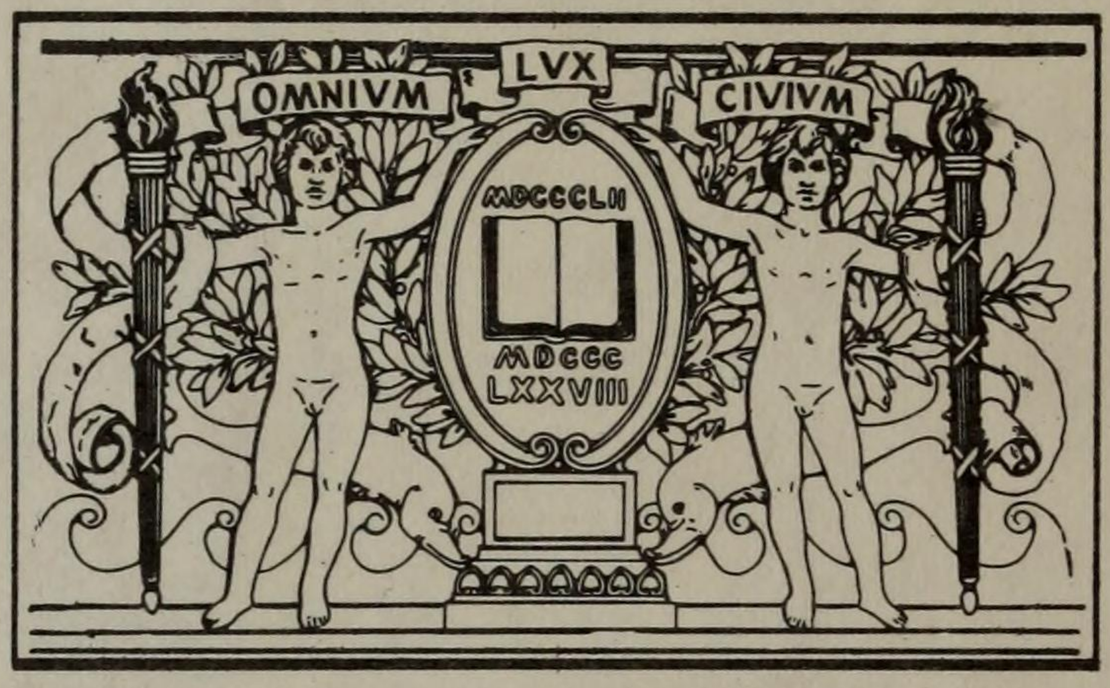

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SEX and THE HIGH COMMAND

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by

John Boyd

WEYBRIGHT AND TALLEY

NEW YORK

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Published in the United States
by WEYBRIGHT AND TALLEY, INC.
3 East 54th Street
New York, New York 10022

Published simultaneously in Canada
by CLARKE, IRWIN & COMPANY LIMITED
Toronto and Vancouver

BOOK DESIGN BY BENTE HAMANN

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 74-99003

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

"BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY"

For Aristophanes and Lenny Bruce

SEX and THE HIGH COMMAND

Wife, from the Celtic word *cwif,* reflects the history of female degradation. It is easy to imagine some wedge-headed cave man swaggering up to a peacefully grubbing band of girls and yelling *"Cwif,"* until, from fear of a clubbing, a helpless female comes forth to be dragged away to a cave. If some bully favored a girl, more timid males avoided her as *hus cwif,* his wife. Eventually, for the male's convenience, the *hus cwif* was kept in his cave or hovel for other chores as well. Thus we evolved the Old English *huswif* which mothered both the words *housewife* and *hussy.*

Cwif, with its Celtic pronunciation, was too pungent for the male to let die, and the word survived virtual epochs in his linguistic underworld as *quiff,* a derogatory synecdoche for a woman. It surfaces in formal Old English as *cwean,* the *cwif* of a king, from which is derived the modern *queen,* used as a synonym for prostitute by Elizabethans. Thus, etymologically, the male's use of *wife* or *queen* in reference to the female expressed his pride of possession in her organs of regeneration.

It is therefore suggested that *wife* and *queen* are not suitable words for polite discourse.

—Excerpt from a report by the Federal
Bureau of Language Reform

CHAPTER 1.

CHANNEL FEVER RAGED aboard the USS *Chattahoochee*. From the starboard wing of the bridge, Captain Hansen could see the forward mooring party playing sink finger on the forecastle while the chief boatswain's mate in charge dreamed toward Norfolk. He could hear Ensign Fairchild croon cross bearings to the navigator from the port wing, and a signalman striker atop the flying bridge was caressing an Aldis lamp pointed toward the Fleet Communication School ashore. Yet the harbor pilot was holding the vessel to ahead slow, although a clear fairway beckoned toward the navy yard whose gantries jutted above the horizon. After forty-eight sleepless hours battling Hurricane Hannah, the captain could have dropped anchor on the spot and gone to sleep, despite the two most beautiful women in the world waiting for him at Virginia Beach; but Hansen had no choice. He owed a duty to his men.

The captain stepped forward. "Pilot, I relieve the deck."

Surprised, the pilot stepped back. "You have the deck, Captain Hansen. Your berth is number five."

"Thank you, Pilot. Mr. Wilson, dismiss the tug."

As the officer of the deck stepped to the bullhorn and sang out to the tug wallowing off the starboard bow, Hansen felt tension strike the bridge gang, and his own euphoria vanished. Swinging his binoculars southeast, he located berth five, aft of a fleet oiler and forward of a heavy cruiser. He stepped inside the wheelhouse and said, "Left, ten degrees rudder."

As the helmsman echoed his order, Hansen lined the center brace of the wheelhouse windshield with the bow peak of the *Chattahoochee* and the after turret of the distant cruiser. "Meet her," he said to the helmsman. "All engines, ahead full," to the quartermaster. "Steady as you go," again to the helmsman. As his orders were chanted back, in meshing unison, the answering pointer on the engine telegraph moved forward, a bell clanged, and the quartermaster called, "All engines answer, ahead full, sir."

Far below, in the engine room, twin jets of steam slammed against twin sets of turbine blades, and the *Chattahoochee* quivered from opposing torque. Giant propellers kicked her stern upward. Her bow sank. Twin screws, partially freed from water resistance, spewed mares' tails twenty yards aft. She shook, settled back on her stern, shimmied as her propellers changed pitch, then buckled slightly as her screws bit and her bow butted water. Suddenly she shivered, rolled, and lunged. A wave rippled from her bow as the wind gauge atop the wheelhouse began to squeak.

Staggering slightly from the ship's forward surge, the pilot entered the wheelhouse. "This is a high-speed vessel, isn't it, Captain?"

"Not too speedy. About thirty-eight knots with the wind astern. Hydrofoils are faster."

Tactfully, the pilot was questioning the captain's judgment in giving a full-ahead order to a ship in a roadstead. He looked around him, as if seeking moral support, but the eyes of the crew members were impassive above the coal-scoop snowblink shields they wore against the glare from Hampton Roads. Usually sailors wore sunglasses, the pilot knew. "Captain," he continued, straining for a

sprightly voice, "this vessel weighs about eighteen thousand tons, doesn't it?"

"That's net. Give a few thousand when she's loaded." Captain Hansen, sensing the pilot's apprehension, added in a conversational tone, "I never figured the weight of the crew, but it's insignificant and doesn't ordinarily shift. On ferry boats, however, passenger weight *is* a factor. The Glasgow-Belfast ferry once capsized in Loch Long, I believe, when its passengers rushed to starboard to watch the *Queen Mary* pass. The *Queen Mary*—by heavens, there was tonnage!"

Hansen saw the pilot look through the windshield at the looming cruiser, glance down at the tachometer, jerk his eyes away, and his face grow ashen as he turned and faced aft, hunched, either praying or bracing himself for a collision. Perhaps both, Hansen decided. To calm the man, the captain said, "I was born in these parts, Pilot. I've sailed the Tidewater since I was knee high to. . . ."

"But, Captain," the pilot screamed above the rush of the wind, "it doesn't matter where a man's born if. . . ."

Hansen cut through the pilot's remarks with the orders: "Right full rudder. Starboard engine, back full."

Helmsman and quartermaster sang out in tandem as the *Chattahoochee,* with the drive of the port engine and the pull of the starboard reinforced by the drag of the rudder, slewed ninety degrees to starboard and rolled thirty degrees to port. Hansen stepped back as the pilot hurtled past him through the wheelhouse onto the port wing to be caught and steadied by Ensign Fairchild, who was holding to a pelorus.

"Meet her," the captain said. "Port engine, back full."

"Port engine answers, back full, sir. All engines are back full, Captain."

Hansen needed no reminder that all engines were backing, but he appreciated the quartermaster's conscientiousness. Larson was half Swede, half Alabaman—good blood lines for a fighting sailor.

"Steady on one-eight-three, sir," the helmsman called.

Perfect—183 headway was 003 sternway. The *Chattahoochee* was backing parallel to the dock. Hansen held

speed until the oiler's midship housing was slightly abaft his beam, and called, "All engines, stop."

"All engines stop. All engines answer stop, sir."

Hansen had resolved his movements neatly. The ship's forward motion had been converted to side motion by the sudden course change; its headway to sternway by the backing engines, giving it a side speed of six knots and a back speed of three knots. Sidling toward the dock, fifty yards away, it was moving fast enough to crush its port plates against the pilings, and the pilot clambered up the canted deck to the safety of starboard.

The fleeing pilot had not reckoned with the *Chattahoochee*'s bow wave, now, technically, its port beam wave. That wave was a hummer. When Hansen sent it rolling toward the dock, he knew that junior officers, watching from the yard administration building, would be taking bets that the wave would crest over the dock. He knew, also, that Old Navy hands would be standing by to collect the bets. Captain Benjamin Franklin Hansen, USN, had not earned his nickname, Dock Walloper, by parking jeeps. In twenty-five years as a naval officer, Hansen had never slopped a dock.

"Secure the engine room, Mr. Wilton," he told the OD.

His bow wave had bounced off the sea wall and was rolling back. Its initial surge righted the ship and thus gave full purchase to the *Chattahoochee*'s keel. Trapped by the sidling vessel, Hansen's bow wave volleyed between shipside and dockside to slow the hull, which compressed it. Five feet from the dock, its stern twenty yards from the prow of the cruiser and its bow eighteen yards from the stern of the tanker, the USS *Chattahoochee* lay dead in the water.

"Let go all lines," he told the OD, and a stupefied handling party on the dock looked alive when a salvo from the ship's three-pounders hurled four heaving lines over their heads.

He turned again to the OD. "Mr. Wilton, commence liberty immediately for the port watch, liberty to expire at 0800. Officers may bring their ladies aboard for lunch tomorrow. Disembark all scientific personnel. Have my jeep on the dock in twelve minutes without a driver. I'll

be leaving for my home at Virginia Beach, and my telephone number is in the night order book."

"Aye, aye, sir."

As Hansen turned, the pilot stood before him. "Captain, I request permission to write this docking up in the *Masters', Mates', and Pilots' Monthly*."

"Permission granted."

"Sir," he spoke rapidly, "I understand the theory behind the extreme roll which diminishes the keel drag, and I grasped the principle of the compressed bow wave; but, Captain, to add human interest to my article, may I ask, sir, why you docked so fast?"

"Sir," Hansen answered crisply, "these men have been at the Ross Ice Shelf for eighteen months and twenty-seven days. In that time, the only females they saw were female penguins. Any delay in getting these lads ashore in Norfolk would be cruel and unusual punishment."

Shock and horror glazed the pilot's eyes. "Those poor boys," he said. "Those poor, poor boys."

Hansen could have sworn that the man had tears in his eyes as he turned and fled down the ladder, but the captain had little time to ponder civilian behavior. Commander Johnson was emerging from the chart room to ask Hansen to pay his respects to the captain's wife. "Indeed," Hansen said, "and give my compliments to your good wife, Anne."

As Hansen started to go below, he heard Larson call up to the signalman striker, "What's the word from Norfolk?"

"No chicken, but there's lots of fruit at the YMCA."

Descending the ladder, Hansen inwardly shook his head. Time was when the last thing a sailor thought about when reaching port was the menu at the YMCA. This was nothing like the Old Navy.

An hour later, Hansen executed a ninety-degree turn into his driveway at Virginia Beach, stopped, and draped his arms over the steering wheel. Lawn trimmed. House painted. Walkway swept down. Helga had policed the outside well, but he couldn't give her a 4.0. Definitely not a 4.0. Atop the ranch-style residence was a signal mast; but instead of a black and white pennant, the third

repeater, flying from the yardarm to signify the captain's absence, a television disk antenna resembling an oversize dishpan was secured to the mast.

Hansen smiled to himself. Joan Paula would be gigged for this breach of discipline. Helga rarely watched television but their daughter was a born communicator. When he had called, last June, to congratulate her on graduation from high school, Joan Paula had been more interested in the radiotelephone transmission than in his felicities. Once, at the South Pole, the ship's radio operator had sworn he had picked up Joan Paula's call sign from her ham radio.

Crawling from the jeep with his ditty bag in hand, Hansen reflected that his daughter would soon be eighteen, almost ready to quit going steady and to start exercising her options.

Wearily he mounted the steps, lay his head against the doorjamb, and buzzed "sugar-easy-xray" on the doorbell. He was too tired for "sugar-easy-xray," but naval tradition demanded that he show the flag, and Helga would be delighted by the old, familiar code. But no one answered the ring. Tentatively, he tried the doorknob. It turned. Hansen entered his living room unescorted.

Hansen entered the living room unwelcomed; it was empty.

After the shock of his family's absence evaporated, he reacted with pleasure to the familiarity of the room. Nothing had changed, not even the position of the furniture. Over the mantel was his midshipman's sword, and on the mantel was his Bowditch, *Watch Officers' Guide,* and that book by Admiral Mahan he intended to read someday. Here was the conch shell on the coffee table, the sofa, the television set, all present and accounted for. Only Helga and Joan Paula were missing. He had telegraphed from sea that he would be home at 2000. Granted he was fifteen minutes early, but Helga and Joan Paula should have been standing by since noon. They knew the regulations.

Ah, he knew. They were hidden in the after compartments of the house, waiting for him to come searching. But he would trick their expectations. In a home suddenly

glowing with the presence of his wife and daughter, Captain Hansen sat down and lighted a cigarette, leaning forward over the conch shell. When the stub burned his fingers and awakened him, he knew he was home alone, after eighteen months and twenty-seven days of absence.

Snuffing the butt, Hansen reconsidered. Helga was attending some mandatory soiree given by an admiral's wife, and Joan Paula was out with that certain someone. Admirals' wives outranked captains to captains' wives, and ensigns outranked captains to captains' daughters. He had been outranked from above and below. He took his ditty bag and walked back to the kitchen where night orders were posted, and found his, written in Helga's hasty slant:

> Welcome aboard, skipper. If you see this before you see me, am gone to a very important meeting at Ensign Benson's house. J.P. is out bowling with the girls. Fillet of sole dinner in the freezer. Instructions on the package. Oven light burning brightly. Instant coffee in pantry. Booze you know where. Keep kitchen shipshape or get gigged.
>
> In haste,
>
> HELGA

From habit, he took his pen and initialed the note. Pouring a bourbon and water, he walked into the patio and looked across the beach to the ocean. Ensign Benson's! Joan Paula out bowling with the girls! Joan Paula's behavior he might understand. She was only seventeen, but she was a Navy brat. With her he had to stretch his understanding. But Helga's absence was sheer dereliction of duty. He wheeled back into the kitchen and put his unfinished drink on the table. Her note had been pleasant enough, even facetious, but the situation was too unusual for his appraisal. After eighteen months, twenty-seven days—.

Forgoing the instant coffee and fillet of sole, he walked into his trophy room—Hansenonian Institute, Helga called it—and looked around him at the mementos of four generations of Navy Hansens—the Bonnie Blue flag preserved by his great-great-grandfather who had served as an officer

on the CSS *Alabama,* the midshipmen's swords of succeeding generations of Hansens, the medals and citations. But he gained no peace from tradition, and lugged his disappointment into the master bedroom, undressed, showered, and donned his pajamas. Spreadeagled on his part of the single-headed twin beds, he firmly ordered himself not to yield to resentment. After forty-eight hours fighting Hannah, he was in no condition to take on Helga and Joan Paula.

Sleep came quickly but not deeply as was usual his first night ashore. Balanced on the edge of wakefulness, he slept as he slept at sea, with one ear next to an imaginary voice tube from the bridge. Thus, he was fully awake and reaching for his wristwatch when the door opened and his wife stood silhouetted in the glow from the blue battle lamp in the passageway. Flicking on the bedlamp, he said, "Helga."

"Now, don't get yourself wide awake, Ben."

"After eighteen months, twenty-seven days, and eighteen hours, I can afford to lose a little sleep." He swung himself to a sitting position on the edge of the bed and opened his arms to embrace her. She did not enter his arms. Instead, she extended her hand, palm down.

"You may kiss my hand," she said, "for I've one of those dreadful summer colds that hang on and on and on." As he pressed his lips to her hand and looked up into the calm Nordic beauty of her face, she added, "Besides, you parked in the driveway and blocked me. I had to park on the street and that right rear door doesn't lock. Around here, in the summer, an unlocked car is a standing invitation for a love-in in the back seat. Also, I noticed you didn't clean your glass and stow it. That's three demerits."

"Is the back of your hand all I'm getting?"

"I wouldn't think of giving you this dreadful cold. . . . You're home early." Her voice was almost reproachful. "Your telegram said 0200. It's only 2355."

"Is Joan Paula home?"

"Yes, but I'm tired. Let me get into something comfortable."

She turned and went to her dressing room. Following her with his eyes, he chided himself for the resentment toward

this woman of beauty and grace that he had permitted himself to feel simply because she had misread a telegram. His wire had said 2000. When she returned, her face smeared with cold cream and her hair in a net, she glanced at the lighted bedlamp as she fluffed her pillow. "Are you going to read in bed?"

"My only books are Helga's looks," he said as she crawled under the covers.

"As a poet, Ben, you have one thing in common with Shakespeare: Jonson said Shakespeare knew little Latin and less Greek."

"I never heard Johnson say anything about Shakespeare."

"You're talking about Ralph Johnson," she said. "If you aren't reading, will you turn off the light?"

"Let me look at you for a moment."

"I hope I look better than I feel. I just gargled almost half a gallon of extract of eucalyptus. Did you have a good voyage home?"

"Most of the way. Two days out, I caught the underside of Hurricane Hannah."

"Why do they name hurricanes after women?"

"It's an alphabetical designation of meteorologists."

"I wonder," she drawled. "Now, I just wonder. Ben, I think it makes a man feel better if he says, 'My house was torn down by Hannah or Ethel or Ruth,' because then he can blame a woman."

"Enjoy your meeting at Ensign Benson's house?" he asked hurriedly.

"Very disappointing, a political lecture for my club which was ruined by club politics. You know that cute little Sue Benson? Well, I'll tell you about it, later. You must be awfully tired."

"Not too tired, Helga. I rang our signal on the doorbell."

"We've been having trouble with that bell lately, getting a disconnected buzz. It goes *rrrr, rrrr,* and then *phhht, rrrr.* Joan Paula's been promising to rewire it for two months, but that girl defies me. She'll work all day on a transistor radio but do you think I can get her to spend fifteen minutes rewiring a doorbell?"

"When a man's been to sea for almost two years, Helga, he's interested in more than doorbells."

Drowsily she asked, "Give me a clue?"

It's something I haven't had for eighteen months, twenty-seven days, and sixteen hours."

"Animal, vegetable, or mineral?"

"Animal!"

One eye closed, she squinted at him. "Sugar-easy-xray."

"Now, you're getting warm."

"No, I'm not. And you'd better not either. You're tired after forty-eight hours with that other woman, and I don't want to give you this bad cold. I'm tired, too, after a disappointing meeting. I'm going to sleep in. If you have to get back to the ship, there's bacon and eggs in the refrigerator."

"Yes, I'll leave early. Perhaps you and Joan Paula can lunch aboard tomorrow. It's time she met some eligible bachelor officers."

"Oh, Ben, she's just out of high school. Besides, I want some eagle scouts in on the bidding. . . ."

Helga was joking about Joan Paula but not about being sleepy. He reached over to stroke the curve of her hip. Even as he reached, he saw her eyes drift out of focus and her eyelids close. His arm continued its movement upward to flick off the bedlamp and he rolled over on his back.

