, and into a small, barren reception room. An angular, intelligent-looking Negro woman looked up through heavy, black-rimmed glasses and smiled slightly. Her eyes flicked toward a closed door.

"He's expecting you. Go right in."

The room had a chill, stark quality under the blue-white fluorescent lights in the ceiling. A pale winter's sun refracting off the now slowly dispersing river mist created an eye-watering glare outside the aluminum window frames. The man behind the scarred walnut desk, half silhouetted against the window, motioned his visitors onto a leather sofa.

"Take off your coats. This is going to take a little while. Good trip?"

"Some delay landing at Washington National Airport. This damned fog. Otherwise O.K." The taller of the two visitors ran a freckled hand through his thinning sandy hair and pulled a cigarette with his lips from a battered, half-empty pack.

The man behind the desk nodded absently as he arose, lifted a metal rod on the front of a steel filing cabinet, and extracted a file from one of the drawers. He laid it flat on his desk and regarded his visitors intently through narrowed gray eyes.

"Operation Chameleon. The DDP\* says it's 'Go.'"

The shorter visitor exhaled gently, a grin creasing his swarthy face. "I never thought he'd buy it."

"Times change, Ernie. Now I want to review this once more."

If either of you see<sup>2</sup>any weaknesses or oversights, for God's sake speak up. This is Cuba, you know." He leaned back in his chair with a creak and lit a cigarette, then folded his hands behind his head and with a little furrow of concentration across his forehead watched the smoke drift lazily up toward the ceiling where a ventilation duct abruptly drew it away.

"There are three primary questions. First, have we got the right man? Second, can he succeed? Third, if he fails, will there be any trail, however faint, leading back to us?" His eyes dropped to the sandy-haired man.

"Is he the right man, Dave?"

Dave Pearson rubbed his nose thoughtfully with a forefinger. "We are discussing a type of man, not a name. None of us know who he is. We have a fair idea of what he is. He is a well-organized, ambitious, ruthless son-of-a-bitch. Just what the job requires. He is extremely cautious. I sometimes think we learn about him only what he wants us to learn. He doesn't want his identity known and we don't know it, and it isn't because we haven't tried. He has spent years patiently recruiting and building a highly secret revolutionary movement within the Cuban armed forces.

"Our boy sits at the top of this organization. His identity is known only by two trusted old friends. He has put each one in control of a separate revolutionary apparatus organized as a pyramid composed of revolutionary cells of ten men each. Each friend is the apex of his own pyramid and controls the pyramid through

\* Deputy Director for Plans

leaders appointed in each cell. The first cell layer under the apex is composed of two cells. The leader of each of these cells was recruited by and is controlled by the friend at the apex. Each leader then recruited his own cell members. The cell members only know their leader and some of the other members of their cell where essential. The leaders of the first cell layer cells do not know each other. Each first cell layer cell leader recruited and controls two second cell layer cell leaders who in turn recruited the members of their cells. Likewise, these second cell layer cell leaders do not know each other. In other words, as the base of the pyramid grew by means of each cell leader recruiting and controlling two cell leaders in a layer below him, vertical contact and control was maintained to the apex, but horizontal contact was prevented, thereby limiting the opportunity for betrayal.

"The cells are made up of vital command officers and technical specialists capable of seizing control of the armed forces, transportation, and communications as soon as word is relayed down the pyramids from the top. It is a nearly unbreakable system for subversion and revolution based upon complete discipline and the delegation of authority on each level."

The man behind the desk nodded, "Go on."

"Our boy has recruited shrewdly and has his organization built, but he isn't moving. Word has percolated to us, maybe from our boy himself, that he wants some life insurance in case of failure or of a successful counterrevolution. We have tried to create revolutionary groups within Cuba and have failed. We have turned down many requests to finance underground movements in Cuba because they have been hopelessly disorganized. This is different. We are impressed with this boy's organizing ability. We like his style. We propose to furnish the insurance he wants. Money. Lots of it."

The gray eyes of the man behind the desk narrowed. "Yes, money. The following prizes to be placed in a numbered account in Zürich, Switzerland, with no strings attached: one million dollars on agreement to try; ten million dollars if he deposes Castro; ten million dollars more if he deposes Castro in such a way as to discredit him as a Communist revolutionary leader." He prodded out his cigarette in a glass ashtray filled with ashes and cigarette stubs. "Is it enough?"

