

Prologue - Eilat Sunset

“Hello. I’m Maruška, but you can call me Marie – most people can’t remember my real name. Do you mind if I join you?” She had just walked up to him at the bar and introduced herself, offering her hand, brimming with confidence and a broad smile – good teeth, though not perfect, and he found that appealing, along with a firm, dry handshake, almost manly, in fact. He guessed that she was a few years older than him, but wearing well. Although twenty eight years old, Paul looked older – hair loss did that to most guys, though he had not yet reached the stage where he needed to consider the completely shaven head. He did not consider himself particularly successful with women and Marie was stylish and intriguing, her introduction too good to be true.

“I’d be delighted – er, Marie did you say? Would you like a drink?”

“Yes, Marie, and thank you - a margherita would be good.”

He held out his hand and stammered – “I’m Paul, by the way.”

“Hi Paul, nice to meet you.” She smiled that smile again, and he stumbled to reply.

“So, er,..Marie, what brings you to Eilat, and, er.. to me at this bar?”

“A short diving holiday. I learned to dive in the Adriatic when I was student in Trieste. I thought that you looked like an interesting guy who might enjoy some company. And before you ask, no, I’m not a hooker!”

It was in the bar at the Eilat Sunset, a renowned fish restaurant. Paul had come down from Tel Aviv for a week’s break from his research. He was in the final year of a mathematics doctorate, researching large prime numbers and their application to advanced encryption technology. He was currently working on a particularly abstruse area relating to reverse factorisation of prime number products and needed to get away and clear his head.

Since a couple of years after the Six Days War in 1967, his parents had kept an apartment in Eilat and he had holidayed here all his life. He planned to use the family’s rigid inflatable boat to do some diving and photography, probably with one of his buddies from the diving school. He also planned to supplement his pocket money, as he did every time a new version of his encryption algorithm was finalised. This would be the final sale now, as he was near to completing his project, and would be heavily engaged in writing his paper for the next year or so. He also felt that what had started out as a bit of fun was now becoming a worry. But, for a research student and extra \$20,000 a year was not to be sneered at.

It became clear that Marie was an experienced diver and knowledgeable about reef fish. The best reefs were not accessible from Eilat as they were in Egyptian waters. Marie had dived the Egyptian coast – the reefs of Sharm el Sheikh in particular – which Paul always longed to visit, but travelling and diving there was impossible for an Israeli citizen in the current political climate.

After a few sundowners, they agreed to have dinner together and shared a superb grouper cooked with lime. They rounded off the evening with a couple of brandies and agreed to dive together the following day.

At 10 am the next morning they met at the diving school where Paul arranged to borrow gear for Marie. They loaded the Zodiac RIB and headed out. Although anchorages were restricted in reef areas, Paul knew the area very well and selected a spot which he knew was particularly good for Moray eels. They were one of his favourite photographic subjects, and enjoyed being fed by hand. He had dived here so often now that he knew some of the eels individually and had pet names for them, but Moray eels were short-sighted, they didn’t recognise him.

The diving was superb, the lunch better, and they were getting on like a house on fire. They headed back to Eilat and Marie suggested that they go back to his apartment to round the day off in style.

“Shit, I have a meeting arranged” Paul said to Marie, kicking himself silently, “but how about dinner again this evening, and we’ll take it from there?”

“I look forward to it – how about 7 o’clock at the Eilat Sunset again?,” Marie responded.

“That would be great, I’ll see you in the bar,” said Paul, still wondering at his good luck.

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The meeting in the café was brief. Paul handed over the CD case in an envelope, and received an envelope in return. Eli, as he knew him, shook his hand.

Paul had first been approached in the students’ union coffee bar in Tel Aviv two years before. At that time he was still working on ‘hard’ encryption, but using fast Fourier transforms to apply it real-time to speech.

Eli had introduced himself and over a few months a friendship had developed. Eli was reading Philosophy, but finding it did not excite him and he was considering dropping out and going into business. They had shared, beers, holidays and occasionally even girlfriends. One day, Eli said that he had heard that Paul was working on some really interesting maths. Public Key Encryption Technology was not secret – it was after all a mathematical technique based on very large prime numbers. There were practical limitations however. These arose from the sheer amount of computing power required to apply these techniques in real time. The application of the techniques could be sensitive, secret even, but at that time Paul’s work was borderline. It was however commercially valuable.