Summer colds could be a nuisance, he admitted, but he was disturbed by her comparison of naval officers to eagle scouts. Hansen was fourth-generation Navy and named after an aircraft carrier whose fighting spirit had impressed his father during the battle for Okinawa in World War II. Under glass in the trophy room Helga had the telegram which his father had sent his then-pregnant mother in Richmond: "Have a boy. Name him after the USS *Benjamin Franklin*." Only one American ancestor of Hansen's had not died or been retired as an officer in the USN. Great-grandfather Boyle Hansen had been killed while serving aboard the CSS *Alabama* as an officer in the CSN. His own father, then a commander and the finest Virginia gentleman since Robert E. Lee in his son's eyes, had figuratively gone down with his ship—literally up—when

his destroyer was exploded by a North Vietnamese PT boat while patrolling, ironically, the Yankee Station.

Captain Hansen had nothing against eagle scouts, but a merit badge was not a Purple Heart.

Hansen awoke before six, dressed quietly, and eased out of the bedroom in order not to awaken Helga. In the hallway he noticed Joan Paula's bedroom door ajar, and he went to peek at his sleeping daughter. She was not abed, although the bedclothes were rumpled. Her bathroom door was open and her bathroom empty. As of old, a teenager's accouterments littered her room, with the addition of a boldly stenciled sign above her bed: RESTRICTED AREA—LAUNCHING PAD.

"Papa, is that you?"

Her call came from the kitchen, where he found her rising from an unfinished roll and coffee to embrace him. If she had her mother's cold, she was eager to give it to him, and he was eager to share it.

She was the same Joan Paula, a little taller, a little fuller around the pectoral area, but still lithe, energetic, laughing, and affectionate—almost. She pushed him away and looked up at him reprovingly. "Papa, where's my penguin?"

"You never ordered a penguin."

"That's right! That's why it would have been real neat for you to surprise me with one. But one thing I can depend on from my dad—no surprises."

"Still my daughter." He shook a dubious head.

"Until August, Papa. Say, how about a breakfast of charred toast, half-crisp bacon, and eggs straight up? Everything's hot off the grill because I won't use a frying pan."

"Sounds good," he said, sitting as she whirled to pour his coffee. "But why aren't you my daughter after August?"

"I turn eighteen in August and go up for grabs."

Turning to the stove, she moved with the efficiency of a fry cook, cracking eggs with her left hand as she separated bacon strips with her right, then she turned to the toaster, put in the bread, and with a minimum of

effort, continued her movement downward to a cabinet from which she selected his favorite black marmalade. She had her mother's wit, he decided, and her father's efficiency.

"Where were you, last night?"

"Out bowling with my team. Big deal. We lost."

"It surprised me to come home to an empty house."

"Your telegram said two. When I came home and saw your jeep, I figured you had confused the telegraph girls again by using military time. You probably put 2000 and they dropped the last zero. I started to knock on your door but I heard you snoring."

As she talked, she blotted the bacon, lifted the eggs, rolled his utensils into a napkin, flipped up the toast, turned, served him, and wheeled back to the griddle, scraping it down with a spatula. "I don't mind cooking with the griddle," she commented, "because I don't have to clean any greasy pans."

"You get a 4.0 for the meal," he said, as she turned to sit down, "but how did you do in high school?"

"Very good, but mother's giving me remedial reading, anyway."

"Why?"

"She took adult courses in comparative literature and got hooked. She's been force-feeding me. I'm up to my cowlick in Cowper."

"What's comparative literature?"

"You read all that stuff—German, French, Russian—then compare it."

"Does your mother read Russian literature?"

"She flipped over that book about that Russian doctor."

"I hope she isn't reading Karl Marx."

"He's a German, Papa."

He changed the subject. "Your mother was talking about a political meeting, last night."

"Oh, she means that FEM thing. That's a woman's club for freedom, equality, and motherhood. They're against war."

"By heavens, is Helga putting me out of business?"

"You could sail a copra boat. I'd be first mate."

"What about boys?"

"I like electronics. Boys are dumb."

"Did you put that dishpan on my yardarm, young lady?"

"That's a disk antenna, Papa. It concentrates television waves."

"So, you think boys are dumb. I invited your mother and you aboard ship for lunch. Perhaps one of my young officers might say something that interests you."

She looked over her raised coffee cup and shook her head. "Amapola, if you keep talking about boys, you'll sound like a pederast. More toast?"

"No, thanks, J.P." He glanced at his watch and got up. "Liberty expires at 0800, and the captain can't be late."

"Oh, gee!"

Arms akimbo, chin resting on palms, she was such a picture of dejection that he went around the table and patted her shoulder. "Don't fret, honey. We'll see each other again, at lunch."

"But you're leaving me with all the dirty dishes."

"Maybe you'll meet some future admiral, aboard, who'll wash your dishes."

She brightened. "I'll walk you to the car, Papa, because I want to make a deal."

For Hansen, it was sheer joy to walk down the hallway with this lithe and handsome girl who held his hand and swung his arm back and forth in a wide arc. "I want to go to college and study marine architecture, and if you'll buy me a GE dishwasher you can keep the admiral dishwashers. Then, when I make enough money building ships to buy a copra boat, I'll make you captain, because the scuttlebutt among the Navy juniors is that you're the best ship handler in the Navy."

"What'll we do with your mother?"

"Stick her on the fantail and give her a book."

She walked him to the jeep and turned to point up at her antenna. "Papa, it'll get Baltimore on a quiet day. Must I take it down?"

He put his arm around her waist, considered her request with mock gravity, and grinned, "Child, for one-third interest in your copra boat, you can stick a weathercock up there."

"Heavens no, Papa! With a rooster above the house, Dr. Carey would blackball mother."

"Who's Dr. Carey?"

"She's a woman doctor, the president of the FEM's, and she doesn't care for men or roosters. She says automation and science has made them both unnecessary."

"Is she crazy?"

"She's a peace nut, but I wouldn't call her crazy. She can prove what she says." Suddenly, Joan Paula's face brightened. "She teaches what she calls the New Logic, and I'm going to use New Logic on Mother. I'm going to leave your dirty dishes for her. She married you, and you're her responsibility."

She stepped back, saluted smartly, and said, "Carry on, Skipper."

"Aye, aye, ma'am."

As he returned her salute and backed the jeep out of the driveway, Captain Hansen smiled. He'd take Helga aside when the two came aboard for lunch and plan a purchase to be kept secret from Joan Paula. He had been absent for over eighteen months, but he could still recognize a shrewd family campaign to get Papa to buy a dishwasher for the kitchen.

CHAPTER 2.

When Hansen saluted aft and stepped aboard the *Chattahoochee*, he returned to a world he understood. Near the quarterdeck, the first division was mustering. Forward, the third repeater was fluttering down from the yardarm. As he climbed the ladder to the captain's quarters, some instinct told him that this world was also wobbling slightly. Returning the salute of his orderly, he entered his cabin and smelled the aroma of coffee—his steward was aboard. His shore phone was connected, the Norfolk paper with the ship's paper was on his desk, and his yeoman had brought in a fortnight's accumulation of Navy bulletins. As the bosun's "Turn to" was piped over the intercom, he settled at his desk, and Marcos brought in his morning coffee.

Hansen reached first for the Bureau of Personnel's all-Navy bulletins to see if any of his classmates had been appointed admiral—an eventuality he did not expect for another five years—but he did not start to read immediately. Tapping his fingers on his desk top, he gazed idly out of the porthole at a honey barge moving across the Roads. Everything was shipshape, too shipshape.

On the morning of the first liberty in Norfolk, a shore-

patrol paddy wagon should have been on the dock, MP's with brassards and billies on the quarterdeck, and bluejackets scurrying to catch the roll call. Ever so slightly, it seemed to Hansen, reality was out of focus.

Commander Reed, the ship's executive officer, entered bringing the eight o'clock reports. All were present and accounted for but Commander Johnson.

"Probably fouled up in the Suffolk traffic," the captain commented. "Send him to me when he reports in."

Hansen sipped his coffee and turned his attention to the ship's paper. A digest of the international news carried the item that the Red Chinese had dropped another practice missile, this one close to Johnston Island. In ten years they'd be lobbing them ashore at Crescent City, California. On the second page of the paper, he found an item he considered raw:

> According to skirmish reports coming from the port watch, Norfolk is having a cold wave in August. Only CWT McCormick scored, as expected. Go it, starboard!

He'd have to speak to the recreation officer. This paper went into the homes of ratings who lived in the Norfolk area.

Again the captain was interrupted, by the officer of the day who entered, hat under arm, visibly shaken. "Captain, I've just got the word that Commander Johnson killed himself."

"By heavens! Who told you that?"

"His wife, sir. I called his house and asked Anne where he was and she said he was dead. She said he shot himself because she was pregnant. Sir, I was shocked. I said, 'What are you going to do, Anne?' and she answered, calm as you please, 'Why, I'm going to bury him.' Captain, I thought she was crazy. So I called the Suffolk sheriff's office and the poop checked out."

"I would never have thought this," the captain said. "Ralph Johnson was the Rock of Gibraltar. But it happened ashore, so it's out of our hands. Notify Mr. Reed and the chaplain and enter it in your log."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Hansen sat down, far more upset than he had let the junior officer know. Improbabilities were happening faster than probabilities. Commander Johnson had been phlegmatic to a point where a dressing down or a "Well done" were all the same to him. It was inconceivable that Ralph could arouse himself to suicide. But if Hansen assumed that he had erred in his estimate of his navigator's stability, there remained the wife's infidelity.

Anne Johnson had been a visitor at his home, but he would have remembered her if he had seen her only once. Legs as uniform as pipe cleaners balanced a pelvis relatively forward of a spine which, fortunately for her balance, was not top-heavy except in appearance—she wore her hair in a bun. Her most commendable feature was the manner in which her eyes followed her husband, not the eyes themselves, which were gray and bulbous. She hung on Ralph's words, though they were few and commonplace, and even clung to his silences.

Hansen felt that Anne was incapable of dalliance, even if she had been eager for it. He leaped to the idea that she might have been raped on a moonless night by a near-sighted sex lunatic, and as tenuous as the theory was, it was the only explanation of her pregnancy.

Helga's flirtation with a peace movement was easily dismissed as a passing fad. His wife read books. But the cold wave in Norfolk was perplexing. He could see a statistical improbability falling on any given day in a port such as Hamburg, Marseilles, or, remotely, Vallejo, but Norfolk? No!

Hansen slowly shook his head. In his approach to his profession Hansen was practical, forthright, and logical. He analyzed ship movements with his viscera, and the problems of command had long ago been thought through, solutions found and tested. Extraneous problems he resented—if an officer came to him for guidance or advice on personal or domestic problems, Hansen would deliver a few homilies and ship the man out. Technical problems he delegated to specialists who were held responsible. Captain Hansen considered it his duty, as a naval officer, to be single-minded.

Now, these intrusions.

Very well, he would accept the improbable as probable and act accordingly. If he were standing on the bridge when Gabriel blew his horn, Hansen would come to attention and hold a hand salute until the last note died. By accepting the improbable as probable, he reasoned, he could maintain his sanity and, more important, his decorum as a naval officer.

Johnson was dead and the ship's table of organization called for a commander as a navigator. Although the *Chattahoochee* was scheduled for dry dock and he was up for a tour of shore duty, the ship needed a navigator. The name that came first to Hansen's mind was Frank Hewitt.

Ten years before, Hansen had served as exec on the destroyer *Calicot,* and Hewitt, then a junior grade lieutenant, had been navigator. Frank should have his three stripes by now, and Frank was the son of Admiral Hunnicutt "Flank Speed" Hewitt, ComSowesPacPolSqua. As a floating science lab attached to the Southwest Pacific Polar Squadron, the *Chattahoochee* had been under Admiral Hewitt's command. When Hansen went up for admiral, Admiral Hewitt would be a logical choice for the selection board.

Young Frank had been a fair navigator. If he requested Hewitt, and some brown-nosing aide to an admiral chose to use this request as an opener for small talk when Admiral Hewitt dropped by Washington, the request for the admiral's son would not hurt Hansen with the admiral. Hansen picked up the phone and put in a call to the Bureau of Personnel, for Captain Harvey Arnold, aide to Admiral Darnell, Chief of BuPers. After one click, a Wave answered, "Captain Arnold's office. Lieutenant Byrd, hyo!"

Annoyed by her Britishism, Hansen said, "This is Captain Benjamin Franklin Hansen, of the United States Navy. Let me speak to Captain Arnold."

"Th'nk yo'p!"

"Walloper, you old polar bear! How was the voyage?"

"Little chilly down south, Harvey, and we hit weather off Hatteras."

"I've been fighting a cold wave in Washington. No pun intended."

"Same trouble in Norfolk, according to the ship's paper. Only one of my ratings made out. Harvey, I need help. I lost my navigator last night. Unexpectedly. He's dead."

"Sorry, Ben."

"Yes. All hands are shocked by his death. But I'm looking for a replacement. Some years back, Admiral Hunnicutt Hewitt's son, Frank, served under me on the old *Calicot* and I liked the cut of his jib. . . ."

"Whoa there, Ben," Arnold's joviality skidded to a halt. "Maybe you were too far south for the scuttlebutt, but Frank Hewitt resigned three months ago for the good of the service."

Oh, hailstones, Hansen thought, recalling his phrases "served under me" and "I liked the cut of his jib." Now the request would get to admirals, as many as Harvey Arnold could talk to, but none of those admirals would be Admiral Hunnicutt Hewitt. "Well," Hansen said, "I've been out of circulation for a long time."

"Don't let it worry you, Ben. I'm glad to head off the request before it got into official channels. Give my condolences to your crew over the loss of your navigator, and give my compliments to that rating. . . . No, tender my respects to . . . what's his name?"

"McCormick. Chief Water Tender McCormick."

"He would be an Irishman. . . . Well, Ben, next time you're around the Pentagon, drop in and we'll have a cup of java. Over and out!"

Arnold's phone clicked.

Improbabilities were killing him. Who would have thought it of Frank Hewitt? That boy, Hansen recalled, used to have females lined up three-deep at the dock every time the *Calicot* hit port.

Again Hansen shook his head, reached over, and dialed home. Helga answered in a voice still heavy with sleep, "Hi, Ben."

"Helga, I intended to call to finalize our luncheon arrangement, but strange things have been happening—Frank Hewitt was cashiered, and Ralph Johnson committed suicide last night."

"Frank I understand, but do you mean Anne's husband, Ralph?"

"Yes. We were talking about him last night."

"You were talking about him, Ben. I was talking about Ben Jonson. . . . So, Ralph killed himself. Well, he must have wanted it."

"He didn't want it. He came home after eighteen months at sea and found Anne pregnant. The shock did it."

"I suppose Anne will be able to support the child on Ralph's pension."

"That's true, Helga, and that's the irony of it. She kills him and collects his pension."

"You said he killed himself." Helga was obviously still half asleep.

"Yes, but morally she's responsible. Through her infidelity the Navy has lost an officer it took tens of thousands of dollars to train."

"Training for what, Ben?"

"To navigate a ship. Eventually to command."

"Doesn't the *Chattahoochee* have one of those little black boxes? What do you call it, an inertial navigation device?"

"Yes."

"They cost about six thousand dollars installed, don't they?"

"In round figures, yes."

"Ben, I'll never understand why the Navy spends so much money to train a man to do what a little black box can do."

"Instruments break down, Helga."

"You still have the box, Ben. The man broke down."

There seemed to be an element missing in her conversation. "Dear, you can't put a money value on a man's life."

"I didn't, Ben. You did. I was recapping your figures."

She had him there, he had to admit. "I'm upset, Helga."

"I know, Ben." Her voice grew suddenly tender. "You were seeking certainties in this, our life. Well, Ralph found his. I'll arrange for the flowers and go over and help Anne."

"Then you won't be aboard for lunch?"

"I don't think it would be proper. You men will want to be alone with your grief."

"Helga, there's nothing I don't wish to share with you and Joan Paula. . . ." He could feel himself swinging closer to her, feel the beginning warmth of their old intimacy, when the base telephone operator broke into his call.

"Captain Hansen, I have a top-priority call awaiting you from the Pentagon."

A true Navy wife, Helga heard the operator and hung up promptly.

It was Harvey Arnold. "Ben, I just got the word! Admiral Darnell wants the whole scoop on Chief McCormick —service record, medical log, the works. He's calling the Norfolk base infirmary to put an analyst on standby, but he wants you, personally, to check out the chief's story, make sure it's more than just scuttlebutt. . . ."

"Harvey, doesn't the admiral consider it below the dignity of a captain to check on. . . ."

"Ben, if McCormick won't tell his captain the truth, who will he tell? There's something big breaking here, top priority and top secret, because I don't know what the hell's going on, myself. Ring me back, Ben, when you get the scoop."

"Very well, Harvey. Over and out."

It gave Hansen short-lived satisfaction to click first. Always it had been his pride as an officer to hoist "execute" promptly, but how did a captain in the United States Navy go about verifying the alleged carnal relations of a chief water tender? "Orderly," he called, almost wearily, "bring me the service record and medical log on Chief Water Tender McCormick, and pass the word to the quarterdeck for the chief engineer to report to the captain."

Before the engineering officer arrived, Hansen had read the service record of Angus Hull McCormick, CWT, a native of Cumberland, Tennessee, age thirty-seven, unmarried, with a high school education and nineteen years in the Navy. His medical log showed three venereal com-

plaints. By far his greatest distinction was his proficiency in rating, an incredible 3.9. His military appearance also rated a 3.7.

Hansen laid the records aside when the chief engineer entered, but he did not invite him to sit. The engineer had oil on his dungarees. Besides, he used language suited only for the engine room or for the merchant navy from which he had transferred. Hansen didn't care to prolong the engineer's visit. "Chief, I'm trying to evaluate Chief Water Tender McCormick in nonprofessional areas. Does he tell the truth?"

"To my knowledge, Skipper."

"There's an article in the ship's paper about him. Does he brag about his relations with women?"

"No, sir. The story comes from his running mate, Farrel. Those two have a standing bet on who gets first gash when they hit port, and, believe me, Captain, McCormick's the champ."

"Very well, Chief. Thank you."

"Sorry I can't be more help, Captain. I hit the beach, myself, last night, and I. . . ."

"Chief, my interest in this matter is purely professional. I'm directing you to keep this conversation confidential."

"Absolutely, Skipper. You can count on me!" It was the first time in his naval career that the captain had seen a leer put into a salute.

Before the captain had a chance to call McCormick, his orderly announced that Commander Morris Gresham wished an audience. Hansen rose to greet his unexpected caller, a commander in the medical corps, slight of build, with bulging brown eyes, a receding hairline on a receding forehead, and a receding chin which gave his pointed nose such prominence that his mustache merely altered his profile from molelike to seal-like.

He carried a briefcase.

"Good morning, Captain Hansen." The voice was low and well-modulated. "I was free when Admiral Darnell called, and he tells me that you might have one of our profile boys aboard."

Hansen felt himself strangling in a noose of unreality, but he managed a smile and a wave of the hand. "I'm not

familiar with your shoptalk, Doctor, but please join me in a cup of coffee."

"If you have tea, Captain."

"By all means. Tea for the doctor, Marcos."

Hansen turned back to his guest and said, "Have a seat, Doctor. I've checked McCormick's service records. Care to look?"

"Indeed I would, Captain." He was accepting the folders as he sat down, and when he hit the seat he was absorbed, oblivious to the arriving tea or the waiting captain. Once he paused, tapped his finger on the folder, and said, "Does that follow? Yes, it follows."

Hansen considered the doctor's unilateral dialogue undiplomatic in the presence of four stripes. He asked, "What is this profile business?"

Dr. Gresham lifted his eyes, blinked twice, and said, "A personality index profiling male attitudes toward females. We call it Lothario X." His lids lowered and he was lost again.

When he wolf-whistled between his teeth, Hansen asked, "What's this profile business all about?"

"I'm in the dark, myself. It's a secret project that the Bureau of Medicine is working on with the Bureau of Personnel." He paused. "The nonpsychological factors bug me."

Obviously, the doctor was finding more in the service record than the captain had found. He would nod at times, in agreement with himself, tap the paper, and resume reading. "Wonderful! Wonderful! Breast feeding!"

"A nonpsychological factor?" Hansen inquired.

"Definitely psychological. No, he checks out in the nonpsych areas: age thirty-seven, native-born, bachelor, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant, and he's from Tennessee."

"What does that mean, psychologically speaking?"

"Nothing. That's what bugs me." He closed the file, tapping it with his fingertip. "Freud would have a field day with this fellow."

Hansen resented the term "fellow" for a Navy hand. "How can you say that about a man you've never seen?"

Dr. Gresham tasted his cold tea, replaced the cup, folded his hands over his briefcase, and focused his eyes on the

captain. "He's a bachelor at thirty-seven, which evinces a latent hostility toward women as a compensation for an overly active Oedipal drive. This means he loved his mother but resented her relations with his father. Now, get the picture, Captain. When McCormick finds libidinal expression, symbolically he's seducing his mother and thereby taking a backhanded swipe at his father."

"His parents are dead," Hansen reminded the doctor.