Dave Pearson grinned and pulled at his right earlobe. "This is only the insurance. In addition, our friend will have the measureless rewards and pleasures of power and the support of the United States in governing and rebuilding his country. It's a pretty heady job description. After all, he has been moving toward a grab for power for some time. We are only assuring him that he won't fall through the basement if he fails. He at least gets a comfortable exile with all of the pin money any active boy needs. All we ask in return is a pro United States foreign policy and at least a half-hearted try at creating a democracy of sorts. Tyrannies, other than Communist, are out of style. We think he is smart enough to realize that."

The gray eyes shifted to the swarthy man. "Can he make it, Ernie? Does he have the right men in those cells?"

Ernie Sessena shrugged. "Counting the cost of the cover, the contact, and the down payment, we figure that it will cost a million and a half to find out. We haven't penetrated Castro's armed forces enough to be certain, but it looks like our boy has a fair stack of chips. At any rate, it is the best counterrevolutionary group in Cuba since Fidel's salad days."

"All right, say we'll gamble the million and a half. Now let's take a long, hard look at the cover story. Our Cuban man of the hour can fail, he can even double cross us, and we'll live to try again. But if the

cover is blown, if the press picks this up as another CIA fumble in Cuba, God help us."

Ernie grinned. "This operation has more watertight compartments than a battleship. First, we've got 'Sail Exports' set up in Toronto as a small export-import firm. It is now five years old and shows a small profit. We'll see that our pigeon for the Cuban contact buys it out for sixty-five hundred dollars, a fair price. We have our eyes on a guy named Jack Wilson for the job. Wilson is a Canadian, native of Toronto. A not too bright, small-time adventurer and promoter. Right now he's losing his latest stake running a Model-Car Racing Center. No police record . . . not a criminal type . . . just a nevy bush leaguer with outsized romantic ideas. He has one big qualification for the job. He was one of the small international band of freebooters that fought for Castro in the hills. The others held on too long or reached for too much and either were executed or got booted out. Wilson left Cuba soon enough. He has been back a few times since. He is an outsider now, no contact with Fidel, but he is tolerated as harmless. We will have Wilson emphasize the Canadian bit, slightly anti-American; we don't want him to overdo it. For big money, travel, excitement, a feeling of importance, we are sure he will play along with us. The first contact for Wilson will be in Madrid. We are told that our Cuban boy has a sister living there anonymously and if we have an offer to make, make it to her. For public consumption brother and sister are supposed to be estranged over his support of Castro. In fact, she is his outside contact, his anchor to leeward. No one but our boy knows her present identity. This is one of the twists in this thing that gives me confidence in him. He's devoted. He looks ahead, way ahead. The sister has been in Madrid for over five years. So, Madrid for Wilson and maybe Zürich to set up the bank account. We are

going to put ten thousand in the account as openers when the sister agrees to transmit the offer to Havana. If our boy wants to talk to Wilson in Havana, then his cover is still Sail Exports. We will arrange for him to sell about half a million dollars' worth of U.S. spare parts to Castro for his broken-down American machinery. This will make Wilson the ideal guest. The sale will be for U.S. dollars, cash on the barrelhead, five percent over U.S. retail . . . no give away . . . the kind of no-sentiment, all-the-traffic-will-bear deal Castro won't suspect. We'll see that Wilson gets the spare parts on consignment if he gets the order. If we have to do so, we'll follow through all the way. Now, if at any stage our Cuban boy accepts the big offer, the sister wires us a prearranged message from Madrid and we deposit one million dollars in the account in Zürich. If it is no deal—we never get the message. If our boy performs, we pay out the big money."

"What's in it for Wilson?"

"We guarantee him ten thousand dollars for Madrid-Zürich and fifty thousand for Havana, if he goes there."

"What if Wilson crosses us?"

Ernie grinned wolfishly. "We don't think this pigeon's got that kind of nerve. He would have to believe that Castro is the wave of the future and be willing to live in Cuba with his name on the underground's butchering list. He had that sort of opportunity before and moved out on it . . . the only bright thing he has ever done. But if he crosses us, the trail doesn't come back to me. I am using the Toronto setup for the arrangements with Wilson. There is to be absolutely no contact between Wilson and us in Madrid; none in Zürich, the account will be set up by remote control; none in Havana. In Toronto all of the contacts will be well within the Sail Exports cover. If Wilson crosses us be-

fore the big payout, we are out a few hundred thousand at most and he is stuck with a fantastic story. We'll see that he is ridiculed right back into limbo. If he sings after the event, he would be out of his mind and he will sound even sillier."