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A couple of months later over a beer, Eli had casually said that he had a friend who might be interested in buying a copy of Paul’s encryption algorithm. That was when it had started. Paul now had almost \$60,000 in currency squirreled away and had been considering buying his own place in Eilat. However, not knowing what he planned to do after his doctorate finished, he had held back from a property purchase.

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The friendship had gradually changed into more of a business relationship and now Paul was no longer really sure who Eli was. Over the last few months, he had begun to feel pressured to get his software releases delivered to Eli.

He returned to the apartment, put the money in the safe and then showered, shaved and changed. He got to the restaurant just in time for the sunset. The wind had been slowly building through the day, and the sunset was spectacularly enhanced by sandstorms over the Sinai to the West.

He was really enjoying Marie's company, the conversation was scintillating. She had taken a degree in Modern European languages in Trieste. Europe was largely unknown to Paul except for a couple of visits to see family in London. He sat captivated as she described her memories of Amsterdam, Paris, Prague, Berlin and London.

Marie smiled at him and, standing up, took his hand. "Let's dance!"

Paul shook his head. "The last time I danced was at my brother's *bar mitzvah* eleven or twelve years ago!"

"Come on then, you need practice!"

She was strong, laughing and insistent, and used her body weight effectively to half lift, half drag him out of his seat and between the tables to the dance floor. He was captured, captivated and courted and went willingly with the flow.

He couldn't dance but it didn't matter. They kissed on the dance floor, they held hands as they walked towards his apartment. He was blind to everything, walking on air, laughing, joking, intoxicated with her. They passed a grocery shop and the smell of coffee and spices were overpowering. It was overwhelming, as if he had never used his senses before that moment. They turned a corner, and he turned her, pushed her gently against the wall, pushed his hips against hers, his chest against her yielding breasts, his mouth against hers and she returned the pressure, insistently but gently. Their kissing was urgent, their touching electric. He buried his head in her hair, kissed her neck, grasped her by the waist and pulled her harder against him, grasped her buttocks and pulled her tightly against him. She moved her hand between their thighs and rubbed him, groaning as he kissed her throat. Then, the sound of a car horn on the main street brought him to his senses. This behaviour was not really appropriate for a public place in Israel he told himself, sadly. "We're nearly there" he whispered to her, taking her hand and leading her. They took the lift and as they did so they started again and repeated the street scene. Then, the lift was on its way down again, and stopped on the third floor. A middle aged couple with a poodle stepped in and travelled to the ground floor, whilst Paul and Marie composed themselves, giggling, as the lift started its upward journey again.

"That was Mr and Mrs Landy" Paul said, "Mrs Landy will be telling my mother about us kissing in the lift." Marie laughed.

They didn't make it to the bedroom. He was not very experienced, but improved as the night exhausted them. She was an aggressive, almost violent lover, quite unlike anyone he had ever experienced before.

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Paul woke first at about 9am, when the sun was well up, and they shared fresh apricots and bread for breakfast. Marie said she had to go back to her hotel to change her clothes. They kissed and she headed off after agreeing to meet later – she was just so very keen to go diving, and he couldn't wait.

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They picked up the diving gear at midday at the dive school, collected some chilled white wine and some lunch from the deli, and headed out in the rigid inflatable boat. Marie suggested that they go to a quiet reef anchorage which she had heard about. Paul said that he did not think it was very quiet, but he would head there. Once outside the marina, he opened the RIB up to 30 knots, and they laughed as they felt the wind in their hair and bounced and splashed through the wake of a tourist boat. There was only one other dive boat there when they arrived, a large unmarked black RIB, and the divers were just submerging. They dropped the anchor in 10 metres of depth, as far from the other boat as they could get within the permitted area. Paul inserted a fresh memory chip into his digital camera, checked the batteries and sealed the enclosure. They suited up, and checked each other's gear. Masks on, laughing, and a backward flop over the side of the RIB. Only 10m deep, close in to the shore, this was reef walking area. Paul beckoned and they headed towards a rise in the sea floor and a series of natural steps in the reef as it ascended towards the sandstone cliff of the shore. Marie beckoned to Paul to stop and motioned for him to take a picture of her. She stepped backwards a few paces, and Paul raised the camera.