"Parents never die, Captain: We merely bury their bodies. . . . So, McCormick's made this marvelous adjustment on a sado-masochistic level; because incest is frowned upon by his Puritan ethic, he's punishing himself. In short, he's whipping and getting whipped, *simultaneously*."

"Are you saying he's abnormal, Doctor?"

" 'Abnormal' is a loaded word. In the sense you use it, definitely not! McCormick is the super, all-time, all-American boy. Now, take his job, water tender, down where those liquids drip, gurgle, and blurp—the genito-urinary tract of the ship. And he loves it. Notice that three point nine professional aptitude? But wait, Captain! He's a water tender, not an oiler. Water's the fluid of life, symbolically drawn from the breasts of Mother Earth. Remember, in all probability he was breast-fed, coming as he does from a mountain area. This points to a double drive, anal *and* oral, fixated on the sado-masochistic level. Incredible, Captain! Eros charged with the memories of mother love. Spanked at one end, fed at the other. The gamut. Imagine the richness, the texture, of this libido. For it, the act of love is nursing, punishment, revenge, sinning, expiation of sin, plus the job-oriented joy of blowing tubes. This libido has so many plus factors that it reaches spiritual levels of anal-oral eroticism and, heed my words, Captain. . . ."

As commanding officer of a floating scientific laboratory, Hansen had known intellectuals, had learned to tolerate their enthusiasms, but this egghead was a hummer. His owl's eyes glowed, and his mole's nose twitched. Listening, Hansen felt sympathy for all landlubbers at sea on a raft in a hurricane.

"For this man, love is an apotheosis. He punishes sin-

ners, particularly the authoritarian figure of his father, whom he subconsciously identifies with God, and the mother he loves. One who punishes God achieves brotherhood with God. Moreover, Captain, God is also fixated on a sadistic erotic level, spiritually speaking, and only He and McCormick punish sinners *because* they love them. Thus, McCormick becomes a saint in the boudoir. At the explosive moment when his libidinal urge is released, the marmoset soars on the wings of an eagle right into Abraham's bosom."

"He's a Protestant," the captain said.

"That's the point, Captain. In this area, terms lose their meaning. McCormick's experience cannot be defined in the lexicon of the sex psychologist. It is supercharged, hypocarbureted, sixteen-cylinder whoomph! What does he look like, Captain?"

"I don't know."

"Immaterial. He's probably tall, rawboned, blue-eyed, possibly red-haired, with a protruding Adam's apple."

"We'll find out. . . . Orderly, pass the word for Chief Water Tender McCormick to lay up to the captain's quarters, on the double."

"We must beware of his sense of humor, Captain, because he has the subtle wit of an abstract reasoner."

"How could you analyze his reasoning power?" Captain Hansen's question was punctuated by the bosun's whistle followed by the summons to McCormick.

"How did the orderly get to the quarterdeck so fast?" the doctor asked.

"He telephoned."

"Ah, I see. . . . McCormick's reasoning power. He's Anglo-Saxon, and abstract reasoning is the British national genius. Something to do with their fogs and mists. The French genius is for painting. In their brilliant sunlight, they respond to color and clarity of line. Anglo-Saxons are more literary minded. They breed the Shakespeares, the Miltons, the Johnsons. . . ."

"Ben Jonson?"

"I was thinking more of Samuel Johnson. . . . Your antecedents were Scandinavian, I take it. They have a dual national genius—for breeding and for sailing."

"Then why are the Scandinavian countries underpopulated?" The man's theorizing irritated the captain who barely restrained the harshness in his voice.

"Because they sailed away from their miserable lands to breed Normans, Englishmen, Scots, Turks. In Aleppo, once, I met a beautiful blonde, blue-eyed Levantine. Ah, such rapport. . . ."

Sixteen cylinders were beginning to purr, but Hansen had no time for dalliance, past or present. "Doctor, I have to evaluate the truth in McCormick's story, and McCormick didn't tell the story."

"That bothered me, Captain," the doctor sprinted ahead. "Men such as McCormick ordinarily don't boast. Well, the truth's relative, anyway."

"Yes, but I've got to get the facts."

"Put him on his scout's honor."

"I'll put him on his honor as an American bluejacket." Hansen's voice was harsh. "How long have you been in the Navy, Doctor?"

"About three months, sir. I had a large practice in Beverly Hills, but it dwindled away. All of a sudden, the women didn't need psychiatrists anymore."

That explained it—a Beverly Hills head shrinker. Hansen's raft quit pitching, and the sea grew glassy until a lanky, red-haired man with a protruding Adam's apple stepped through the door and said, "Chief McCormick reporting, Captain."

CHAPTER 3.

"At ease, Chief," the captain said. "Dr. Gresham is here because the story in the ship's paper attracted attention, shoreside."

"Captain, I sure hope that little old girl wasn't any Typhoid Mary."

"No, Chief," the doctor said, "the Navy's having a personnel problem, and you may help us solve it."

"I heard about it, sir. Are the women on strike, Commander?"

Gresham opened his briefcase. "That's as good an answer as any." He pulled out a pipe, a tobacco pouch, and a clipboard with a sheet of graph paper attached. "We think it's a boycott as part of a woman's peace movement. The Chinese missile threat seems to have frightened the ladies." He thumbed the tobacco into the pipe. "We hope you can help us isolate elements which make up male sex appeal." He lighted his match and sucked the flame into the bowl. Between interstices in the down-drawn flame, he said, "Now, Chief, I want to ask you a few questions in a sensitive area." Gresham's voice became low, resonant, comforting. "If it embarrasses you to have your captain present, I'm sure. . . ."

"Doctor, I'd rather Captain Hansen hear. We've got some confused hands below, and I hear tell he's got some confused officers. If I can help, I sure want to."

"Then, be seated, Chief," the doctor said. "Remember, even the most personal questions I ask are ultimately impersonal. We're aiming at a general definition of a specific set of traits."

"Commander, I'll tell anything I know, but I don't have no power over women. Sometimes it takes me as long as an hour and a half to get them persuaded, because I don't fool with nothing but nice girls."

"Then, how do you account for the three venereal complaints on your health record?"

"Doctor, I think three out of eight hundred and sixty-three girls, counting after puberty, speaks well for the decency of women all over the world."

"Fantastic!" Dr. Gresham was losing his objectivity. "Were there any before puberty?"

"Might say I fungoed a few."

Gresham jotted a point on his chart, looked up, and asked, abruptly, "Do you practice masturbation?"

By heavens, Hansen thought, they had not changed that question since he was a midshipman.

"You can call me either a liar or a pud puller, Doctor. You take your choice, sir."

"Wonderful! Wonderful! What about your mother? Ever have a yen for her?"

"No, sir. Ma was a little bony."

Almost gleefully, the doctor made another quick jab at his chart. "When you are approached by a homosexual, do you resent his advances, welcome his advances, remain indifferent to his advances?"

"Well, that depends on the fruit, Doctor. Generally speaking, I'm friendly. I figure I might need a reserve supply someday."

Listening with only half an ear, Captain Hansen felt that McCormick might be pulling the doctor's leg, but there was an air of sincerity about the chief, and Hansen felt an affinity for this man who was pouring out his secrets to aid his comrades. However, the affinity was strained slightly near the close of the interview when McCormick

started to come up with some theorizing in answer to the doctor's more general questions.

"And when you're talking to them, Doctor, concentrate on that little thing. . . . Get them close to a piano playing bass notes."

"Wonderful! Wonderful! Sympathetic vibrations."

Hansen rose and went to the porthole, looking out as he tried to hit upon some method of verifying the chief's story. Personally, he didn't doubt it—the American woman had too much independence to join in a general boycott—but he could not officially testify on the ground of personal belief.

"Don't sit like a Frenchman," he heard the chief instruct an awed doctor, "with your kneecaps together, nor like an American with your legs crossed. Hold your knees about three feet apart, rest your arm over your leg so that your hand droops, like this. All lines draw attention to your crotch. Now, for dancing, we got the whore's waltz. That's a real twanger when you're doing a tango."

Well, the doctor had used frank language, himself, the captain mused, glancing at his watch, but he wished McCormick would belay the theories. He wanted to get the verification in before Captain Arnold was on the line asking for a report.

"Marvelous! Now, Chief, would you cross your legs as the Americans do?"

Gresham leaned down and pulled a small rubber mallet from his briefcase. "And pull your trouser leg above your knee. That's right. Thank you." He flicked the mallet and tapped beneath the chief's kneecap. In response, the leg kicked slightly forward. "Fabulous!" the doctor chortled. "That's called the Babinski reflex. If you don't have that, you don't have anything. Chief, you've got it."

Somewhat befuddled, the chief rolled down his trouser leg and stood up.

"Stand by in the passageway, Chief," the captain said, "I want to talk to you, later."

After the chief stepped out, the captain asked, "Weren't you reading too much into the Babinski reflex, Doctor?"

"That was a joke, Captain. He pulled my leg. I punched his."

"Then he could have been lying?"

"Absolutely! But my questions were cross-keyed to establish median attitudes and motives. For my purposes, a lie consistently adhered to becomes a truth. . . . Now, Captain, would you witness an official act?"

"Certainly, Doctor."

Gresham removed from his briefcase a bright-red folder with TOP SECRET stamped across its face. Using a plastic ruler, he connected the dots he had made on the graph paper with a black line which zigzagged down the page. "That's McCormick," he said, laying the clipboard face up on the desk. He unzipped the red folder. "This little baby you're going to look at has a security rating a few grades lower than nerve gas. Believe me, Captain, this doll is a triumph of cybernetics, psychology, and literary research. Observe Lothario X, profile of the perfect lover. Pure sex appeal!"

To Hansen, Lothario X was just another squiggly line, this one on a sheet of lucite.

"This profile, Captain, is synthesized from the reconstructed profiles of the Marquis de Sade, on the one hand, and Saint Francis of Assisi, on the other. It matches, incidentally, the reconstructed profiles of Casanova, Rubirosa, and Willie Jefferson. It inspired the first practical utilization of a computer-stored bibliography in researching memoirs and private letters."

"Do you think McCormick lied about the girl, Doctor?"

"I tend to think not, but you can't be sure without an affidavit from his paramour, and she might be lying. . . . Now, Captain, we shall test this little baby empirically."

"What do you mean?"

"If McCormick's profile matches the chart, we consider that as evidence that the chart is valid."

"What if they're both wrong?"

"Ah, a good question. But we're testing the chart against a known lover. If the pragmatic and the theoretical coincide, the coincidence is too improbable to be coincidental. *Ergo,* we will have found the perfect lover."

"If so, then what?"

"My theory is that they want to use him in a Navy training film."

"To teach sex appeal?" the captain asked.

"Why not? Now, observe, Captain. These holes in McCormick are register marks. I slide them over the spindles, thusly. Next, I take Lothario X, printed on lucite to permit us to watch McCormick, beneath. Now, carefully, carefully, I lower Lothario X. . . . Holy, jumping Jesus! Captain, look at that little darling!"

Profanity was forbidden in officers' country, and the captain's quarters were the citadel of that country, but Hansen's irritation vanished when he looked down at the profile overlaying McCormick's. The squiggles were so matched that the lines of McCormick were completely hidden by the lines of Lothario X. "That's my boy, Doctor! That's my boy!"

Captain Hansen turned to congratulate Commander Morris Gresham, MD, USNR, but Gresham was grabbing the board and stuffing it into his briefcase with his pipe, tobacco, and rubber hammer. "Incredible. Fantastic!" Snapping shut the case, he turned to Hansen. "Captain, I feel like . . . stout Cortez when with eagle eyes he stared at the Pacific—silent, upon a peak in Darien."

"There aren't any peaks in Darien," the captain said, but he was talking to the back of the little man who was slithering through the doorway.

Pleased though he was, Hansen was aware that being in on the making of medical history did not hoist "execute" over his orders from the admiral. Truth might be relative for Gresham, but Admiral Darnell wanted facts concerning McCormick's story. If there was no way to uncover them short of an affidavit from the girl, then he would personally appeal to the girl's patriotism to get the affidavit. "Orderly, send McCormick in."

When McCormick entered, the captain said, "Well, Chief, what do you think of all this?"

"He looked a little fag to me, Captain . . . excuse me, sir. I guess I got a hangover from that interview."

McCormick's answer was a breach of naval etiquette. Enlisted men did not criticize officers to other officers, but the ties which bound the captain to the chief, two salt-water sailors of the regular Navy, were stronger than the fluff which linked the captain with the displaced

Beverly Hills couchmaster. Hansen let the remark pass with a mild reprimand. "In his own profession, he's probably adequate, although I have to admit he had a blind spot—he was surprised that we had a telephone to the quarterdeck. . . . But I have a problem: how can we prove that the young lady had relations with you short of asking her to sign an affidavit?"

"Captain, if they're on strike, her signing something would be admitting she's a scab."

"Yes, but we've got to get something for the bureau." Hansen tapped his finger on the desk top thoughtfully. "Something on record." Telephone. Record. The ideas clicked in his mind. "Chief, would you agree to calling the girl on a conference hookup and letting me eavesdrop just long enough to write my own affidavit?"

"Why, Captain Hansen, that'd do it right nice. I promised to call her, anyhow."

Outside the telephone booths of the world, Hansen had heard the conversation which followed many times, but listening to both ends gave the call a different dimension.

"Hello, Thelma."

"Mac, you beast! You woke me up."

"I'm sorry, honey. I thought you sounded sleepy."

"After last night, darling, I'm bushed," the voice purred. "You were more fun than a V-bomb."

Quickly, Hansen clicked off the conference speaker. He had heard enough. After McCormick had finished the conversation by arranging another date for tomorrow night, Hansen asked, "What did she mean by V-bomb?"

"That's just a slang thing, Captain. Thelma's real ladylike with her language. She says *v* because she don't want to say 'vagina.' "

"Strange," the captain mused, "there was an old German rocket called the V-bomb. But the *v* stood for 'vengeance.' Very well, Chief. Thank you, and carry on."

Hansen felt a vague disquiet as he reached for the phone to dial the Pentagon. V-bombs had been launched from launching pads, and the sign above Joan Paula's bed had designated it as a launching pad. No, he caught himself. Thelma's *v* means vagina, and his daughter was a typical American teen-ager. J.P. would not indulge in

vulgarities. "This is Captain Hansen of the USS *Chattahoochee*. May I speak to Captain Arnold?"

"Th'nk yo."

"Harvey, it's Ben. I checked out McCormick's story. . . ."

"You're a little late hoisting 'execute,' Ben. The reservist medical officer has already telestated the profile to the admiral and it's being evaluated."

"Commend Gresham for me," the captain said, "but if McCormick's story is a lie, of what value is the profile?"

Arnold's voice oozed officiousness. "Well, now, Ben, the way we've got the matter plotted in the bureau, it's almost academic whether. . . ."

Suddenly the operator broke into the line. "Captain Hansen, I have a top-priority call for you."

"I'll take it, operator."

"Ben, call me back if any. . . ."

With acute pleasure, Hansen clicked Arnold off.

He did not recognize the new voice on the line, but he recognized its authority. "Captain Hansen?"

"Yes, sir."

"Darnell of Personnel. Get that chief of yours into civvies. The Norfolk Navy Yard's vertake is standing by to bring you both to the Anacostia Heliport. Both of you will be assigned quarters overnight. Wait in the foyer of the PX at Anacostia, where you'll be met at 1530, by Admiral Meriweather Primrose."

"Aye, aye, sir."

After the click, Hansen hung up, thinking: another improbability. But this one was improbable even in a context of improbabilities. By now Helga had probably left for Anne Johnson's, so he would have to call Joan Paula and tell her why he would not be home for dinner. Helga was a Navy wife and she would know that whatever had called him to Washington was very big. Admiral Meriweather "Sug" (short for Sugar) Primrose was not merely Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Primrose was also Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

CHAPTER 4.

In the foyer of the post exchange, Captain Hansen waited with McCormick as shoppers hurried in from the misting rain or left with spreading umbrellas. Three-fourths of the crowd were women, standard for a weekday, and the service couples seemed happy enough. Some of the women even cast sidelong glances at the chief, but irregularities in female conduct concerned Hansen less than the tardiness of Admiral Primrose, whose entourage was no doubt delayed by dampened streets. Thinking in terms of limousines, Hansen failed to notice the battered station wagon pull up at the curb until a wizened old fellow in heavy-weather gear got out, a nor'wester flopping around his face, and approached. "Excuse me, sir. Would your name happen to be Hansen?"

"Yes," the captain answered.

"Don't come to attention and don't salute. I'm Primrose."

Small, pink-faced, with bushy eyebrows that almost met above pale-blue eyes, creased on the side by sun squints, the man Hansen shook hands with reminded him more of an undernourished Santa Claus than the top admiral in the

fleet. "This is Chief McCormick, Admiral."

"Sorry I'm late, gentlemen, but I got caught in the turning circle and couldn't navigate to the curb. I hope you weren't inconvenienced by the rain."

"We came equipped for heavy weather, sir. From Admiral Darnell's words, I assume we have a national emergency on hand."

In a most congenial manner, the little admiral stepped between them, took their arms, and guided them toward the station wagon. "That's the second-biggest understatement you'll hear today, gentlemen. I'm about to utter the first: I am the world's worst driver."

The admiral spoke truly. Without a hand salute to the boulevard stop, he pulled onto the street into the path of an oncoming taxi whose driver slammed on the brakes and sent the vehicle into a flat-out spin on the slippery pavement. When the admiral swung left toward the bridge, he was using the center line as a guide-on, and oncoming traffic veered to avoid him. Dying horn blasts and curses nubbed by the Doppler effect forced him back into his lane, but he swerved so quickly that a teen-ager who gambled his jalopy on a quick roll past him in the outside lane almost crapped out. Far behind them, cars slowed to a crawl, apparently figuring the admiral for a quick reverse. In his panic, Hansen blurted, "Is this woman thing a Red conspiracy, Admiral?"

"You'll be briefed on the background—Watch it, lady! —but it's every man to his own interpretation, really. Mr. Powers, of the FBI, thinks fellow travelers are involved— *Ti yabot, bazhalista!* Curse them in Russian, Captain; that confuses them—but I don't think so. I spent two years at our Moscow embassy."

"Right, Admiral!"

As the admiral swerved, he continued. "The Reds couldn't come up with this one. It's all woman. Confidentially, we're at a military stalemate with the Russians. We can overkill the Russians forty-eight times and they can overkill us thirty-six times. We have the advantage, but we'd have to be ghosts to exploit it."

"Then why the secrecy, sir?"

"For the girls," the admiral said. "If they figure we're

planning anything, they might speed up their operation."

Primrose roared over the river and under the mall, skittered up the freeway exit and whirled into downtown Washington at freeway speeds. A panel truck emerged from an alley, the driver misjudging the admiral's speed, and the admiral slammed on the brakes, slewing the station wagon into the alley. "Well, if you insist," he said to his vehicle, "we'll take a short cut," and he continued driving the wrong way through the alley. Again on a boulevard, he straddled the white line.

"Admiral, sir," the chief said, "please let me drive. The Navy can't afford to lose both you and the captain."

"Nonsense, Chief. You're worth more to the nation than all the joint chiefs."

"Then, sir, if I outrank you, I'll take the con."

"Very well," the admiral seemed vexed, "if you wish to pull rank on me." He slammed the station wagon to a halt, jumped out, and scooted around.

"Where to, sir?" the chief asked, easing himself under the wheel.

"The White House executive office."

"Where's that, sir?"

"You volunteered for the job!" The admiral's voice was a high, incredulous whine. "Oh, very well! Go down yonder and turn left."

With the chief under the wheel, the captain was able to relax, physically, but inner tension grew as he listened to the admiral. "We've got the Russians computed. Trouble with women, they don't compute. Of course, they have this New Logic, but my analysis of New Logic shows that it applies only to their consideration of men."

Somehow the admiral's remarks seemed ominous against his memory of Helga's recapped figures of Johnson's worth —Ralph Johnson's. He had thought something was missing in her conversation, compassion, concern, surprise, but it might well be something had been added—logic. "We're going to defeat them with their own weapon," the admiral continued. "Intuitive thinking! We're going to take off at tangents, weave and squirm, and come up with creative solutions."

Somehow it seemed to Hansen that the admiral was

practicing what he was beginning to preach as Primrose veered from his subject. "Of course, we're handicapped by formal educations. Social adjustment's all that's taught. At Annapolis we called it military discipline. Dewey, James, and Freud, the three horsemen of our eclipse, to borrow the words of a priest I know. Now, at Saint Cyr. . . ." With growing unease and awe, Hansen listened as the admiral named by name French professors he'd like to invite to Annapolis, revised the curriculum at the academy, quoted Lin Piao and Mao on the subject of the Chinese character. "We could learn a lot from scarabs," he concluded.

"Arabs, sir?"

"No, scarabs. Entymology's a hobby of mine. Your budding officer, Navy, Army, or Airforce, could learn a lot from entymology. Better than a survival course. Grasshoppers make good eating. Some snails."