The man behind the desk put both of his big hands palm down on his desk and stared intently at the closed file for a few minutes. Then he raised his eyes to his visitors. "O.K., other than the danger to Wilson, who will be old enough to know what he is doing, and to our boy in Havana, who may go for broke for the biggest stakes there are, we are only risking money. We all see it that way?" His eyes bored into his visitors as they nodded. "Very well, Ernie, you have the ball. Don't report on this one except at significant points. Keep it verbal and see me only here. Dave, since this is now operational, you can get on to the Dominican operation, but I will want you for consultation on this one if it begins to twist off." He grinned cheerfully at Ernie. "Just make damn sure this cover doesn't blow or Sail Exports may be your only career!"

#### ONE

THE big transatlantic jet nosed down, its aluminum skin reflecting shimmering shafts of white light from the April sunrise, for a landing at Madrid. In the tourist section toward the tail of the plane, Jack Wilson stretched his legs and shifted slightly in his narrow upholstered chair. In the light of the early-morning sun the undulating hills of the Castilian plateau stretched away to the limits of the perspective visible through the little scratched plexiglas window, which rendered a clouded, erratic vision of the earth below.

Wilson had agreed reluctantly to travel tourist class. It took the fun out of the trip. He liked to play a role that was slightly bigger than life. Now he had to play it the other way . . . pretend he was less than he was. He was a soldier of fortune, an adventurer, a man of steel nerves with his own rules to live by; but this particular mission required him to pretend that he was a shoeing operator watching his bank account. The

American in Toronto had looked at him with cold eyes. "You have put most of your money into Sail Exports. Now you are beating the bushes for business. Stay in character. If you splurge, someone is going to ask where the money is coming from, and the first thing you know you will be labeled as a suspicious phony. Then you are dead with us. We'd have no further use for you."

Wilson sighed and glanced across at the thin, nervous blonde and the runny-nosed kid, four years old and of indeterminate sex, with whom he had shared the three seats off the narrow aisle during the overnight flight from New York. A stewardess, her brown hair slightly disarranged and her smock spotted from a night of handing food and drink to eighty passengers, smiled down at him. "Breakfast, sir?"

"Sure, sweetie. You've held up real well with this menagerie."

She rolled her eyes and made a face of mock despair as she handed him a small tray with two sticky rolls and a cup of coffee. "It's been a long night."

"You can say that again. I may never walk again."

The intercom crackled and Percy Faith's orchestra playing "April in Portugal" filled the cabin. The first feeling of excitement and anticipation he had experienced when the American contacted him about this mission returned. He didn't think of it as a problem, or as a job, or even as a game, but only as a mission. Christ! Here he was flying into Madrid to contact a woman he had never seen and to arrange for someone to pull the rug out from under Fiddell! The ungrateful bastard deserved it. He had helped put him up there. He'd help pull him down. His sense of importance returned with his good spirits. He was living again! His thoughts briefly returned to the Model Car Racing

Center in Toronto and veered quickly away in mild distaste. This was the real Jack Wilson. He'd had slow times, but there was always a demand for nerve and guts. There were always tough missions and tight spots where they had to have a Jack Wilson. The Americans had heard of him. They had sought him out.

He had been sitting at an elevated desk, just inside the door from the street, at the Model Car Racing Center. This enabled him to watch the door and at the same time look over the heads of the customers and visitors and observe the action. A narrow aisle about five feet wide had been fenced off along one wall behind which any visitor could watch the racing for nothing. It built business by creating a desire among the spectators to participate, the model car racing people said. Maybe it did, but Wilson didn't see any of his ex-spectators on the customer side of the fence. His customers were mostly teenagers, intense, knowledgeable, and aggressive. They soon found out that Wilson did not know or appreciate the fine points of the model racing car equipment he sold from showcases behind his desk. They went to the cases and examined the merchandise, arguing back and forth about the component parts without consulting Wilson. Usually they put the merchandise back. On rare, very rare, occasions they made a purchase and would fix Wilson with bored, tolerant looks long enough to listen to him mention the price.