Both of Paul's arms were harshly grasped from behind and he was hauled, struggling towards Marie and the ascending cliff. He looked around, confused, frightened, uncomprehending. There was a diver on each side of him holding him, pulling him. He panicked, struggled, kicked with his flippers, remembered flashbacks to last night with Marie, talking about his work, the CD, his pocket money, Eli. Marie swam to the side and retrieved the slowly falling camera as they reached the stepped edged where the reef began its ascent. One of the divers reached out and started to vent Paul's tanks. He struggled violently, kicked, completed the jigsaw of his time with Marie, tremored, and was then, finally, still. They wedged his right foot securely in a crevice. Finally, they vented his pony tank. The three of them swam gently away in the direction of the black RIB. They found the anchor line and ascended it. There was another RIB entering the anchorage. Marie rolled in over the side after the men, and lay on the bottom of the RIB. One man started the engine whilst the other hauled in the anchor. They waved casually to the new arrivals as they passed and headed south at 40 knots.

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The starter feedstock was packed in two litre stainless steel thermos flasks, twenty of them, at a temperature of 4 degrees Celsius. These were packed in polystyrene beads

within a pine box, the lid was nailed down and the box was quickly stencilled in black paint 'WATER MAKER SPARES' along with some spurious part numbers. Easy enough for one man to carry and load into the back of the Vauxhall utility van used by BioPro for local errands.

Dai 'Onions' Davies – the 'onions' soubriquet referring to the champion onions which he grew and with which he won all the local gardening shows - climbed into the van. He threw the envelope of Customs papers onto the passenger seat, started the engine and took a left turn out of the industrial estate on to the A48 road to Milford Haven. This Friday was going to be easy - a run down to Milford Haven and a short wait for customs clearance. Then on down the old Esso terminal to the pierhead to drop the crate off at *Universal Trader*.

Passing through the outskirts of Haverfordwest, he took the turn for Milford Haven at Merlin's Bridge, oblivious to the white Ford transit van which was closing up behind. He did however see the flat bed lorry stop ahead of him – he hit the brakes hard, swearing.

Then, a heavy, insistent contact at the back of his small truck, generating a wobble which amplified into a swerve as Dai tried to correct it and then a spinning skid off the road. The lorry accelerated away, followed by the Transit van.

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It did not enter the traffic policeman's head that this was anything other than an accident, with no apparent witnesses. The small van had demolished the bridge parapet as it shouldered its way through at 55 mph and somersaulted to the copse below. There were wooden crates scattered around the wreckage. The policeman was unaware that one box was one missing. Over the next few days, this fact became apparent to two people at BioPro, and would remain unreported, at least as far as the police were concerned. They found Dai at the foot of a tree in the copse. His neck was broken.

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In a country house on an estate outside Winchester, the matter of the missing case caused consternation. The starter feedstock could be replaced – it would take six weeks to cultivate. A simple calculation indicated that the delay would cost at least fifteen million dollars. Of more concern was the fact that the degree of success of the operation depended on timing.

Of course, the fact that the existence of the case was known to a hostile third party was a matter that would have to be addressed vigorously.

Charles Tobin prepared his e-mail, loaded it onto a memory stick then drove his Bentley into Southampton, parked it and then walked to a Starbucks in St Mary's Street. The e-mail found its way to the server in Chechnya in 3 minutes. It was sent from a one-time e-mail address, to another one-time e-mail address. It was sent at 5 pm UK time, when web traffic was at a peak worldwide.

Copies and trace files eventually found their way in to GCHQ in Cheltenham, Langley in Virginia and into a little known building complex in Nizhni Novgorod, the city formerly known as Gorki on the River Volga. Bots were automatically enabled,

tracing their way up the chain from computer server to computer server, following the address trail. In the few minutes they took to locate the source server, all traces had disappeared. The IP addresses of the source PCs would be recoverable from the ISP – standard practice these days, put in place putatively to prevent and track child pornography – but the real reason was national security. The internet had streamlined, automated and facilitated terrorism, money laundering and general high level banking fraud. Governments were fighting back.

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