He mentioned scarabs at Eighth Street, and McCormick was angling onto Independence before Hansen realized that entymology was the study of insects. If this was the variety of mind it took to fly an admiral's flag, Hansen decided he'd better start looking for a good cold-water detergent to wash his third repeater in because he would be flying it for a long, long time.

"But, by all means," the admiral continued, "we should teach diplomacy. In this business, you don't merely find solutions, you find *compatible* solutions. My solutions have to satisfy doves, hawks, and dawks.

"Let's consider the problem before us this afternoon. President Habersham is a dove, with his wings clipped by constitutional law. Cobb, of State, is a hawk tethered by Southern gallantry. State's best friend is Dalton Lamar, Interior. That boy's an eagle, but State keeps him in line with the doves. Oglethorpe Pickens, the boy Secretary of Defense, is a hawk. Now, Dr. Drexel, of Health, Education, and Welfare, went to SMU, but that isn't why they call him a Mustang. Axminister Farnsworth—Can you imagine wasting a name like that on an attorney general? —votes with the President; he was Habersham's student at Arkansas. Powers of the FBI goes along with Farnsworth, or vice versa. Frumenti, of course, is Labor, and

he's a peregrine falcon. He hails from California. The newspapers were claiming sectionalism in the Presidential cabinet, so Habersham brought in one Northerner."

"I thought California was out West, sir," the chief said.

"Technically, you're correct—Turn right at the next corner—but all who are not Southerners are Northerners. Incidentally, Senator Dubois will be present. The Veep's in Puerto Rico on a goodwill jaunt. Defer to Dubois. He's majority leader, a Republican from Louisiana. He claims to be a Negro—one-sixteenth qualifies you in Louisiana—but I think he's suffering from terminal satyriasis. Next to the President, Dubois is key man in Operation Chicken Pluck."

"Operation Chicken Pluck?"

"Up to now, the operation has been top secret, but I'm springing it at this cabinet meeting—Park there, Chief. The President's assistant, Amos Culpepper, will brief you on the reasons for this meeting. Culpepper has a marvelous knack for simplifying complex subjects—Here we are, gentlemen—but I think history has a way of preparing us for these things. For instance, Johnson's credibility gap taught us to stretch our imaginations."

As Hansen emerged from the station wagon, he was almost positive that the admiral was referring to Lyndon Johnson, but he was wary. "Yes, sir," the captain agreed. "In my own mind, I've been stretching the bounds of probabilities to include the improbable."

"Excellent. Now, gentlemen, both of you must be prepared to accept the incredible. But you're both Navy. Remember, brave hand in the foray, cool council in cumber."

Even though Captain Hansen was braced against improbabilities, Amos Culpepper almost delivered the *coup de grâce*. Behind a huge and completely bare desk, Culpepper's pink face formed a perfect circle, and his black hair was brushed straight back without a part. Any man concerned with his appearance would have broken the circle by fluffing the hair, but Culpepper had added a pair of pince-nez spectacles as thick as the bottoms of beer bottles and of such magnifying power that they turned

his eyes into two pale-blue circles floating out from the center of the larger circle.

"Gentlemen, you wish to know why you are here. First, I would like to ask a question: Are you Christians?"

"Yes, sir," the chief answered.

"Good. It isn't so hard for Christians to accept what is happening because we have accepted the Virgin Birth of Our Blessed Savior. Technically, this miracle is called parthenogenesis. Artificial parthenogenesis has long been practiced in biology labs on tadpoles. Natural parthenogenesis in human beings is not unknown. In 1924, in Lincolnshire, England, Mary X, a virgin with a nun's cap 1.8 millimeters thick, was delivered of a fully formed girl child, stillborn but completely developed."

Annoyed by Culpepper's pedantry and the pacing of his words, Hansen interrupted. "I'm under the impression that we're here to stop a feminine peace movement," he said.

"Under that guise it is practiced," Culpepper said slowly, "but females must always give themselves an excuse for their lewdness and sensuality, be that excuse sentiment, duty, or drunkenness. As a man, I can speak bluntly. The subject for this cabinet meeting is self-induced childbirth arising from autoeroticism in the female."

"You mean they're playing pocket pool?" the chief gasped.

"There's been no information of this nature published in Navy bulletins," the captain said testily.

"You can readily understand, gentlemen," Culpepper said, "that these incidents occur in a very sensitive area. Women are not willing to advertise their practice, and men are reluctant to publicize the fact that they have been rejected for a vaginal douche. As for your question, Captain," he turned to McCormick, "carnal release is not achieved through self-manipulation. Rather it arises through a chemical agency known by the trade name of Vita-Lerp but popularly referred to as jazz pills, vaginal bombs, or California jumping beans."

"Well, I'll be a bald-headed woodpecker," the chief ejaculated. "When that little doozy was telling me I was

better than a V-bomb, she was comparing me to a douche!"

"Why, Captain, this amazes me." Culpepper was equally surprised. "You've had relations with a woman after she's been bombed?"

"I'm the chief, but I did."

"Tell me, how did you manage it?"

"Mr. Culpepper," the captain intervened, "the chief's lecture takes over an hour. You tell *us*. How did this thing get started?"

"Two years ago," Culpepper began, "a cell biologist named Martin, in Van Nuys, California, discovered the product and marketed it as a rejuvenating facial creme called Vita-Lerp because the chief ingredient was oil of eucalyptus plus alkaloids. It actually has a rejuvenating effect, though temporary." Here, the pace of Culpepper's words faltered. "My wife used it on her face, first. . . . Dr. Henrietta Carey, a gynecologist then working at UCLA, met Martin at a cocktail party. He explained the action of Vita-Lerp to her in technical terms, and she recognized it as a possible breakthrough in DNA chemistry. Not even she suspected to what extent, until she used it to give tone and resiliency to the tissues of a female patient who was barren because flaccid vaginal tissues blocked her Fallopian tubes. Dr. Carey inserted a capsule into her patient while her patient's husband waited in an anteroom to be called. When the capsule melted, it became obvious that the patient would have found her mate highly superfluous in respect to carnal stimuli. In fact, he was dismissed without a trial and later divorced by the woman even though she was pregnant when she instituted proceedings. Meanwhile, Dr. Carey lent her name to endorse the product, for fifty-one percent of the company, and Vita-Lerp was marketed as an aid to feminine hygiene. In six months Martin was dead of a heart attack, and the product was sweeping the country."

"He died rather conveniently," Hansen remarked.

"So we thought, but Dr. Carey, as attending physician and the executor of his estate, signed his death warrant and cremated his remains."

"Why don't you stop the sale of the product?"

"Such an act would be unconstitutional," Culpepper ex-

plained. "It's FDA-approved, nontoxic, and not a drug. Since it triggers the DNA in ova without the male chromosome, it's been a boon to chicken farmers and dairymen. Roosters and bulls are neither produced nor needed."

"Well," Hansen said slowly, "I'm sure that I mean more to my wife than a fertilizing agent."

"Service wives are its most avid supporters, sir, since they're alone a lot. Once a female has tried Vita-Lerp, any male, for her, becomes a biological relic. I know! I'm a Southern Baptist, and no one appreciates parthenogenesis more than Amos Culpepper, but, during my legally authorized visits when I'm permitted to take my darling daughter in my arms and gaze down on her little face and I realize that I am not my daughter's father, well, gentlement, I, I, I. . . ."

His voice broke, and Hansen felt compassion for this little man whose round eyes stared from his round face, for under the magnification of his eyeglasses two enormous round teardrops were swelling.

"It's time, gentlemen," a kindly angel in the blue serge of the Secret Service announced from the doorway.

Admiral Primrose met them in the conference room to take over the introductions. For Hansen, there was a feeling of unreality in meeting so suddenly so many faces he recognized from the pages of *Time* magazine. Most of the men were standing around a long table, covered with green felt, ashtrays, and note pads, but one sat alone near the head of the table, his fingers fluting over the felt and his blue eyes focused afar. "A gentleman I'd especially like for you to meet is our Senator from Louisiana, Senator Dubois," the admiral said, steering them toward the figure. Primrose said "de bwye" in the French manner rather than "dewboys" in the Southern manner.

Under his thatch of Mark Twain hair, the man's face held the sensitivity and strength of a Southern aristocrat, and there was respect in the admiral's voice as he bent low and murmured, "May I disturb you, Senator?"

Arousing himself, the senator looked up, smiled, and said, "Why, sutnly, Adm'l. I wasn't pondering affairs of

state. I's just dreamin' 'bout catfishing down on the bayous when I was a little barefooted pickaninny."

Primrose waited for the nostalgia to clear from the old man's recollections before he said, "Senator Dubois, this is Captain Hansen who commanded our Antarctic expedition."

Slowly the senator rose to his full height, every inch of it regal, and said, "Captain, I'd sure like to shake yo' hand, but I hear tell you're a Virginia gentleman, and I know some of you gentlemen still have reservations about shaking the hand of a colored man."

"Not at all, Senator," the captain assured him. "In the Navy, we judge each man on his own merits, even a colored man."

As he shook the senator's hand, the admiral waved McCormick forward. "And there's our ace in the hole, Senator, Chief McCormick, from Tennessee."

"I sho heard about *you*," the senator said, "and if it's not against your convictions, I'd like to extend to you, also, the hand of greeting."

Strangely, McCormick seemed reluctant. "You're not one of them Cajun Catholics, are you, boy?"

"No, sir, Cap'n. I'm a Methodist."

"Then, put her there, boy. I don't mind a good Southern darky much as I mind some of these Yankees."

Hansen was aghast at the familiarity in the chief's greeting, but the senator seemed to do a half shuffle, tilted his head slightly downward, and flashed McCormick a broad grin. "Boss, I'm mighty proud to hear that. I always said the Southern white man and colored man got a lot in common, sometimes even the same mammy."

"I always wanted me a black mammy, Senator, but black mammies came high in my neighborhood. . . . Say, how'd a good old colored boy like you ever get to be senator?"

Drawing the captain aside, Admiral Primrose introduced Hansen to the Secretary of Defense, Pickens, a tall, slender man with an Alabama drawl. They were exchanging pleasantries when Culpepper entered the room and stood by the door, saying, "Gentlemen, the President." Hansen snapped to attention, but the civilians merely straightened up slightly and moved to stand behind their chairs.

President Demorest Habersham entered.

In contrast to his portrait in the wardroom of the *Chattahoochee,* the President's hair was thinner, there were pouches under his eyes, and his lower lip protruded much farther than the lip in the painting. He looked down the table and said, "Gentlemen, be seated."

All sat but the President.

"Today, we're honored by a visit from Senator Dubois, distinguished leader of the opposition, who has put the interests of his country above partisan politics to join us. From the Navy Department, we have Captain Benjamin Franklin Hansen, who has just returned from the Ross Ice Shelf, and Chief Water Tender Angus McCormick, of Captain Hansen's command. Both have been recommended for the Distinguished Service Medal."

A dazed captain and chief stood briefly for applause as Primrose's face grew overly stoical.

"Now, gentlemen," the President continued, "if you must smoke in defiance of Health, Education, and Welfare, please confine your ashes to the trays, you in particular, Health, Education, and Welfare." He nodded toward Dr. Houston Drexel. "The hired hands have been giving me the dickens over the mess we leave. Also, I ask you to refrain from emotional displays during this meeting. It is not for us to weep tears; rather, it is for us to seek solutions. . . . Mr. Cobb, you may commence the status reports."

As the President sat down, the Secretary of State stood. Acworth Cobb's University of Georgia gullah quivered with discords accompanied by a tic in Cobb's right eye. "Mr. President, gentlemen, Italy seems to be the developing hot spot. Last night a group broke into the Pitti Palace and emasculated the statue of David. Bloodshed continues in Africa, particularly in Tanzania where Kenyatta's evacuation to Madagascar continues. Mexico has gone under, definitely. Canada seems to be holding steady in the Great Plains, but Montreal and Quebec are long gone. No news from China, but our man in the Vale of Shalimar reports that Tibet is not yet contaminated."

"Request permission, Mr. President, to go hunt yeti," Dalton Lamar, Secretary of the Interior, leaned over and

called down, and the Secretary of State grinned. "That's my report, sir." He sat down.

"The Secretary of Defense?" Habersham ignored Lamar.

Oglethorpe Pickens rose to the slender six and one-half feet which had helped make him an all-American basketballer at the University of Alabama. "In the past month, enlistments have tripled from a rumor that volunteers are sent overseas. Troop defections to East Germany, however, are holding steady, and defections to the West have dwindled to a trickle, all of which bodes well for Operation Queen Swap. . . ."

"What's Operation Queen Swap?" Powers barked the question from across the table.

"A military operation not open for discussion," the Defense Secretary said. "And, of course, we in Defense are standing by for the trade mission from Moscow."

Oglethorpe Pickens sat down.

"HEW?"

"Mr. President, gentlemen." The medical doctor stood up. "Ratio of girl births to boy births now stands at seventeen to one in urban areas, ten to one in rural areas. At the present rate of decline, there'll only be trace amounts of boy babies born by March of next year." Dr. Drexel sat down.

Hansen was saved from horror by the casual manner in which the reports were delivered to the President and by his inner glow from the DSM. If a man truly believed such a juggernaut was rolling toward him, he might go mad, Hansen admitted. These men were hardly perturbed, so the reports must be exaggerated. But where were the hawks and doves?

His balance was slightly tilted after the President called, "Labor?"

Hansen remembered that the admiral had said that Frumenti was a peregrine falcon, and he could see the Californian struggle for self-control as he opened his notebook before him, without standing. "Our cost of living dropped another two points last week, but I don't think the drop represents a normal fluctuation. I think the housewives are pulling it down. They're not buying fancy cuts of meat, anymore. They're feeding their husbands swill!

Anyway, I don't think the cost of living represents the true cost of living, not the way we've got it set up. Take me, I'm a bachelor. My wife won't leave San Francisco to come to Washington. But I'm a man. Hell, I've got feelings. So I do a little playing around. I'm honest about it. I lay it right on the line with the girls, tell 'em I'm married—no romantic hanky-panky. Two years ago I take a woman out and buy her a meal. Third time around, I score. Cost per score? Around twelve dollars, averaging out the initial investment. Then the system starts breaking down. Here and there, I miss a score. About six months ago I noticed the average start edging up. Here, I've got the figures."

He began thumbing, convulsively, through his notebook. Hansen saw his hands tremble. Beads of sweat were forming on his forehead. "I started keeping tab, six months ago, in increments of two months. First increment, cost per score, 22.50. Second increment, 102.80, over three hundred percent increase. Now, third increment, and gentlemen this fiscal period isn't over, so far, 386.48! Over a thousand percent increase from the first increment. Now, gentlemen, I'm Secretary of Labor. This is a strain on *my* budget. Now, I'm asking you, if it's getting out of reach of my budget, what's happening to the working stiff . . . begging your pardon, sirs, the poor laboring man?"

He steadied himself and looked up from his notes. "Mr. President, the cost of living is a travesty if it doesn't include the cost of loving, and if you include the cost of loving, the cost of living is a tragedy. Ten-cent cotton and five-hundred-dollar meat, how in hell . . ." His voice broke, his eyes grew glazed.

"Labor, control yourself," the President barked.

". . . can a poor man eat?" Labor did not close the notebook. Leaving it open, he folded his arms across it, buried his head on his arms, and his body was racked by dry sobs. He stayed that way until Mr. Culpepper stepped out and summoned two Secret Service men, who came, lifted him to his feet, and led him from the room.

"Interior?" The President was outwardly unperturbed.

"No problems, Mr. President. No problem a-tall." Dalton Lamar was grinning.

"Justice?"

Attorney General Axminister Farnsworth said, "Mr. President, gentlemen, rape cases are still increasing but false rape cases are coming in so fast that police departments in smaller towns can't handle the load. Obviously, this is harassment, but I'm more concerned at the moment with a new activity of the underworld which Mr. Powers will describe."

"Proceed, Mr. Powers."

Hansen liked the cut of Mr. Powers' jib. He stood, his jaw outthrust, hands clasped behind his back, leaning slightly forward as if to balance with his brow the problems on his mind. "Mr. President, narcotics and gambling are becoming minor operations of the underworld. With the increase in prices, prostitution is the heavy industry, and staffs are now being augmented by teams of virgin-hunters who go into the less accessible areas of the continent and recruit the girls forcibly. Through informal channels, the bureau has learned of an expansion program, here in Washington, and I don't mind telling you, Mr. President, I'm counting on that expansion to take the pressure off some of my boys on State Department assignments." Mr. Powers sat down.

"Gentlemen," the President said, "this completes reports on developments. We are now open for countermeasures or solutions. May I explain to you, Captain Hansen and Chief McCormick, our brainstorming sessions are completely informal. Feel free to toss any idea you wish onto the table and let us take a punch at it. If it fights back, it may win. Under our ground rules, Captain, anyone can play. Care to kick off the session?"

Hansen started to demur when a weird electricity around him seemed to grasp him, and he heard his own voice saying, "Well, sir, we could draft unmarried females into the Waves and order them to breed."

He was amazed by the spontaneity of the handclaps which greeted his suggestion, and felt somewhat contemptuous of the men around him for not having considered such an obvious solution. "Very good, Captain," the President said. "Mr. Culpepper, file Captain Hansen's remarks under 'Possible Solutions.' Chief McCormick,

would you care to take a left jab at your captain's idea?"

"Well, sir, to back up what the captain said, you wouldn't have to give any orders to breed, sir. You line the Waves up on one side, the sailors on the other, order a short-arm inspection, and jump back."

Laughter was mixed with the applause.

Not on my ship, Hansen thought, and suddenly he realized what he, himself, had said. Seated on the right hand of the Chief of Naval Operations, separated from the Secretary of Defense by one chair, he had offered a suggestion that would turn the fleet into a floating bordello. Moreover, he had impugned the honor of American womanhood. Out of the corner of his eye he could see the admiral scribbling a reprimand on his notepad, and he could read, "Frankly, I am stunned and. . . ."

Hansen snapped his eyes forward, his face set, hardly hearing the President order Culpepper to enter the suggestions under "Feasible and Constitutional Solutions." Now it mattered little what a President thought of him; he would never be promoted by a Navy selection board, but his discipline remained. With a cool glance he appraised the rough draft of the official reprimand which the admiral shoved under his nose, and read, ". . . and delighted that you have cast off the Annapolis anchor and think with originality. Well done!"

CHAPTER 5.

EACH MAN APPROACHED the problem from his own field of interest.

With urbane sincerity, Dr. Drexel presented schematic drawings of a pair of stocks which, affixed to the foot of one's bed, held the female immobile during entry. Stocks were rejected by the President as a violation of the Due Process clause of the Constitution and the idea was not even filed under "Possible Solutions."

The Attorney General proposed that a wife's refusal be considered a civil wrong, as a breach of the marriage contract, but the idea was hooted off the table by Oglethorpe Pickens, who called it a tart tort. However, the President's former student bounced right back.

"You're not through with the Justice Department, yet, Mr. President. May I yield to Mr. Powers?"

Standing for the second time, Mr. Powers was obviously prepared for a longer speech. He had a notebook open before him, and he shoved his right hand under his coat. "Mr. President, in my status report I spoke of the virgin-hunters—those boys with private initiative and enterprise are keeping the houses open. Now, I've gone on record as

opposing this wheat deal—the Reds are going to furnish our boys with girls whose aim will be subversion, pure and simple. [Hansen was aghast at the implication in that remark.] Mr. President, what I propose is a counter-measure to substitute for the wheat-for-women exchange. I suggest I make a few phone calls. If we gave those houses protection, we could peg prices to put them in reach of the family man. In addition, the boys in State would be less prone to peddle our secrets to the girls in the Red consulates."

As he sat down, Dalton Lamar shouted, "Mr. President, I recommend that convents be declared national reservations under the jurisdiction of the Department of Interior."

"Sir," Mr. Powers was ruffled, "I consider that suggestion sacrilegious."

"Mr. Powers," the President interposed, "the feasibility, not religiosity, of ideas is our concern here, but I will undertake no alliance with the underworld, overt or sub rosa. Insofar as the trade arrangement with the Soviets is concerned, the émigré females will be here under work visas, and their presence will be constitutional. As for the nunneries, Mr. Lamar, your proposal violates the Separation of Church and State clauses of the Bill of Rights. . . . Now, gentlemen, I wish to clear the table for a heavyweight solution. Put your guard up."

Suddenly, his listeners seemed to lean toward the President.

"We have all pondered this problem," he said. "I have thumbed Gladstone until the pages curled, probed the Code Napoléon, the Koran, and the Talmud seeking a precedent to guide me, but wherever I sailed over the seas of law, my bottom eventually dragged on the shoals of the American Constitution. Since I have taken a solemn oath to protect that Constitution, I have decided not to run for reelection in November."