Sometimes the competitive spirit boiled over and Wilson had a fist fight to break up. This he did with a certain pleasure. It was a break from listening to the goddamned whine of the little cars that seemed to mesmerize these pimply-faced creeps he called customers. He had expected to make a lot of quick money on a

new fad. It wasn't a fad, not in Toronto; and he was hardly making cigarette money.

He didn't notice the man come in. He must have been draped across the spectators' railing with the others for ten or fifteen minutes before he walked over to Wilson.

"Nice little game you have here."

"Thanks."

"Been at it long?"

"Five weeks."

"When do you close?"

"Ten P.M. weekdays. Twelve midnight Saturdays."

"This being a Tuesday, you close at ten?"

"Right."

"I have a business proposition for you. How about having a drink with me about ten-fifteen?"

Wilson looked at him narrowly. "You're a stranger to me, Bud. I don't need a drink that bad."

"I didn't mean to offend you, Mr. Wilson. This is a legitimate business deal. I know something of your background and I think you are the man we want. My name is Adams. Here is my card."

Wilson took the card. It read "Ansel E. Adams, Sail Exports" followed by a Toronto address and telephone number. "I'm doing O.K. here, Adams. Why should I take on something else?"

"Because you'll make a lot of money and have a lot of fun doing it."

"It sounds phony."

"Have a drink with me and let me tell you about it. If you still think it's phony, brush me off. I won't bother you again."

An agitated, freckled-faced kid in a lumberjack's shirt pushed by Adams to interrupt them. "Hey, Wilson! Table two has lost its power again. That's twice this week."

"O.K. kid, I'll be right there." He pushed out his cigarette and looked at Adams. "I'll listen . . . no harm in that. Where?"

"The Lucky Dollar bar around the corner."

"Right." He reached for a small leather repair kit and walked back to table two. . . .

They took a table in the rear of the Lucky Dollar, near a brightly lit, multicolored record player. Adams pushed five coins into it and pushed a number of buttons at random. "This is a private talk," he said as he drew up a chair beside Wilson. "No one can hear us over that caterwaul."

Adams folded his hands together on the table and stared at them intently. They became yellow, red, blue, and green as the lights from the record player bubbled slowly through their sequence. Adams seemed almost hypnotized by the effect. Neither spoke until the thin, peroxide-blond waitress in red satin slacks and a tight blue blouse had placed their drinks before them.

"What have you got?" Wilson asked.

Adams waited until a record changed and the room was filled again with a rhythmic, discordant sound from the record player. He leaned toward Wilson.

"Can you get in and out of Cuba without trouble?"

"Cuba? Sure. I guess so. I go down every winter and spend a couple of weeks. I've got buddies I fought with there."

"Yes. I know the story. How would you like to go to Cuba and deliver a message?"

Wilson grinned into his drink. "Spy stuff, huh? And you said it was business." He pushed back his chair and stood up.

Adams took hold of one of Wilson's arms. "It will take a lifetime of good nights at the Model Car Racing Center to make fifty thousand dollars, Mr. Wil-



son. Don't throw it away until you hear the whole story. You are much too experienced and intelligent to do a thing like that."

Wilson stood still a moment, then sat down. "I'm listening."

"The message may lead to the overthrow of Fidel Castro. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Not much."

"You deliver the message and you collect fifty thousand. That's all there is to it. Fifty thousand dollars for one month of your time."

"Why me? You probably got a lot of professionals on your list who would do it for a lot less, maybe a civil servant's salary and a pension."

"You are the only person who can do the job the way it needs to be done. You speak of professionals. There is no such thing in espionage. There is only the right man in the right place at the right time. This is a vital mission. For it we need a man of proven courage, intelligence, and ingenuity. We need a Canadian, someone who knows Cuba and speaks Spanish; someone acceptable to the revolutionary government. In short, we need you. That is why I have sought you out. When a person has unique qualifications he can command a top price. In this case, it is fifty thousand dollars."

"Who is it? The Americans?"

"I should think that is a distinct possibility. But does it matter?"

Wilson lit a cigarette and watched the flame of his match burn almost to his fingertips before he blew it out. "No."

"Are you interested?"

"Yes."

