

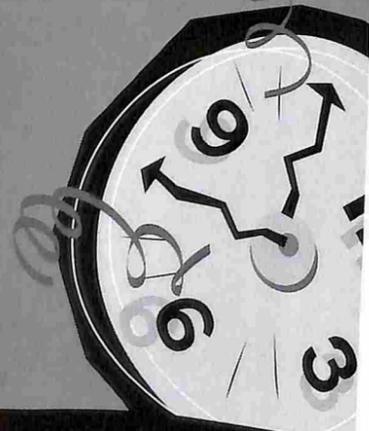
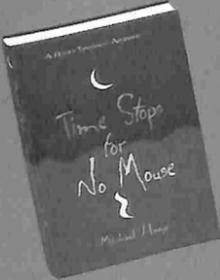
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Chapter VII: The Defector

On the sixth of November, 1940, the freighter Kirov left Istanbul at dusk, steaming slowly through the crowded harbor. "You'll be approached," he'd been told. "Someone from the special services — it's always done on Soviet ships. A conversation, only, nothing elaborate, just to see if you are, perhaps, sympathetic."

The purser, as it turned out, a jolly man with a sailor's beard. "Come and have a drink," he said. "In my office."

The ship worked its way past the Golden Horn, water-front lights fading away at the stern. It was warm in the purser's office. "Will you take a vodka with me?"

Maybe one, he thought. "With pleasure," he said.

The bottle was waiting on a brass tray. Absolut, he had been iced, the glass opaque with frost.

"Swedish?" he said.

"Yes. Why not?"

"No reason."

"Disloyal, you think?"

He smiled. "Well..."

"Oh, who can care about nationality, in these times," the purser said, setting out glasses on his desk. "It's more a question of taste, I think. Preference. Do you understand me?"

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