Amazed groans of "No! No!" came from his cabinet appointees, but the President continued unperturbed. "Whatever happens, gentlemen, we must not lose our power base, the Presidency. Yet, with me as President, we are hampered by a strict observance of constitutional law.

What we need, gentlemen, is a dynamic young candidate unfettered by tradition who will boldly carve new guidelines around the Constitution.

"The new plan proposes a single male candidate, endorsed by both the Republican and Democratic parties at one joint convention, to run against any possible combination of female candidates supported by the FEM Party. To explain the core of our new plan, I give you one of its chief engineers and architects, Admiral Meriweather Primrose."

When the admiral rose to applause, Hansen felt a glow of pride in this five-foot six-inch man who cast a six-foot five-inch shadow. Primrose spoke tersely. "Gentlemen, in order to determine a suitable candidate for the new plan, I turned the President's suggestions over to my Naval Plans and Operations under the code name Operation Chicken Pluck. The Secretary of Defense and I are so confident of success with Operation Chicken Pluck that we have set aside, at least temporarily, Operation Queen Swap."

"What is Operation Queen Swap?" Mr. Powers asked.

"A military operation and closed to discussion. . . . Operation Chicken Pluck, gentlemen, resolved itself into two phases: The first phase involved finding a candidate before the scheduled date of the joint convention. Finding a candidate demanded an analysis of the components of that capability designated 'male sex appeal,' a strategic objective hampered by a scarcity of intelligence in the area. From analysis of the written records of known great lovers, we arrived at Lothario X, a psychological profile of the Great Lover. Once we had found the living Lothario X, we knew we would have a candidate who could draw the votes of all uncommitted and uncontaminated females. With this man, we could win an election. With the election won, we could declare Vita-Lerp illegal and move out with our odorometers to jail everything but koala bears that smelled of eucalyptus. For the record, gentlemen, we have found Lothario X, and he has demonstrated his prowess by playing the cock to one of Mother Carey's chickens." Astonishment showed on the faces of his listeners as the admiral continued. "Gentlemen, that man is Chief Water Tender McCormick of the USS *Chattahoochee*."

There was applause for the chief who reddened at the outburst.

"So, gentlemen," the admiral continued, "the military has successfully completed the first phase of Operation Chicken Pluck. Winning the election, the second phase, is now a matter for our statesmen." The admiral sat down.

"Gentlemen," the President said, "the admiral is commended. He has given us the man, and by 'us' I mean Senator Dubois and me. Senator, as a representative of the people and as Republican majority leader, are you willing to support us in November?"

Senator Dubois did not stand. He merely straightened in his seat, but the aura of wisdom and age around him claimed Hansen's full attention. "Mr. President, gentlemen," he said, "I have misgivings about any plan which attempts to overcome hostilities accumulated against us since the first arboreal creature swung down from the trees, lifted his knuckles from the ground, proclaimed himself man, turned, and cuffed his mate. I fear we are boarding a dreamboat to purgatory, and the next voice you hear will be the voice of God, saying, *'Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin.'* Of all who have prophesied the way the world will end, there was the poet T. S. Eliot. Gentlemen, *he* called the shot!"

A titter, which Hansen did not understand, rustled through the room. He made a note on his pad, "Check with Helga. World's end. T. S. Eliot."

When the laughter died, the Senator resumed. "We have rolled our point, and snake eyes stare us in the face. The merry-go-round's run down, little children. Plan? Let us plan for this Armageddon when we are already its veterans and its victims, for the tactics to defeat our tactics were extant before the struggle started, and all that we have left, gentlemen, are the cold stars and the priesthood. Support you? Indeed! Against their panzer divisions I'll hurl the cavalry of Hannibal. There's no use saving the elephants, boys, for Carthage shall not rise again."

Suddenly he dropped the oratory and swept the assembly with eyes which seemed to pierce each man, individually, and his tone grew low and harsh. "In the parlance of our Navy friends, I'll never give up the ship—until that mo-

ment comes when I can arise and address you all as 'Brother Rats.' Then, I warn you, gentlemen, I am the pluperfectest swimmer in the rodent kingdom, and the last sound your drowning ears shall hear will be squeals of delight from Honeysuckle Dubois, the last manchild on the merry-go-round."

Hansen thrilled to the senator's speech, although he had only a vague idea what the senator meant. To President Habersham, however, accustomed to political discourse, the senator's words brought umbrage into his voice as he said, "Mr. Majority Leader, you can rest assured the Democrats will keep their promises, but remember you have a Republican majority on the nominating committee."

"What do you think the female tactics would be?" the admiral asked the senator.

"Political counterattack with our weapons."

"But, Senator," the Defense Secretary interjected, "their only logical Presidential candidate is Dr. Carey herself, and she's flat-chested."

"She'll have a Vice Presidential running mate," the senator said.

"That's a possibility," the President interposed, speaking to the senator, "but with you running for Vice President, what we lose to the breast vote among men should be offset by the little old ladies with tennis shoes."

Suddenly, the senator threw back his head and half snorted, "Why, Dem, if you had an ounce of br . . . excuse me. Mr. President, may I recommend that you rise above your constitutional principles, suspend habeas corpus, and outlaw Vita-Lerp."

"I've got the historians to think of," the President said.

"For us, there'll be no historians," the senator said.

"Nevertheless, I have my own integrity," the President said, "and I have Alternate Plan B."

"Mr. President," the voice of Primrose cracked through the room, "may I remind you that we have not discussed Alternate Plan B!"

"What is Alternate Plan B?" Mr. Powers asked.

"Military! Closed!" the admiral snapped.

Surprisingly, the President turned to Mr. Powers with

an almost gentle look. "Alternate Plan B, Mr. Powers, will be invoked only by me. I would not ask my advisers to share that responsibility." The President fell back into his chair, as if recoiling from the thought of Alternate Plan B, but the chief drew his attention.

"Mr. President, y'all wanting *me* to run for President?"

"That's the idea, Chief."

"How long would I be electioneering?"

"Less than two months, after the convention which is roughly three weeks from now."

"But, Mr. President, I'll have to resign from the Navy, and, sir, I'd lose my pension."

"Your pension as a former President will be more."

"I never done no politicking. I could lose that election."

"We assume your opponent will be an amateur, also. We'll use the three weeks to train you in public speaking and to teach you formal English. Once you've won, Senator Dubois will handle administrative chores."

"Chief," the admiral interjected, "I've weighed this matter from your point of view. You'll be granted a leave of absence from the Navy which will permit you to return if you should lose the election, and you'll receive, as of today, an appointment to rank of commander, USN."

"As of right now," the President added. "Make a note, Mr. Culpepper, that Commander McCormick's new pay base commenced at four forty-five P.M., Washington time."

"Welcome aboard, Commander," the admiral said.

Surprisingly, the new commander still bridled. "But, sir, I got three weeks shore leave coming and I figured on heading for the hills to shag me a bride."

"Commander," the President said, "it'll be extremely difficult to find a virgin in three weeks. Vita-Lerp has spread like wildfire and we old married hands can tell you that your marriage won't last."

"Then, sir, I'd better get mine while the getting's good."

Oglethorpe Pickens spoke up. "Mr. President, I should think that the resources of the federal government, abetted by the FBI, should be able to provide one nubile hill girl to permit the commander to woo while he works."

"I agree," the attorney general said. "Mr. Powers, perhaps your bureau's Knoxville chief might. . . ."

"Are you suggesting that we kidnap some young lady, Axminister?" the President asked.

"Mr. President," Mr. Powers interrupted, "I won't need the Knoxville chief. The young lady will come of her own free will. I've got John Pope."

"Who is John Pope?" the President asked.

"John Pope is one of my operatives who has never failed a mission. He comes from those hills, and he's got a gentle way of looking that can persuade a woman to do anything or a hoodlum to sing." He turned to Commander McCormick. "You want a woman, Commander? OK! I'll send you a Bertillon chart and you check off her measurements. John Pope will fill the order promptly and in detail."

"I'm not particular, sir. I just want me some pretty little mountain doozy, not over eighteen, with a good shape, who can cook crackling bread."

"With or without the hymen?" Mr. Powers barked.

"Well, if I was going to take the job, what with this John Pope being so powerfully persuasive, I reckon you'd better throw in the hymen."

"I'll have the hymen certified by a bureau doctor and present the certificate to you."

McCormick still looked dubious. Hansen felt the time had come for him to intervene in the matter. Speaking in a low but authoritative voice, he said, "McCormick, quit shilly-shallying. Stand up and volunteer!"

McCormick stood up. "Gentlemen, I just had a conference with Captain Hansen and I got the word. If this John Pope brings me a doozy with a maidenhead, you boys have done got yourself a President."

CHAPTER 6.

AFTER THE MEDAL-AWARDING ceremony, the Navy men emerged to find darkness had fallen. As Hansen and the admiral waited for the commander to bring up the station wagon, Hansen, from long habit, checked the skies. Between a rift in the clouds he could see the stars, and he could feel their remoteness in the voids of space. The cold stars and the priesthood, the colored senator had said.

Sensing his junior officer's unease, Primrose said, "Captain, I know you're a man who looks at facts, but these are hard to look at. It helps if you practice what the literary boys call a willing suspension of disbelief."

"I'm learning that tactic, Admiral, but one fact I can't accept, no matter how hard I try, is that Senator Dubois will be the last manchild on the merry-go-round."

"Don't ever," the admiral said. "As old and as disinterested as I am, if there were one available woman left in the world with Honeysuckle Dubois and me, Meriweather Primrose would walk off with the prize."

"I was thinking more of my wife," Hansen chuckled, "who is true-blue Navy. However, it seems to me that the government is making a mountain out of a molehill, and

Secretary Lamar seems to agree with me."

"Lamar has a hidden ace. . . . The whole situation sounds irrational," the admiral agreed, "but, after all, it's only our own rationality which gives order to the irrational. . . . Hmm, that sounds like Ogie."

"Ogie?"

"Oglethorpe Pickens, the Defense Secretary. Now, Captain, when we return to the BOQ, you'll probably have a message to call your wife. Do so. Tell her you were brought here to receive a Presidential citation. Tell her you've been appointed to my staff, which you have been, effective since you tossed that idea on the table. You'll be in Washington over the weekend. Express a longing to see her, but don't discuss the subject of today's meeting with her, other than your DSM. Never let her suspect that you know that she's gone over to the other side."

"Helga hasn't, Admiral."

"Good! Continue to believe that and you'll find it easier to pretend."

In the station wagon, the admiral huddled in a corner of the back seat, lost in speculation and his huge raincoat. Hansen respected his silence until Primrose aroused himself to say, "Remember, gentlemen, no word around the Pentagon, tomorrow, about Operation Chicken Pluck."

"Yes, sir."

All three were silent as the commander steered the vehicle into the dinner-hour traffic, overpaying honors to the speed limit. Hansen could understand his preoccupation. Finally, the admiral asked, "Captain, what's your estimate of the situation?"

"A Navy man puts his trust in God and the High Command, but he has to believe in his family, too. My family is two girls, and women make up half the country. I'm still one hundred percent American."

"Yes, Captain. I'm a widower, but it must be shattering to realize your wife, daughter, or sweetheart, is an enemy."

In matters of policy, the admiral was supreme. In matters relating to Helga and Joan Paula, Hansen was the authority. His girls would never defect, he knew, but holding his disbelief in suspension, he went along with

Primrose. "You'd think, Admiral, they'd have more gratitude after all the groceries and shoes we buy them."

"Gratitude is a two-edged sword. Remember Polonius."

Hansen was grateful that he was not being asked a question. The admiral had said "Remember Polonius" as he might have said "Remember Pearl Harbor." Primrose continued, "One must learn to think with nonhuman concepts. Are you listening, Commander?"

"Yes, Admiral."

"Perhaps you are both using what the literary boys call personification: Because a man feeds a dog and the dog greets him with tail wagging, the man assumes the dog feels love. Actually, as Pavlov infers, the tail-wagging is a conditioned reflex that gets a bone tossed to the dog."

Hansen followed the admiral's reasoning up to that point, but he balked when Primrose continued: "Perhaps we err by reading into women the qualities of human beings. Some authorities hold that a woman never experiences an orgasm during intercourse. Her pretended enjoyment is tail-wagging for the bone tossed to her; she is protecting her biological supply line."

"Admiral," the captain said, "I might concede your point except it contradicts my experience. Once, as a young ensign on liberty in Bangkok—aptly named city—during summer, in a period of the full moon, I was seated in a park at twilight, with the perfumes of the tropics around me and temple bells tinkling over the old city. As I sat, a girl, half French and half Siamese, came walking by. . . ."

For reasons of traffic safety, Hansen had to edit his tale of young love in old Bangkok. McCormick had a tendency to swerve out of his lane at the high points, but the story convinced the admiral. "That was incredible, Captain."

After a moment of awed silence, the admiral huddled deeper into his coat, and the voice that came from its folds seemed disembodied. "That was twenty years ago. They don't need us anymore. Logically, we should be permitted to wither away, but they won't let us. The Cajun-bourbon erred when he said they would leave us the stars. They won't. They'll cancel the Venus landing. Yet, I can understand them. Vita-Lerp is their Declaration of Independence from us."

"But, sir," the captain asked, "if a man can't believe in American womanhood, what can he believe in?"

"No longer in God *and* the High Command," Admiral Primrose said. "Only the High Command. God's on their side. He's joined the opposition." Now the voice that issued from the coat was an oracle sounding from the depths of a grotto. "He's correcting His error. I could never understand why He let Himself get involved with the inefficiencies of bisexuality. Monosexuality was His only way to go. Still, we have the Navy, we three. For me, the Navy fills my needs."

As the three men drew down their cones of silence and rode over the bridge, lightning glittered and thunder muttered to the northeast. After they arrived at the bachelor officers' quarters and received their room assignments, the OD reported to Hansen that his wife had called and wanted him to return the call. The admiral suggested that they meet in the bar for an aperitif after Hansen completed his telephoning, but McCormick declined—he was skipping dinner because he had not slept the night before.

Helga bubbled with pleasant chatter. The mentholated oil of eucalyptus had her cold under control, and she was excited over his DSM, but still disappointed. "Darn the Navy, anyway, Ben. I missed connections last night, and now, this. Do you know it's been eighteen months, twenty-eight days, and sixteen hours since I carved a notch on my bra?"

Hansen chuckled. "Now, tell me about your day."

"Oh, just a woman's day, Ben. I went over and helped Anne lay out Ralph. He was forehanded. He shot himself in the chest so he looked perfectly natural with a suit on. Anne and I almost got into a cat fight. She's planting a rose over his grave to give his memory a little beauty. I suggested an oak tree because a tree could use his calcium, and the oak tree *is* Ralph."

"I agree, Helga. A rose bush is too feminine. Ralph was as sturdy as Gibraltar."

"That's exactly what I told her, Ben! I said to her, 'Anne, if Ben were here he'd want you to ship Ralph's remains to the Gib and bury them in the rock.' But she's stubborn."

"She should have listened to you, Helga. By the way, dear, I think we should start thinking about a dishwasher for the kitchen."

"We have Joan Paula."

"I know, Helga, but. . . ." If the admiral had not been waiting, Hansen could have spent hours with her.

Later, over a bourbon, he related the conversation to the admiral, who listened with interest. Primrose agreed with Helga and him that an oak tree would have been more appropriate than a rose bush over Johnson's grave, but, rolling his glass around on its bottom rim, the admiral asked, "Why didn't someone suggest a tombstone?"

"By heavens," the captain said, "I never thought about that!"

"I know," the admiral nodded. "You're so committed to improbabilities that you're overlooking the probable. Well, Ben, what did you think of your first cabinet meeting?"

Hansen thought for a moment. They were in a social atmosphere, the admiral was topping off his second martini, but a naval officer was always under observation by his seniors. "Some of the arguments weren't too well defined. Of course, I have a clear idea of Operation Chicken Pluck, but I drew a blank on Alternate Plan B."

"Our first Plan B," the admiral explained, "was to contest the swearing-in of any President-elect endorsed by the FEM's. Dr. Carey has attacked the Constitution, and the President swears to uphold it when inaugurated. The old Plan B backed up Operation Queen Swap, which was a military operation, but constitutional. Truthfully, I'm happy to shelve Queen Swap. Through sheer intuitive logic—that's reasoning from unknown facts—I found a flaw in the operation which I'll explain at a little staff meeting, Friday."

Hansen nodded an understanding he didn't fully possess because Primrose was talking too fast and he was halfway through a double bourbon, his second.

"It's easier to grasp politics when you're swacked," the admiral said, "so drink up." Primrose lifted his glass in a junior officer's toast. "To a bloody war or a sickly season! Now, we're bringing in Operation Chicken Pluck. This one

can't fail, but it's an obvious attempt to circumvent the Constitution. Enter, now, Demorest Habersham, the constitutionalists' exemplar, who regards the first law of the land as holy writ. I tell you, Ben, that man *loves* the Constitution. When Bertha booted him out of her bedroom, Old Demorest grabbed a copy of the Constitution, rolled it into a cylinder, and went to bed with *it*. . . . Steward, another round! Understand this, Ben. Operation Chicken Pluck elects as President a great lover who doesn't *know* doodly squat about the Constitution. Operation Chicken Pluck elects as Vice President a great fornicator but a poor lover, a wily politician, and Honeysock Dubois doesn't *care* doodly squat about the Constitution. Old Honeydew Sucklebois would suspend the Bill of Rights to get a year knocked off the age of consent. Now, who's throwing his lily-white weight behind these two frauds? None other than our good old constitutional altar boy, D. Habersham."

Primrose topped off his third martini, almost below the stem of the glass, and resumed, "Once he's nominated those two frauds, in comes the new Plan B."

Hansen nodded as an expediency and said, "He seemed upset about Alternate Plan B."

"And well he should be," Primrose said, "because that's my plan! Constitutional, but a military doomsday plan. The code name's Operation Ultimate Thule. That one's a brain wrencher."

Bemusedly he rolled his empty glass around on its empty bottom and looked over at Hansen with eyes that were balanced on the edge of reveries. "Ben, are you a Christian?"

Here it comes, Hansen thought, and braced himself. "Yes, sir."

Primrose set his glass firmly on its bottom. His face hardened. His eyes focused. "Then, Captain, pray that the President never invokes Operation Ultimate Thule."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Hansen's answer was deliberately formal. Admiral Meriweather Primrose had issued an order.

CHAPTER 7.

JOHN POPE DROVE his turbine over the Potomac on a bright August morning and headed southwest toward Fairfax Junction. He was a male Caucasian, 5 feet 11 inches tall, gray-eyed, with no birthmarks and one scar from a Vietcong bullet on his left hip. He was an FBI operative on assignment, driving his own Mustang with a 30-0-0 hunting rifle in the trunk. He was almost happy.

Before him the nearly empty speedway cleaved the green of Virginia beneath a sky polka-dotted with clouds. Within him, lyrical memories sang of pursuits along the tango-swirls of mountain roads with curves ill-met by moonlight at 90 miles an hour. Again he heard the boomelay-boom of exhausts beneath the tintinnabulations of chassis, the sopranos of tires shrieking into the bass of crashed roadblocks. On per diem, with mileage paid, John Pope was heading home to the high country to slice another slit in the death of a thousand cuts he was meting out to Jake "Big Red" Barnard. His spirits quickened to his rising wind of passage, but he was still not completely happy even at 110 miles per hour.

Born in Dalton, Georgia, Pope had worked his way

through Tusculum by running whiskey out of the hills for Jake Barnard until, in the summer before his senior year, he had shifted to dirt-track racing to finance a criminology course at the University of Virginia. He chose criminology because he wanted to work for the Internal Revenue Department. The turnabout was caused by an unpaid bonus promised him by Jake Barnard if he made a rush delivery to Knoxville on time. Pope made the run with minutes to spare, but Big Red reneged on the bonus because it was Pope's last delivery for the summer. In the ensuing argument, the 220-pound man had given the 160-pound youth a beating which had led to a feud rivaling the Hatfield-McCoy feud.

One year after Pope returned as a revenuer, he had stopped every runner in the hills from working for Jake. He used railroad torpedoes instead of nails to blow tires. He felled trees on back-country roads to trip detouring runners. In six months he made 16 arrests and 14 convictions without arousing the antipathy of his friends because his pattern of arrests had been obvious from its outset. Runners not working for Barnard were waved on after a discussion of the weather.

Pope left Barnard's stills alone. He wanted a maximum flow with no outlet because the pay drivers demanded to run whiskey for Big Red would drive the price of his moonshine too high for the market.

When, in the glow of a September evening, Big Red made his move, Pope knew. He had been drifting along the ridges above Jake's cabin waiting for the White to roll out of the barn, piled high with hay from a farm that grew only corn. Then Pope sprinted a mile in less than six minutes to a logging road where his partner waited in an Impala powered by a LeBaron engine.