"Good boy. Think it over. Be certain you have no doubts. If you would like to talk to me again, I suggest Carmacks over on the boulevard, same time tomorrow night. Know where that is?"

18

"Yes."  
"I hope I hear from you." He put three dollars on the table and got up. "Enjoy the music, Mr. Wilson."

Carmacks was a circular, glass drive-in restaurant. Adams was sitting at the counter drinking a cup of coffee. He kept glancing at the mirrored wall behind the counter, and between the blizzard of red and green paper runners announcing menu specials pasted on its surface, he saw the reflection of Wilson coming through the door. He swung around and gestured toward the stool next to him. "Cup of coffee?"

"Thanks. I guess I will." Wilson added two teaspoons of sugar to the coffee placed before him by an alert, moon-faced counterman. "Well, here I am," Wilson added.

"Good boy. I have a car outside. After you have finished your coffee, let's take a drive."

"O.K."

Adams drove out on the boulevard, and moving into the right lane, drove along it at an easy speed. "There is no better place to talk than a moving automobile, particularly one just hired from a car rental agency."

"Are you hot?"

Adams laughed. "'Blown,' I believe, is supposed to be the correct term. No. I am secure. Just cautious."

Wilson leaned back in his seat and inhaled his cigarette. "I have decided that I want fifty thousand dollars. What is the rest of the story?"

Adams briefly outlined the plan.

Wilson pushed out his cigarette in a small ash-tray on the dashboard. "You said fifty thousand dollars. If I only go to Europe, it's like ten thousand."

"The risks of the European contact are slight. Anyone can do that for us. Consider the ten thousand

19

dollars as a bonus. When you go to Cuba, we pay fifty thousand dollars. It's the Cuban trip for which your special skills are required."

"If I go to Cuba."

"You will. He will want to hear it all from you."

"What about expenses?"

"I'll arrange to have your Model Car Racing Center bought for fifteen thousand dollars. You will buy Sail Exports from me for sixty-five hundred dollars. Your racing center at tops is worth three thousand. The remaining fifty-five hundred is an advance against expenses. If you need more, we'll arrange that through Sail Exports."

"When do I get the sixty thousand?"

"You get ten thousand dollars on your return from Europe and fifty thousand on your return from Cuba."

"What if it's no go?"

"If you make your trips and are available to deliver your message, we will pay you whether you are contacted or not."

"Some dame in Madrid will contact me?"

"Yes."

"And if I go to Cuba some guy in Havana will contact me?"

"Yes."

"I just wait around for the contacts?"

"That is all. That is the important part. Don't take any initiative. If they want to talk with you, they will. They will know all about you."

Wilson thought a few minutes. "Who do I report to?"

"No one. Once you leave Toronto you are on your own. We'll give you some help on the Zürich deposit. That is all. Prior to the Cuban trip you can arrange the spare-parts sale through Sail Exports. Other-

wise, we don't touch you. If the operation goes along smoothly, you won't need someone to hold your hand. If you get into trouble, we don't want to see you."

"Are you my Toronto contact?"

"After tonight I doubt that you will see me again. Just remember your contact formulas and the big message. Otherwise, you play it straight. You sell out the Model Car Racing Center and enter the export-import business. Your first business trips take you to Madrid-Zürich and possibly to Havana."

"How long do I wait for the contacts?"

"Not more than a month, unless events suggest something more. Play it by ear."

Wilson rubbed his fists together anxiously and hunched forward, looking at the sea-green of the illuminated instrument panel. Finally he cleared his throat. "O.K., I'll try it."

"Good boy. I wouldn't be surprised if the buyer for your Model Car Racing Center dropped in on you tomorrow. Also, if you will look in the Business Opportunities section of the classified ads the day after tomorrow, you will see Sail Exports advertised for sale." Adams chuckled. "It will be a good buy. Don't miss it." He swung along the curb in a deserted section of the street and turned in the seat toward Wilson. "The broker who sells you Sail Exports will give you your contact formulas, the big message, and other instructions that might occur to us in the next few days. Memorize everything, Mr. Wilson. No notes. It's the only safe way." He extended his hand. "Good-bye. Good luck."

Wilson stood on the curbing and watched the small sedan accelerate away. He took a cab to a neighborhood bar he frequented and ordered a beer. In a few minutes his initial elation was replaced by a feeling of anticlimax. This couldn't be real. Adams must be some