It took Pope less than ten minutes, driving without lights, to spot the White on an upgrade, and he slowed his car, turned on the lights. Wires on the fan belt antiqued his engine sound, and with seeming effort the Impala overtook the truck. As he passed, he flicked his brights as his partner leaned out and called up to the cab, "Bridge block on the Clinch."

"Thanks," Jake yelled, and swung his truck on a road

too narrow for a U-turn to back up and head back to Treadway and the state road south. As Jake nosed into the shoulder, Pope reversed his car to block the rear of the truck, and by the light of headlights reflected from tree boles, Jake Barnard's career as a moonshiner came to an end.

Pope took the driver's side of the cab, yelling, "Come out with your hands over your head. You're under arrest. . . ." By plan, Pope's partner, a new man on the force, covered the opposite side of the cab and did not hear Pope say, dropping his voice beneath the still-idling engine, ". . . you pink-whiskered son of a bitch."

It was too much for the big man, who recognized the source of the insult. He lowered his hands and charged, but Pope pistol-whipped him with such efficiency that the rookie, thinking Pope was being attacked, was allowed only two strikes after he rushed up before Big Red struck the ground.

Big Red survived his arrest to get ten years in Atlanta as a second offender. His counsel was a public defender, since Pope had reduced him to poverty.

The bonus Barnard had promised Pope was ten dollars.

Pope resigned after his mission was accomplished and joined the Army. His second Purple Heart came from a mortar blast which damaged his optic nerves, and for six weeks his eyes would not focus. After he was shipped back to the States, a therapist with genius helped him regain control of his eyes. She hit on the idea of using her breasts in a darkened room as a focal area for his sight, and when he could spot her nipples at forty paces he was discharged as cured. Although his vision returned, he was left with the knack of throwing his eyes out of focus at will; the resulting expression of gentleness, understanding, and open-hearted candor was such that hoods and women confided in him as they might a priest.

Now, five years after Barnard's conviction, Pope was rolling south at a conservative 85 miles an hour, on a hunting trip paid for by the government. Barnard was only one of many pleasant memories, ranking no higher than Pope's recollection of quail hunting in crisp Octobers, hounds baying under wintry moons, crap games and fist

fights, all-day singing and eating on the ground, humping the hired girl and hickory nut hunting, all-night fishing and drinking on the bank, grits and gravy and moonshine and Coke, country music and cornfield mergers—the memories of a boyhood in the South.

Yet Pope was not completely happy.

At Covesville, the highway patrol picked him up, but he lost them at Myndus. They radioed ahead, and he was flagged down; but he showed them his orders at Monroe, Virginia, and was waved ahead at 70 miles an hour. Heading west from Lynchburg, he ran a playback of the chase to savor the thrill, and he felt that he had a clue to his disquiet.

One aspect of his nature he had never fully understood was the rhythm of his biological urges, rising within him like a tidal swell, and preceded by a strange aura. When he felt the far sweep of the skies, grew conscious of the clinging touch of T-shirts, or enjoyed outrunning state patrols— Ah, there it was.

On no other assignment had his urges been a consideration. On this one, a lack of circumspection could bring about a betrayal of the FBI, his country, and his President. Mr. Powers had specified a *virgo intacto,* and he dare not let his eyes drift out of focus.

CHAPTER 8.

"CAPTAIN, THIS IS RICH. Winken, Thinken, and Prod want us to join them, next Tuesday, to welcome the Russian delegation. To impress the Russkies, they want us to wear dress blues in August. You game?"

"Yes, Admiral."

Over the intercom, the admiral's voice quavered in a childish treble. "Think we should take the side boy with us to broaden his knowledge of protocol?"

"Let me take the matter under advisement, Admiral. His tutor will be briefing me on his progress at lunch."

"How are you coming with Schopenhauer?"

"He's winning, Admiral. When I read a page, I have to review two pages to get the gist of the page I read."

"He starts getting difficult near the end," the admiral encouraged, "but I'm calling to remind you that I have a little staff meeting in my conference room at 1330."

"Thank you, Admiral."

Hansen turned back to his letter from Joan Paula. He was catching on to the breezy language the admiral had picked up from the civilian establishment: Winken, Thinken, and Prod were the Secretaries of State, Defense, and Interior; McCormick was the side boy.

The line from Eliot's "The Waistland" about the world not ending with a bang made mother laugh out loud. She said there was no doubt what those boys were talking about, and no Navy man would be quoting from Eliot. She said she bet you were at a cabinet meeting.

You complain about things not making sense anymore. They never did to me, either, so I guess I got the Hansen curse. For instance, why am I called Hansen when that means the son of Hans and your name isn't Hans? If the world was logical, my name would be Helgasdotter, at least in *my* Scandinavian.

Mama's terrifically excited about your trip home over the weekend. She's wearing lipstick for the first time in months. She's getting the house so ready for Captain's Inspection that she made me take down my disk antenna. I told her you had given me permission to let it stay up, but she said she was senior officer present and it had to come down. So my mother, your Swedish Angel, pulled rank on me.

How do you get out of this chicken outfit? Anyway, thanks for my dishwasher.

Love,
JP

Folding the letter, he put it into his pocket. Helga's deduction about the cabinet meeting was technically a breach of security on his part, since the admiral had ordered him to keep the cabinet meeting secret. He was chagrined, not so much by the accuracy of her deduction as by her misinterpretation of the word "bang."

Hansen still waited for his duties on Primrose's staff to be defined, hopefully at today's meeting. For ten days he had done nothing but read books suggested by the admiral, and not one had any bearing on naval operations. *A High Wind in Jamaica* had concerned itself with murderous children, *Lord of the Flies* with a bunch of young savages, and *The Painted Bird* had been vignettes of Hell described by a boy. He was mystified by the admiral's choices. A good, wide-open adventure yarn by Max Brand

or Zane Grey, Hansen could appreciate, but these books were about imaginary characters in an unreal world.

He shoved Schopenhauer into his desk and left early for the cafeteria to meet McCormick, planning to get the unofficial scoop out of the way before the arrival of McCormick's tutor with the official report on the commander's progress.

McCormick was waiting and excited. The FBI had sent an operative, this morning, to "shag me a bride," he reported happily, but he was less enthusiastic about academic life. He was complaining mildly when he looked over and said, "Here comes Mr. Steward."

Approaching them was a man, tall and reedy, who walked with the undulations of a goose, and when Hansen got a closer look at the face of their luncheon guest, he decided to order salad. The face was relieved more by liver spots than watery gray eyes which suggested myopia and lost spectacles. Steward extended a flaccid hand to acknowledge McCormick's introduction, and sat down while Hansen explained to him that he was expected to report McCormick's progress to the admiral.

Steward's eyes fixed on the captain with detached pity. "To a nonacademic man, that task must be as easy as keeping an unsteady finger on an erratic pulse."

"What he's saying, Captain, is that I don't know where in hell I'm at."

"Come now, Commander. We're not fond of prepositional endings. Say, if you must, 'I don't know where the hell I am.' Captain, I detest verbosity. As a grammarian, I'm devoted to enclitics, hiatuses, and total silence. Circumlocution is pussyfooting. Be brief and pithy, it is no matter how witty."

Maxims and apothegms shot across the table in twenty-millimeter words at a fifty-caliber rate of fire, and Hansen grew increasingly dismayed. All morning his thoughts had dwelled on the admiral's staff meeting, wondering what his assignment would be, but Steward forced more serious problems on his mind. Hansen's pride in the Navy as his country's first line of defense suffered when civilians such as Steward made him wonder what the first line was defending.

Admiral Primrose's "little staff meeting in my conference room" was guarded in the vestibule by two Army MP's who checked Hansen's ID card with a thoroughness that surprised him. Then he walked through a short corridor where a magnetic-field deviation recorder surveyed him for hidden weapons. After he was cleared, electronically, he was permitted past a second door guarded by Marine MP's.

Primrose was certainly security conscious, Hansen commented to himself as he entered the conference room, two stories deep with a length and width to match. On one of the windowless walls was a Mercator projection of the world, done in detail, and the room's dominant piece of furniture was a horseshoe table, with a dais at the apex of the arc and enough chairs around the interior arc to seat fifty men. At least thirty were present, and Admiral Beauchamp, Primrose's senior staff officer, was the only familiar face present. Most of the men had a VMI look, and when Hansen recognized Air Chief Talliaferro and Army Chief Ware, he knew that the admiral's "little staff meeting" was a meeting of the General Staff of the United States.

Admiral Beauchamp came over, towing the short, barrel-chested Commandant of Marines, General Barnhardt "Porky" Flugel, and introduced Hansen to him, saying, "Porky wants you to sit between him and me so you won't catch armored lice from the doughfeet and the flyboys."

General Flugel mangled his hand and bellowed, "Captain Benjamin Franklin Hansen. So, you're the one the Old Man's been bragging about. You must get the f - - - - - - writer's cramp from signing that name to all the G - - d - - - - - copies the Navy asks for."

After the bout with Mr. Steward, Hansen found the general's language vigorous and bracing, and he was flattered by the attention of a man who had made the cover story on *Time* magazine. Flugel's trademark was personal bravery; he flew jets, raced sports cars, played polo, and chased women. As a captain, he had specialized in guerrilla warfare and one of his remarks was famous: "I like to stab them in the kidneys and watch them p - - -

blood." According to *Time*, he had been appointed Corps Commandant over senior officers because of his publicity value to recruiting officers. General Flugel was considered a typical Marine.

Physically, Flugel appeared to be squashed. His square head was neckless and centered around a nose spread out and bent up in some past fist fight. Two small eyes were set close together. His crew cut made his hair resemble bristles, and his torso was almost as wide as it was long. Reputedly, he swilled sour mash whiskey with such gusto that some claimed he ate the mash. He was called Porky because he was a Razorback from the University of Arkansas, not an Annapolis man.

"Well, Ben, what do you think of your new boss?" Flugel's voice dropped from a bellow to a series of grunts.

"An admirable officer," Hansen said.

"That's a good, safe answer. I love the old son of a b - - - - ! If anybody can round up a little a - - for my boys, it's that old c - - - lapper, and it's about time, too. Down around Quantico, they've quit calling us - - - - - - - - Marines. Now, they're calling us the fist - - - - - - - - Marines."

When Hansen was shown to his seat, Flugel introduced him to an Army general whose name he did not catch because the general was eager to recite a new limerick of his own composition to Flugel and Beauchamp. Hansen could hardly believe his ears.

On the bridge stood the young Duke of Buckingham,
Thinking of teats and of sucking 'em,
While observing the stunts
Of the c - - - - in the punts
And the tricks
Of the - - - - - -
Who were - - - - - - - - 'em.

Flugel he could understand. Profanity was a part of the act with the Marine, but these officers were talking like sailors after a long sea voyage.

Admiral Beauchamp leaned over and said, "Say,

Generals, did you hear the one about the strip-tease artist . . .” when an officer near the entrance called them to attention.

Admiral Primrose entered, accompanied by the Secretary of Defense. Primrose's deeply inset eyes, brooding now, were cold and remote, his frame was held rigidly, arching slightly backward, and it carried his head atop it like the bust of Julius Caesar. Toward the dais was striding the Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, every whit as impressive as Napoleon on the heights above Austerlitz, Stonewall Jackson riding into Port Royal, or Robert E. Lee in repose. “Carry on, gentlemen. Be seated,” he said.

As the audience sat, the admiral handed a gavel from the lectern to the Defense Secretary. “Today, gentlemen, the duties of the chair will be assumed by the Secretary of Defense.”

Hansen was close enough to hear Pickens say, “Sug, you're throwing me to the wolves.” As Pickens spoke, it struck Hansen that Primrose had not reached his position by ingratiating himself with civilians; he had reached the top because he was the toughest and most able of a tough and able group of men.

Oglethorpe Pickens rapped the gavel. “Gentlemen, before I call this meeting to order, I want you all to know we are winning the battle against the monosexists. As Secretary of Defense, I promise you, gentlemen, the boys will be back in the trenches by Christmas.”

There was cadenced applause for the Alabaman, who ended it with a rap of the gavel. “Meeting is now in session. The floor belongs to the Chief of the Joint Chiefs. Gentlemen, observe the rules of order.” He sat down.

Admiral Primrose stepped forward, his eyes sweeping the faces before him, and said, “Gentlemen, I am charged to express the President's high appreciation for your planning in Operation Queen Swap. From myself and from Admiral Piagorski a ‘Well done!’ ”

Joint Russo-American planning. So, that was Queen Swap, Hansen thought. A combined operation against the pesky Chinese.

“Gentlemen, I have decided to postpone Queen Swap indefinitely in favor of Operation Chicken Pluck.”

"G - - d - - -," Porky Flugel roared. "What in the hell is Operation Chicken Pluck?"

"A political operation and not open for discussion."

"Well, I'll be a son of a - - - - - ."

"Does the Commandant of Marines request the floor?" Pickens asked.

"You f - - - - - ' right, I do!"

"Does the Chief of the Joint Chiefs yield?" Pickens asked.

"For ten seconds," the admiral answered, removing a stopwatch and placing it on the lectern before him.

"If we don't swap queens while the iron's hot," Flugel said, "the iron's going to get as cold as a witch's teat."

The gavel sounded.

"For the reason given inadvertently by the General Commanding the Marine Corps," the admiral said, "my decision to postpone Queen Swap is unilateral. The Russians have not been informed."

Good, Hansen thought. After the Russians and Chinese had flailed the hailstones out of each other, Uncle Sugar could move in and pick up the pieces.

"Point of order," someone called.

Pickens looked over at the source of the request. "Does the General Commanding the Armies request the floor?"

"General Ware would like the floor."

"Does the Chief of the Joint Chiefs yield?"

"Six seconds!"

Speaking rapidly in a clipped Northern accent, General Ware said, "Admiral, this unilateral decision seems a breach of military honor. . . ."

The gavel rapped and the general fell silent. Hansen could have sworn that Ware did not get his full six seconds.

"According to my reasoning," the admiral said, "the breach has been made already, by them. The CIA believes a fall-off in defections from behind the iron curtain is a point in favor of Queen Swap, the CIA's opinion fortifies my belief it is not. The fall-off represents a firmer hand in control of the party apparatus. That hand, gentlemen, does not belong to Premier Gregorovitch. If there has been a withdrawal within the Soviet Union, the Russian

men will not let us know it because they are quite willing to swap a dead pig in a poke for our half-dead pig."

It was seeping into Hansen's mind that this plan might not be as innocent as he had first thought. Operation Queen Swap was beginning to shape up as treason by the High Command. Unaware of the turbulence he had created in Hansen, the admiral continued, "Now, hear this! In accordance with the Eisenhower Directive, I submit nothing to the President without your approval. I want you all to leave here satisfied with my decision, so you'll be shown two photographs of the resort town, Zhadanov, on the Azov Sea. The first was taken by the nuclear sub *Patrick Henry,* three years ago, on a July afternoon on the second Saturday of the month. The second was taken three weeks ago, second Saturday, as before, same time of the day. We know that the withdrawal had not begun three years ago. So, pay close attention to the differences between the two photographs."

Admiral Primrose clicked a cricket and the room lights dimmed. A panel, twenty feet square, in the middle of the Sahara Desert, slid back to reveal a high-resolution photograph projected on a screen. It was a beach scene with crowds. Behind a boardwalk, on piers behind the beach, were pastel-colored buildings, their shades drawn against the sun. Most of the bathers were stumpy and towheaded, and the girls, for the most part, had performed the unique feat of making their bikinis look dowdy. Hansen scrutinized the shadows under the boardwalk carefully to see if the Russians had concealed suicide boats.

When the admiral clicked the second time, the picture was replaced by another and very similar photograph. Checking for differences, Hansen detected only that the stucco had peeled on the center building, and it had cracked vertically on the building to the right. Allowing for individual differences, the bathers were essentially the same, the ratio of men to women held the same, and there were still no suicide boats under the boardwalk.

Out of the darkness, the admiral asked, "Any comments from the floor?"

"You G - - d - - - right!"

"General Flugel has the floor," Pickens said.

"Blow up the faces of that couple on the top steps leading from the boardwalk to the beach."

As the projectionist complied, cropping the photo to that area, Hansen saw a blond lad, about eighteen, alert, keen-faced, bending down over a lovely, dark-haired, dark-eyed little Ukrainian miss. He could see the twinkle in the lad's eyes as he bent to his sweetheart. Ironically, Hansen thought, an espionage photograph had captured and preserved the image of young love on the threshold of life.

"Notice her lips," General Flugel's voice boomed through the darkness, "wetted and slightly apart. Gentlemen, when they hold their mouths like that, that means the - - - - - - - - is ready, with a slow rising on the 'poon' and a rolling snap to the 'tang.' Bring it back a little. Notice how she's sort of slung forward at the pelvis? I haven't seen hunching like that since I got kicked out of the Epworth League. Her - - - - - is burning a hole in her bloomers. But look at that boy. Notice how that shag-poke's leaning down on her. He's sneaking a squint at her titties.

"That boy wouldn't make a Marine," the general said sadly, and then his words picked up tempo. "But take a look at that lower right-hand quadrant—Blow it up!—see that old bag with her - - - toward us? Notice how she's drooling as she looks off the camera to the right? She's looking at a boy who *would* make the Marines because he's getting his under a beach blanket, off the photograph to the right."

To Hansen's astonishment, the woman's face did seem lewdly intent, but how in the world could the general see what was happening off the photograph?

"Will the general please yield the floor?" Hansen could not determine from Pickens' tone whether he was asking or ordering.

"Skipper," Flugel ignored the civilian to direct his remarks to the admiral, "I take this photograph as proof positive that we'd better haul - - - to Russia on the next convoy out, and I'd like to pick up a print of that scene of a beach to add to my collection."

"General Hogarth, aide to General Ware, would like to comment," a voice with a Southern accent came out of the darkness.

"General Hogarth has the floor," Pickens rasped.

"May I see the upper half of that photograph? Notice, sir, that fewer men are wearing sandals than in the former picture, and more women. . . . "

"Right!" It was Admiral Primrose sounding through the darkness. "And I hope your observation points up to the Commandant of Marines the dangers of overspecialization. . . . "

"It is characteristic of lower classes," General Hogarth continued, "both in this country and abroad, that the men do not remove shoes. . . ."

"I object," Flugel bellowed, "some of the best I ever got was in combat boots. . . ."

"That exception proves the rule," someone yelled from the darkness.

"What son of a bitch said that?"

"Lights," said the admiral as Pickens pounded the gavel. "General Hogarth's point is well taken. Women are status conscious in Russia as well as the United States or Tanzania. *They* removed the men's shoes."

In the rising light, Hansen was completely at sea. No one from the floor had finished talking, yet the admiral had won the support of the General Staff. When he spoke his voice carried resolution: "Gentlemen, it's the considered opinion of the Secretary of Defense and me that women control Soviet Russia. Although the evidence is deduced, we have been provided with a means of checking our deductions.

"On Tuesday, a Russian trade commission is scheduled to arrive from Moscow bringing ten females, the first of five hundred for the services, representing down payment on one million bushels of wheat. If the women have been previously segregated, they can be delivered on schedule by the Russian Minister of Trade—unless we get word to the Russian women.

"Providentially, a member of my staff, Captain Benjamin Franklin Hansen, has just returned from eighteen months in the Antarctic. His wife believes that he is un-

aware of her withdrawal. Captain Hansen is going home over the weekend to speak freely to his wife of the Russian girls.

"As soon as Dr. Carey gets the information to her Russian supporters, they'll attempt to cancel the trade. If the girls arrive Tuesday, I will seriously consider reopening Operation Queen Swap. If not, we will know the Russian women have taken over."

Hansen saw plainly, now, that Operation Queen Swap was a plan to occupy Soviet Russia with the connivance of Russians whose armies no doubt would occupy the United States. Technically, it might not be treason, but morally it most surely was. More galling even, he was being assigned to deceive his wife on the theory that she would betray her country in order that the U.S. High Command might assess the effectiveness of the operation. Here was an incredible pyramid of treachery, and the base of this pyramid was the wife of Captain Benjamin Franklin Hansen, USN.

He rose and faced the admiral.

"Sir," he hurled his words across the bend in the U, "I wish to advise the admiral that this assignment conflicts with my ideas of honor as a gentleman, and it falls, I believe, within the proscriptions established by the Nuremberg Trials."

Only a slight stiffening of the admiral's spine and a slight intensification of his gaze was enough to give Hansen the sensation of a freeway driver whose brakes suddenly fail. "Honor? This is no time for midshipman cant! You're being sent behind the lines on an intelligence mission. Didn't you read those books?"

"Yes, sir."

"I was trying to prepare you, in days, to face facts the men in this room have faced, for months. Obviously, one of us has failed. Report to me at 1630, Mister." Primrose's voice rose in pitch and tempo as he spoke, and when he snapped the "Mister," his words had become a whip which cracked against proud flesh.

At 1630, the flesh was still proud and Hansen's spirit was not humbled. With the anxiety of a midshipman

called before the superintendent, he waited in the admiral's outer office, but there was a difference between a captain and a midshipman. He stood ready to resign his commission if the admiral continued this madcap scheme. Honor might be old-fashioned, but he valued it above his desire for promotion, and his loyalty to Helga was his honor.

When the warrant yeoman announced that the admiral would see him, Hansen walked into a smile and a hand waving him to a seat. "Sit down, Ben. How'd you like the way I handled the boys?"

"You have unique command presence, sir."

"If you crack the whip before you pat the head, you're firm but just. If you pat the head, then crack the whip, you're a salty old seadog, and you know what *that's* a synonym for. Cigarette, Captain?"

If this was the pat, Hansen wanted to make it plain that he would not sell his integrity for an Egyptian cigarette.

"No, thank you, Admiral."

"Captain, I want to commend you for your attitude, so far, but there's an area which could use a little spit and polish—your sense of humor. Humor in the service invites familiarity which invites contempt, and *double-entendres* cloud clarity.

"Taxpayers, however, use wit and humor to ease their burdens, and justly so. Many of them pay us more than they make, and they work for their money. We are called upon only to die for our pay, but they die, too, without getting paid for it.

"Under a democracy, the civilian establishment holds priority over the military except in the area of disbursements. We must always remember that, and when the boss whistles, you and I come running, not for his sake nor for our own, but for larger disbursements.

"Secretary Pickens delights in unusual similes and unique metaphors. When you asked him if your assignment violated the tenets established by the Nuremberg Trials, you couched your question improperly."

"May I invite the admiral's attention to the fact that I was talking to the admiral and not the secretary?"

"Wrong, Ben. Whenever you speak in the presence of the Secretary of Defense, you are speaking either to or for the benefit of the secretary."

"Then, sir, how should I have put my question?"

"First, never ask direct questions in the presence of civilians. Direct questions imply that we lack knowledge of something, and we don't want to give that impression of the military. Second, if you had stated the Nuremberg question in an allusive manner, if you had said, for instance, 'Admiral, should I carry a cyanide capsule in my rectum when I go home?' Secretary Pickens would have loved it."

Hansen did not clearly understand, but he was learning. "Then, Admiral, Secretary Pickens would have loved me for my hair dye and my padded bra."

"Well-asked, Captain," the admiral chuckled. "In my form of your question, there's an allusion to Goering's suicide after he was sentenced to hang. You have shown a knowledge of history, advanced a theory regarding Goering's hiding place for the cyanide, voiced a legal objection, and used the Nuremberg Trials as your precedent. Ogie would rather hear one four-deck allusion than a forty-two-gun salute." Suddenly the admiral paused, drummed his fingers over the desk, and asked, "But how did the subject of Nuremberg arise in the first place?"

"I voiced moral reservation, sir, about my intelligence assignment. My wife would never take part in any conspiracy against her government."

"Since you know this," the admiral said in frank consternation, "why are you objecting to going home for a weekend and telling the family about your work at the office?"

Hansen felt a blast of reality. By heavens, he had risked mutiny and his career because this kindly man had offered him a weekend with his family.

"Sir, I must have been in a state of shock over Queen Swap. When I began to understand the operation, well, it seemed treachery."

"Oh, the war plans, of course. . . ."

Suddenly the admiral's face sagged, and he seemed very

tired. "Captain, what to you was brain wrenching was, for me, merely routine. . . ."

Again he paused, and lifted his hands, palms upward, toward the captain. "Ben, in these hands lies the power to overkill the entire planet eight times. When one lies down at night to ponder methods of mass homicide, and wakes to schemes of genocide—when death is one's profession—one loses one's sense of proportion."

He folded his hands and dropped them to the desk. Primrose resembled a man praying to himself. His head tilted down, and his eyes focused on infinity. Hansen, waiting, understood why this man could evaluate the logic of God; but it was already 1650, and if he didn't get to the airport by 1715 he would miss his plane, leaving Helga waiting for another two hours at the Norfolk Airport. He cleared his throat.

"Oh, the war plans," the admiral snapped to alertness. "Queen Swap is a bona fide plan initialed by the Russians, but I have plans for invasion of Israel initialed by Egyptians and plans for invasion of Egypt initialed by Israelis. I keep planners planning as you keep sailors swabbing desks. Idleness would drive them batty. But Plans and Operations is important. When you suggested sea duty for Waves, you marked yourself as P. and O. material, but I want this intelligence mission completed first. We have plans for dropping nuclear bombs on individual states of the United States in the event of a rebellion. Next week, I'll let you nuke Texas as a starter. After Virginia, you'll have toughened up for the mind wrencher, Ultimate Thule. But you'll be in cold storage when you start work on that one. Let slip one word about Ultimate Thule and I'll be assassinated."

"Admiral, are you freezing me in rank?"

"Temporarily, Ben, I have to, but I promise you, when you are promoted, you'll be jumped so far over the captains who jeered at you on their way up that you'll have to start now to practice compassion. You've been slated to fill my shoes, Ben."

"By heavens, Admiral, it's gracious of you to tell me this."

"It's my pleasure, Ben. Now, you go home and talk

shop to that wife and daughter of yours. Drop hints about Queen Swap. Ogie and I would like the grass-roots reaction. We'll be interested to know if your wife tries to wrangle more information from you."

"Thank you, Admiral, but let me assure you that my wife is loyal."

"Good! Keep the faith, Ben. Just know she's a loyal American wife, untainted by Vita-Lerp, and if ten little Parooskie goodies come traipsing off that plane, Tuesday, I'll know it, too."

CHAPTER 9.

POPE WAITED ON THE RISE above the spring where Cora Lee Barnard came each day at five for water. Five years before, he had spotted her at the task as he scouted the ridge, waiting for her father. She had been twelve or thirteen, then, and in her lithe gawkiness he had seen the potential for beauty. Her chastity was guaranteed by other factors: The cove was two miles off the main road, it was secluded, and her mother, a former schoolteacher, had been given permission to take her out of school after her father was convicted.

Pope lay north of the spring about thirty yards, with a clear line of vision up the trail that came down from the east. Under a pokeberry bush, in his checkered green and brown sports coat and his green trousers, he would have been difficult for a hawk to see, and anyone coming to the spring from the east must look into the rays of the westerning sun.

Cuddling the polished stock of his rifle and smelling the familiar odor of oak and hickory humus around him, he knew with contentment that he was in the best sniper country in the world. If Mao had been on the Confederate

High Command, the South could still be holding out in these hills.

Once in a while he glanced at his wristwatch, and the minute hand moving toward five created no tensions in him. Cora Lee was no problem. At thirty yards he could have nipped her earlobe.

It was good to stretch out, feeling the polished stock of the rifle against his cheek and watching clouds sail through the skies of home. He knew, without sadness, that someday he would die and be buried here, that his volatile gases would escape upward to form a part of the blue haze he loved.

"Glory to God for dappled girls!" he ejaculated under his breath.

Cora Lee Barnard swung into view, moving as lightly as a fawn through the dappling shadows, swinging her pail, her dark hair rippling below her shoulders, and Pope began to think in sprung rhythms. Originally, her gingham dress had been modestly long and full-bodiced, but she had grown to fill it and to lift the hem line well above her knees.

Swinging from beneath her skirt, thighs, knees, calves, and ankles blended into two long, tapering wholes. Walking on such legs would have been a desecration had not the swinging pelvis orchestrated them into a soaring oratorio, and Pope lay awed.

He slid the rifle slightly forward as she neared the spring, looking over the telescope to command a wider field of vision.

She stooped to skim the surface of the water with her hand, and stood for a moment, looking around her, her body arched slightly backward, her waist pivoting easily on her hips.

With a flowing motion she bent down to dip the bucket, and Pope dropped his eyes to sight her northwest hemisphere through the telescope. As she stooped lower, to flood and sink her pail, he closed his left eye, placing the crosshairs of his sight three inches to the right of her caudal disc and three inches down.

Slowly he squeezed off a pellet.

She *eeked* one bell-toned yelp, slapped her hand behind

her, set the bucket down, and felt the spot in wonderment. Turning, she walked away from the spring, lifting her dress to see what had bitten her.

She wore no panties.

She dropped her skirt, yawned, and walked over to a hummock of fallen leaves. Pope, brought erect by the sight, walked through the underbrush toward her. She heard him, looked up, and waved. He waved back, and she lay down, cupping her head in the bend of her elbow. When he reached her, she was asleep.

She was sprawled over the leaf bed, her profile toward him, her bosom rising and falling with the respiration of sleep. Her hair cascaded down to split at her shoulders, part flowing beneath her chin and the rest rippling behind her shoulders.

A photo of her body, full length, would have earned a lively profit sold door-to-door. With the camera angle lowered slightly, a color photograph of Cora Lee Barnard could have been traded for an oil field. Her stomach, white with an underglow of pink, swelled from a flat plane into a *mons veneris* crowned with a fluff of hair, black but copper-glinted in the slanting sunlight. Below, the labia majora arced with the line of a lightly pulled bow. From his angle—his head was lowered and bent sidewise—the labia minora, pink and peeking, smiled up at him with the enigmatic lure of a Mona Lisa.

He reached down, slung her over his shoulder, and swung westward along the overgrown path to the logging road. Her 130 pounds were the lightest he had ever carried, and the four miles were the shortest he had ever walked.

Darkness had fallen when he pulled his car up to the door of the Birch Mountain Monastery. Slinging her over his shoulder, he walked up the stone steps to the heavy wooden door, pulled a rope, and waited until a peephole opened and a cowled face peered out.

"Brooks," he said, using the cover name Mr. Powers had chosen, to conceal his identity from the girl and to spare the sensibilities of the monks who belong to a merged order of Trappists and Capuchins.

Slowly the door creaked inward, and a monk motioned

him in. He followed the brother down a long hall to the right which ran parallel to the front of the building, passing four doors on his left. Barefooted, the monk padded ahead and pointed to the fifth door. Pope nodded, and the monk continued on down the long hallway lighted by sparsely placed and dim, unshaded bulbs.

Pope shouldered the door open, noting with satisfaction its heavy oak paneling, and walked onto an Oriental rug which carpeted a spacious bedroom-dining room. On his right was a fourposter bed with canopy and curtains adjacent to a door leading into a tiled bathroom. He could see another door to the bathroom opening onto an adjacent compartment. On the far side of the room, its curtains drawn, was a large window. In front of the draped window was a writing table.

Nurse Hathaway and Dr. Cabrone, both from the bureau, were seated at the table playing gin rummy, and a bottle of wine was on the table. They were smoking, and each had a large stack of quarters on the table, although Nurse Hathaway's stack was much smaller than the doctor's.

"Hello, John," the doctor said, "welcome to the bridal suite. Just lay the patient on the bed."

"Hello, Doctor. How goes it, Hathaway?"

"Poorly, poorly," she said, pointing to her stack.

Pope flipped the limp girl forward, held her for a moment in both arms, and tossed her onto the mattress through the inverted V of the canopy at the foot of the bed. He let her ankles drag through his palms to slow her in midair and flip her dress up.

She landed on her back, her arms spread, legs slightly akimbo, with her short skirt almost precisely on the Plimsoll mark.

"There it is, Doctor, ready for inspection."

Dr. Cabrone arose with the nurse who walked over and turned on the bedlamp.

"She's beautiful," Hathaway said, "and she isn't wearing a smidgin of makeup."

"Hathaway," Pope said, "with that girl holding my hand, I could make love to you."

Unshockable from fifteen years of association with

police-type males, Nurse Hathaway nodded. "With her holding my hand, I might let you."

After an awed silence, Dr. Cabrone walked over and took a flashlight and a pair of rubber gloves from his briefcase. "There's one part of this inspection I can tell at a glance is unnecessary, but I'm going to perform my soul-shattering duty with bureau thoroughness. How much sodium pentothal was in the pellet?"

Pope shrugged. "The zoo man said it should keep her out for about four hours, but I told him she weighed about one hundred and ten. He could be wrong."

"Well, to work. Nurse, would you pull the curtains."

Pope's voice was low and deadly. "Hathaway, if you pull that curtain, I'll kick your rib cage from your backbone. I'm not letting that Neapolitan abortionist out of my sight."

"He's in charge, Doctor. He kicks hard."

"Nurse," the doctor insisted, "why don't you run down to Charlottesville and pick me up a vial of plutonium while the operative and I work out an arrangement?"

Pope wandered over to the card table and looked down at the cards. "No deals, Doctor." Hathaway needed a seven of clubs to rummy, and it was her draw. He riffled through the cards remaining in the deck and put the seven of clubs on top. "Cabrone, what's a good Catholic like you doing smoking, gambling, and drinking in a monastery?"

"It's their wine. They grow tobacco here, and I got special dispensation from the pope."

"You got the wrong pope. One of the brothers has complained to me, already, so I'll have to report you to Mr. Powers."

"They've taken a vow of silence," the doctor said. "If anybody rats on me, I'll know who."

He straightened up. "She's all right. I'll put her in the bathtub."

"Hathaway can handle her. I ran fourteen miles with her on my shoulder. You just make out the report and haul it back to Washington."

As they talked, the nurse reached over and gathered the girl easily into her arms.

"I'll finish the game for Hathaway. What's stakes?"

"Quarter to win. Fifty cents to rummy."

"Let's double it."

"Okay," the doctor said. "It's Hathaway's money."

Pope drew the seven of clubs, rummied and laid the money and the cards on the bed. "It's your deck, Doctor."

"By the way, John, Mr. Powers called. He wants you to call him, *rapido*. An emergency."

"Where's the telephone?"

"Two doors to your left, in the Father Superior's office."

"What's a silent order doing with a telephone?" Pope asked.

"Mr. Powers had it installed."

Down the hall, Pope came to an open door of an office with a desk inside and a tall man, partially bald, seated behind the desk. Without his robe, the man could have been head of a steel company. Pope pointed toward the phone in the corner, and the man nodded in assent.

Since the phone had no dial, Pope knew it was a direct line. He lifted it, and the night duty officer answered.

"Brooks," Pope said.

"One minute, John. Mr. Powers wants you."

Gravel rolled in the next voice on the line. "This is Mr. Powers. What's your situation, John?"

"I just brought her in. She should be coming out from under in about an hour. Her indoctrination shouldn't take long."

"I need you here, fast. As soon as you're through, go immediately to the highway patrol in Charlottesville, and get an escort in. I'll wait up."

"State again, sir?"

Glancing at his watch, Pope saw that it was eight fifteen. It would be well after midnight before he reached Washington.

"No. Papa Pepite is asking for our help. Something big has broken in Manhattan. I'll brief you when you get in."

"Thank you," he said automatically to the monk after he hung up.

"My pleasure," the monk answered him.

"Oh, you can talk?" Pope felt silly after the question, and added, "Quite a place you have here, Father. Are all the suites as lush as the girl's?"

"No," the Father smiled. "That's Mr. Powers' doing. Is there anything I can do for you, my son?"

"Neither the girl nor I have eaten supper."

"When she's ready, ring the bell by her bed. A brother will serve you."

"I may take you up on that . . . but I'm worried about that large window."

"Mr. Powers had bullet-proof glass installed. It opens on a garden in the quadrangle, completely enclosed. In addition, Mr. Powers is sending three of you men to protect her. They'll be here by ten, but she's quite safe."

"What's in the room adjoining hers?"

"A bedridden monk, Brother Johannis. The bathroom door locks from the girl's side, but the brother has not moved from his bed in ten years. His muscles are atrophied."

"Then I won't disturb you further. Thank you, Father."

Cabrone was leaving when Pope got back to the room, and the doctor wished him luck.

"I might need it," Pope admitted. "Her father works for me down in Atlanta. She might remember me from a photograph taken during his trial."

After the doctor had gone, Hathaway entered, carrying Cora Lee wrapped in a nylon nightgown, and laid her on the bed. "Imagine that, John. All this beauty with no props. I only brushed her hair."

From across the room, he noticed the tempo of Cora Lee's breathing change, and he said, "Begone, Hathaway. She's coming around."

Hathaway counted out her money on the table and said, "Thanks for the dollar. I saw you stack the deck."

"Good," he said. "If you were watching me, the girl is safe with you."

Hathaway's room was next door, to the right. Standing in the doorway to check for forgotten articles, she said, "You may have to massage her legs below the knees. They'll feel dead when she awakens."

"Leg massages are my specialty," he said. "Good night, Nurse."

Pope took off his coat and threw it over the chairback. He sat down on the edge of the bed and slapped Cora Lee's cheeks, sharply. "Wake up, Cora Lee!"

Her eyes opened and she looked up at him. He sent his eyes out of focus, brought them in again, and saw her smile at his expression of friendly sympathy.

"Hello," she said amiably, and closed her eyes again.

He reached down and pried her left eye open with his fingers and said, "Cora Lee Barnard, are you in there?"

She opened both eyes and laughed. "You're funny. Are you a doctor?"

"No, ma'am. What's your name?"

"Cora Lee Barnard, you just said."

"Was I right?"

"You were if you weren't lying to me."

"Cora Lee, I've never told a lie in my life, and I'm one hundred and eighty-two years old."

"Say you sooth?"

"I say sooth."

"You look real young for your age. My legs feel paralyzed."

"Cora Lee, I'm the best friend you ever had. I wouldn't do this for just any girl, but I'm going to exercise your legs."

He leaned down and flexed her legs by lifting them at the knee joints and letting them drop. Exercising her legs, he knew, would do little except show her they were not paralyzed, but in her highly impressionable state of mind it would help assure her that he was the best friend she ever had.

"I know you," she said drowsily.

In her euphoria, she would speak only the truth, and she was not likely to conceal anything. Oh, hell, he thought, and asked her, "Who am I?"

"You're the shire reeve's man."

"Shire reeve?"

The word had a peculiar familiarity.

"Yes, sir. I saw you coming down the hill right after that scorpion stung me."

"Cora Lee, that wasn't any scorpion. That was me."

"You telling me you're a caeco-demon who changes shapes?"

"No. I shot you with a tranquilizing pellet that put you to sleep."

"Well, I'm right glad to hear that. I'd hate to have you change into a spreading adder while you're rubbing my legs."

Suddenly she sat up. "What air ye y-clept?"

Bemused, he realized she was using words from Chaucer's era. "John, but quit talking Middle English."

"Is that what that is? I reckon I'm a little out of my head. John, what you going 'round shooting girls for?"

"I'm a hunter."

"It ain't hunting season."

"There's no season on girls. Lie back down! Where'd you learn Middle English?"

"From Geoffrey Chaucer. He's a writer. Mama took me out of school when Papa got put in jail for selling corn. . . . Mama says that's the way it is with the Barnards. No Ramsbotham's ever done time. That's Mama's family, the Ramsbothams."

She was rambling, and he was interested in her ramblings. By listening, he could map her recovery from the sodium pentothal, and he knew, now, that she had no idea who he was.

Finally, she staggered back to the subject.

"Mama let me read Chaucer because that was the only book she had from normal school. It was wrote in two columns; one column like he talked and one like we talk, and I liked his way of talking best."

"His poetry scans better in Middle English," Pope said.

"You read after him?"

"Most of the *Canterbury Tales*."

"Why, John, you're the only boy I ever saw who's read Chaucer."

"Cora Lee, you're the only girl I ever saw who read Chaucer."

"I wondered why I liked you so much. Which one of them stories did you like best?"

"I suppose *The Miller's Tale*."

"I didn't like the way that one ended," she said. "That Alison was the meanest thing, making poor old Absolon do what he did. I'd liefer Absolon hadde brender hir haunche-bon than Nicholay's. I reckon talking Chaucer comes in handy, sometimes. I'd never say anything like that, plain out. . . . Where am I?"

"You're in sort of a Trappist-Capuchin monastery."

"Them hunters! If you be my friend, John, why'd you shoot me?"

"Because the future President of the United States wants to come courting, and your mama wouldn't let any boys into the cove."

"Does Mama know where I am?"

"At the moment, no, but she knows you're safe. She's got a radiophone call, by now, from President Habersham, asking her permission for the next President to come courting. She'll know where you are, in good time."

"Good times is something Mama don't know much of. . . . Is that next President as good-looking as you?"

"That doesn't make any difference, if he's going to be President of the United States."

"I don't care what he does for a living. . . . How's he know what I look like?"

"He learned through me. I saw you, once before, when I was on a hunting trip."

"You think I'm pretty enough for him?"

Here, he thought, was a girl of incredible beauty, an authority on Geoffrey Chaucer, and modest. He could have loved her for her beauty alone, or for her appreciation of Chaucer alone, or for her modesty alone. Suddenly, he hungered to speak with absolute frankness to this girl, to tell her the truth with no holds barred.

"Cora Lee, I'm a policeman of sorts. I have lied to girls —most of the time, as a matter of fact—but I'm your friend and I want to tell you the absolute truth, cross my heart and hope to die.

"You are the most beautiful girl in the world. If your mother had let boys into that cove, you would have seen this with your eyes long ago and felt it with your lips."

"Shoot fire, you sound like you mean that! Mama *was* strict. She used to tell me she couldn't let boys see me

because they'd want to get on top of me, and I'd have a woods colt. I never wanted one of them to do that, but then I never saw a boy as pretty as you . . . John, would you marry me?"

"I certainly would! If that Presidential candidate drops dead between now and election day, girl, you'll be spoke for, by me."

"John, way you talk makes me feel good all over."

He noticed he had taken her hand as he talked, and he thought: He had been assigned to go and get her, have her chastity certified by the doctor, and then convince her that she should accept McCormick's suit. His mission was accomplished.

Pope slipped his eyes out of focus and said, "Cora Lee, your mother never said anything about you getting on top of a boy, did she?"

"Not that I recollect."

"Would you do it for me?"

"You're my friend, John, the only one I got. I reckon I'd do anything for you 'cept brender your haunch-bon."

She had controlled spontaneity, he decided. In the beginning, her movements were shy, tentative, exploratory. She seemed to be searching for the correct rhythm, and he let her have her head, offering no suggestions. Finally, she sighed and rippled, quivered and swayed; then, she stifled a squeal and slapped, buckled, moaned, rocked, rattled, rolled, pitched, shimmied, groaned, walloped, pounded, and yelled. When she writhed, screamed, slapped and bounced, soared, and fell, he conceded.

"How about that?" she hooted, before she collapsed.

Hansen had to admit, Helga was a hummer. With skill and experience, she accomplished as much as the Bangkok belly dancer had accomplished with youth and enthusiasm.

It had all started with an impish challenge at the Norfolk Airport after he missed his plane from Washington. During her extended wait, Helga had had a few "drinkies," and she was in the little girl's room when he arrived in the bar. He spotted her table from her coat and her book, so he ordered another martini for her and a double for him-

self at the service bar. While waiting for the bartender to fill the order, he overheard a man down the bar say, "I saw a dame down twelve martinis and walk away."

"Must have been a Swede," his companion remarked. "They stow booze like water."

Hansen took the order to the table and was waiting when she returned from the ladies' room, radiant-eyed, to greet him with a hug and kiss.

Hansen related the Scandinavian story he had overheard at the bar, but Helga was not amused. "Jealousy," she said. "Men can't bear to see a woman beat them at their own game."

"I'm not so narrow," he said, as they clicked glasses for their first drink together after nineteen months, so many days, and some odd hours. (He had lost count in the Washington rat race and had to accept her tally.) "I recognize female superiority in all departments but one."

"That's because you're generous-minded, Ben, and I agree. You're a much better ship handler than I am."

"I supposed I should have said two departments," he said.

"No. One," she demurred.

"After dinner," he said, "I'll demonstrate what I mean."

From a slouching position in her chair, she looked him over with a calculating gaze. Then she downed her drink, slapped the glass on the tabletop, stood up, and said, "To hell with dinner! I'm taking you home, and I'm driving."

Drive she did. She slowed the family jalopy to ninety when she hit the off-ramp at Virginia Beach, and geared down to a sedate sixty for the drive through residential streets. Fortunately, they had the house to themselves, for Joan Paula was out on a date with a boy from MIT, and now, he had to agree with Helga. His capable Swede excelled in all departments but ship handling.

When the sough-sough of her breathing slowed above him, he said, "Scuttlebutt around the Pentagon has it that the girls have formed some sort of conspiracy to withhold favors from the boys. You've just proved the rumor wrong."

He felt her body grow tense. Her voice was flat and dull.

"No, Ben, the scuttlebutt's correct. There is a con-

spiracy. It has grown into something evil and powerful."

"Sounds interesting," he said, contented in the deepening euphoria engendered by gin and satiety. "Sounds like something . . . affecting national . . . security."

Forspent, he slept.

CHAPTER 10.

RUSSIA, Primrose had said, was a nation of paranoiacs.

As Hansen shaved the next morning, it occurred to him that Primrose might have picked up a few delusions of persecution himself, while stationed in Moscow. Despite Hansen's carefully phrased leading remark, last night, Helga had evinced no further interest in scuttlebutt around the Pentagon. On the basis of her behavior, the FEM conspiracy had no intelligence network, and even if a general withdrawal did occur, it would not include Helga Hansen.

Helga had been more excited over Joan Paula's new beau, a lad from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. As Hansen splattered himself with cologne, he shrugged. He would prefer a promising young bachelor officer, but he was growing accustomed to eggheads.

After breakfast, he commented over coffee, "Last night was quite a contrast to my first night home."

"I had a cold, then."

"That was my risk."

"To tell the truth, Ben, a cold was only part of the problem."

"Try me with the whole truth."

"A wife doesn't like to tell her husband everything."

"From what I've heard around the Pentagon, I felt that your hen party, the night I came home, might have included a lecture on feminine hygiene."

"Oh, well. I'll confess a misdemeanor to clear myself of a felony. I couldn't hoist 'baker' because I already had a flag up."

"I'm sorry." He was contrite. "I thought it was Vita-Lerp. Quite a few of the ladies are indulging, I heard."

"Only the in-groups, and the wives of admirals and generals who have no other recourse."

"Some of the country girls must be using it," he said. "Five hundred Russian women are being imported to entertain the boys in the armed services. The first shipment of ten is supposed to arrive at Dulles next Tuesday."

"You mean *our* government is allowing five hundred Red hussies into *our* country to subvert *our* boys?"

His heart soared at her indignation.

"Not only that. Your husband has been detailed as an official greeter."

"Why, this is ridicuolus!" She paused to ponder for a moment. "Ben, it isn't even true! Five hundred Russian floozies, working at top speed, could only service one serviceman once every three years, in rotation. Those girls aren't being imported for our servicemen. They're coming for the staff officers."

Surprisingly, he had never considered the mathematics, but Helga was completely correct. Five hundred women couldn't service the *Chattahoochee* on a Saturday night.

"I never heard of such! Sometimes, I think Mother Carey is right! One cannot rehabilitate what has not been habilitated."

"*Mother* Carey. Don't tell me, Helga, that you're one of her chickens."

"Of course I am. How else would I have known about the conspiracy I started to tell you about last night?"

"Don't tell me you've joined the in-group of Vita-Lerp users?"

"Ben, there's something I simply must tell you." She

leaned forward, suddenly serious. "Get the word back to Admiral Primrose that Dr. Carey is announcing her candidacy for President of the United States, next Monday. She's organizing cadres to spread her message and her methods into rural areas. If she succeeds, our nation will have reached some *ultima Thule*."

"Ultimate what?"

"*Ultima*, Ben. Not ultimate, *ultima Thule*, the final dark regions of myth."

"I thought Thule was in Greenland!"

"Oh, Ben! It's Latin. But that woman is expecting to recruit Vita-Lerp users and swing them into her column by next November." She rose for the coffeepot, and there was genuine anxiety in her voice and eyes as she poured.

"Don't let it upset you, dear." His voice was calm and reassuring. "The Navy's working on the problem."

"Now, I *am* upset!" She poured part of his coffee into his saucer. "Listen, Ben. I'm with the League of Loyal Women Voters, and we're on to her plots. One of her schemes is to order us married women to bet our husbands she will lose. Naturally, the men will vote for her in order to win their bets. Isn't that devious?"

"She can't win," he said. "We've never had a woman President. She's bucking tradition."

"When the horse saw the first tractor, it no doubt heehawed! By the way, you can pass along the word to Admiral Primrose that one of the counterattacks conducted against Carey by the League of Loyal Women Voters is a do-it-yourself movement. Our movement keeps the waistline trim without forcing a girl to drink all that flatus-causing goo. Oh, we're fighting her, Ben."

"Your group is fighting Dr. Carey?" He kept his voice casual. Here was a bit of intelligence worth recording.

"Not openly. She's too powerful, and if we're blacklisted by the FEM's, our espionage value is jeopardized. You can tell your little Sug that he has a partisan group fighting underground in his support, and, Ben Hansen, if you start fooling around with any of those Commie Mata Haris Sug is bringing over, my girls will know about it, and you'll go right back on top."

"But the Vita-Lerp. . . ."

"We're fighting that, too. There's no challenge to swallowing a pill upside down."

"What inspired you to break with her, Helga?"

"Because I love you, Ben, and because I was one of the first members of the Virginia Beach Chapter of FEM, and I was in line to be the president when that woman, Dr. Carey, flew in, with no knowledge of local conditions, mind you, and set up a permanent table of organization. I was appointed merely vice president, and that dear little Sue Benson, who should have been my vice president, was made sergeant-at-arms. Can you imagine, Ben, of all the persons to make president, she chose that horsey, sharp-nosed Elaine Jackson, and her husband is an over-aged lieutenant commander in charge of a firing range."

"He hits the bottle, too, I hear," Hansen said.

"Who can blame him! I saw Elaine the other day in a miniskirt, and, I declare, Ben, her knees looked like arthritic golf balls. . . . So Sue and I got together with two or three other girls . . ." Suddenly, Helga looked at him and smiled. "This woman talk must bore you stiff."

"Not at all," he said truthfully. "I enjoy it."

"Joan Paula's boy friend is coming by, then Sue and her husband will drop in for drinks, and we'll all head to the club for the Saturday night dance."

"Sounds great," Hansen said. "But tell me, honest Injun, have you ever tried this Vita-Lerp?"

"I knew you'd get to that question, sooner or later."

Slowly, she nodded her head, looking into his eyes for disapproval. "Are you angry, Ben?"

"Oh, no," he admitted. "If all the girls reacted as you have, the High Command would order 'bombs away.' What did it feel like?"

"Like a paratrooper taking his first jump. . . . That is, at first. Then, I thought, well, if I'm going to be raped, I might as well relax and enjoy it. But, I'll admit, Ben, it wasn't unpleasant, and I can see where it would be worth a dollar sixty-eight to spinsters. It felt like a cave full of frightened bats fluttering out in broad daylight. . . .

"Get out of here, Ben, before I crawl over the table after you!"

Hansen exited chuckling. He loved the give-and-take of family life with its intimacies, and when he turned in his report to Sug and Ogie, they were going to be bowled over by its note of optimism.

Strangely, neither the admiral nor the Secretary of Defense seemed excited over the Partisan League of Women Voters. Admiral Primrose was alert, as always, doodling behind his desk, but the secretary, sprawled on the admiral's settee with his hands linked across his stomach, listened with detachment. At times, one of them would break into his report with questions that seemed hardly relevant to the captain.

"Was your spouse absent for any length of time before commencement of coition?" The secretary's question was asked in an abstract, almost bored manner.

"Absolutely not."

"Did you detect the odor of eucalyptus?"

"Never!"

"Chlorophyl?" His question was directed to the admiral. Primrose, doodling on a note sheet, said, "Possibly. Carey knows chemistry."

"How did Sue Benson impress you?" Defense drawled.

Hansen thought for a moment to gather his impressions into one succinct and appropriate figure of speech.

"Balls, sir," he said finally. "She was wearing sandals and shorts when they dropped by in the afternoon. When she walked the muscles popped out on her calves like billiard balls, and her kneecaps were croquet balls. She was fairly broad abeam for a short girl, and she had a bouncy way of walking that made her buttocks look like basketballs being dribbled. And. . . ."

Hansen caught himself. In his own voice, he heard the avidity for lewd details he so condemned in the men around him, but it had brought the Secretary of Defense bolt upright on the couch, leaning forward, gripping the edge of the seat. Out of the corner of his eye, Hansen could see the admiral's pencil pause above a doodle.

He resumed the old abstract and impersonal tones of a naval officer describing a lady. "She was a very cute and charming young miss."

"Continue, Captain. Continue," Defense said. "Her breasts?"

"Her breasts, sir?"

"Bowling balls or tennis balls?"

Hansen was being taken aback by the civilian's effrontery until the admiral interjected, "Or quoits?"

Looking directly at the admiral, Hansen answered, "Polo balls, sir."

"Say, Sug," Defense said, "did you hear about the girl from Detroit? With her thing she was very adroit. She could narrow it in to the width of a pin or flatten it out like a quoit."

"At the moment I was thinking of a lady in Scotland," the admiral said, resuming his doodling. "Tell me, Captain, at any time during your association, did you hear the ladies use words not familiar to you?"

"Well, sir, it was a very intellectual gathering. Both girls and my daughter read books, and Helga takes courses. Sue was talking about the neo-Romanticism of Capulets. Now, 'neo-Romanticism' isn't a word that pops up. . . ."

"Caponets!" Defense seemed stricken.

"She said Capulets," the admiral turned to Defense, "because there were elements of neo-Romanticism in Mercutio's speech, when he referred to his death wound—'not so wide as a church door, nor so deep as a well.' "

"Mercutio," Pickens said with sudden anger, "was talking about that sweet little Juliet. She'd been two-timing Romeo. I wouldn't believe him on a well-stacked stack of Bibles, and you don't, either. Else, why your remark about Lady Macbeth?"

Obviously the two were talking in code, Hansen decided, because no one had mentioned any Lady Macbeth.

"She would have died, hereafter," Defense added ominously. "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in its petty pace till the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. . . . Thank you for the report, Captain. I enjoyed the spicy parts. See you, Sug."

He walked out, strangely preoccupied and dejected.

With a bluntness not his usual wont when addressing a flag officer, Hansen turned to Primrose. "Admiral, my policy has always been to sail the straight great-circle

course, but the secretary seemed to be zigzagging. Was he trying to scramble a message to you that my wife and daughter are in danger?"

"No, Ben," the admiral assured him, laying his pencil down. "Defense has many virtues, but as a Shakespearean scholar, I rate him little higher than Alexander Pope. Speaking of Pope, Winken is sending your side boy to meet his future First Lady, this afternoon, in the company of Steward, and I don't want any other service hogging the limelight. Go along, Ben, and show the flag. We've got the girl moored up at Birch Mountain, in a monastery. You'll enjoy meeting the Father Superior. He's a former admiral who gave up the High Command for God. But on your way to Birch Mountain, Captain, keep Steward off the subject of enclitics."

"Enclitics, sir?"

"If you don't know what enclitics are, Captain, I would advise you not to ask Steward."

Pope wheeled his Mustang into the U-shaped driveway and parked in front of a Tudor mansion.

Pope was vexed because he could not get Cora Lee out of his mind. Sight of the mansion irritated him even more. While the average Joe sweated to maintain his credit and family on industry, thrift, and a low salary, Papa Pepite Regal lived in a joint like this.

Not that Regal wasn't a respected businessman: he controlled three savings and loan companies in California, all chartered, and several floating loan companies around New York City, which were not chartered. He also headed an importing firm not listed on the big board and was czar of an entertainment industry noted for its low overhead, particularly in talent costs and electricity.

Pope's rap was answered by a Negro butler in full livery who was not over thirty and who carried himself with an easy grace that was too fluid for a butler. "Tell your boss that Pope's here."

"He's expecting you, sir. This way."

Pope was ushered into a room where a man sat behind a huge desk in front of a huge window. His bullet-bald head was balanced on a ball of fat. The man arose to

extend an affable hand which Pope did not accept because there was a large diamond on it and its owner reeked of garlic.

Regal, seeing the hostility, swept the hand in a face-saving arc toward a chair in front of the desk and said, "I am happy to have this little truce in which we can talk as friends."

"Yes," Pope said, seating himself, "we can talk."

Regal eased his huge blob into his chair while the butler stood rigidly at attention behind Pope.

"I have checked on you, Mr. Pope, and I want to tell you, as a patriotic businessman, that I admire your war record."

"I have checked on you," Pope said, "and you were rejected by the services on grounds that you were a psychopathic personality and a pathological liar."

Regal's globe trembled with mirth. "I have not been talked to with such frankness since Mama was alive. I laugh, but it touches me, here."

With a dramatic flourish, he drew his hands against the upper part of the chest.

"What's there?" Pope asked. "An ulcer?"

Again the girth quivered, and Papa pulled out a large handkerchief to dab the mirth from his eyes.

"Mr. Pope, I like you. If you tire of your job, come to see me. I will pay you twice as much."

"Send your man back to the pantry," Pope said, "and let's talk."

Regal nodded and the butler glided away.

"What's your problem, Regal?"

"You are not a T-man, so I will not bore you. Only one thing is worse than income tax, and that is no income to be taxed. I have a large family, Mr. Pope, and I have large expenses—groceries, senators, doctors' bills, charities, congressmen, gifts, clothing, entertainment. . . ."

"I can lend you five dollars till Monday," Pope broke in.

Again the mass quivered, and a pudgy finger moved toward a button on the desk. "As a Chink once said, Mr. Pope, a picture is worth a million bucks."

He pushed a button and the curtain closed behind him,

another, and a bookcase rolled back to reveal a screen, another, and the chandelier above them grew dim and went out. From the opposite wall, a beam of light projected a chart onto the screen.

"What you are seeing, Mr. Pope, is a chart showing average sales, per unit, in houses throughout the country last year. Note the rise in sales beginning in February of last year. At that point, we knew that something had gone wrong on the outside. Later, the government confirmed our discovery."

He pushed another button, apparently, for the chart changed to show the first seven months of the current year.

"Notice, business continues good. That leveling off you see in May was brought about by a shortage of personnel, but revised recruiting methods bring the chart back up for June and into July. That break on the fourth is for the family holiday, but by the tenth, business is climbing again. But notice the twentieth."

Pope would have been unable not to notice the twentieth. On that day, the chart began a nose dive.

"So, Mr. Pope, on the twentieth, the decline begins. By the twenty-fifth, the decline is a recession. By the thirtieth, it is a depression. . . . Now, I have had my accountants prepare a day-by-day chart of the first week in August. Watch this."

He flipped another chart into the projector.

"Catastrophe!"

He turned the lights back on.

As the curtain rolled back from the window and the bookcase slid again into place, Pope turned to him. "Did your girls quit?"

"No, sir. We have maximum security residences for the girls."

"Did you price yourself out of business?"

"No, sir. We have even tried bingo nights, but nothing works. The men are not buying."

Pope thought for a moment. It couldn't be a boycott from the outside and it wasn't a strike from the inside. It couldn't be a plague, for HEW would have told Mr. Powers.

Whatever it was, it was big.

"I'm checking on it, tonight," Pope said, "I'm calling on your Park Avenue joint."

Pope arose and walked out, abruptly, less from rudeness than from shock. It had been bad enough when girls quit giving it away; but when men quit buying, then the world had gone mad.

CHAPTER 11.

TWO UNEXPECTED HAPPENINGS occurred on the road to Birch Mountain Monastery: Professor Steward proved interesting to Hansen, and McCormick turned girl-shy.

McCormick's condition was obvious from the outset of the drive in the limousine with liveried chauffeur which the State Department had provided. In a white, starched collar and highly polished shoes, wearing an immaculately creased dark blue suit, the commander sat rigidly between his tutor and the captain. He reminded Hansen of a class portrait for Yale, class of 1898, and Hansen commented on his rigidity.

"Captain, it's not that I'm meeting a girl. It's that I'm meeting a virgin."

"They're much like other young ladies," Hansen said, "except shyer and more modest."

"Sir, I know she's going to be shy, and if she don't know what that little thing is for. . . ."

"Repeat that last sentence, Commander," Steward ordered.

"If she doesn't know what that little thing's for, how'm I going to show her if she's shy?"

"You seem to be doing a job, Mr. Steward. My compliments," the captain said.

Steward's long face smiled a Woodrow Wilson smile, and Hansen, remembering the injunction to use humor with the taxpayers, added, "You must have used a cattle prod on our boy."

Steward slumped back in his corner and rubbed his long jaw reflectively. "That's an idea, Captain. That just might be an idea. . . ."

McCormick was stricken. "Captain, you've really done it, now. Mr. Steward was born and raised in Selma."

Hansen realized he might have overdone it. Perhaps a sense of humor wasn't as common among civilians as Primrose presumed.

But Steward wasn't a civilian! Primrose had said, "We don't want any other service hogging the act."

"I jest, of course, Colonel," the captain said.

"The professor's no colonel, Captain." It was McCormick who spotted the deftly inserted title. "He's a G-man, and he's my bodyguard, too, until Secret Service takes over."

"It's quite all right," Steward said. "They call me Colonel when I'm on homicide duty and Professor when I'm assigned as a bodyguarding tutor."

"But you must be a grammarian," the captain said.

"Grammar is my hobby. When I was a boy, I read a poem by Browning—*The Grammarian's Funeral.* I was so touched by the poem that I became morbidly interested in the enclitic *te*."

Primrose had warned him to avoid enclitics.

"That's a rather technical hobby, I should think, for a man in your line of work."

"On the contrary, the department has constant need for our specialized knowledge. John Pope, for instance, who brought in the commander's young lady, speaks Anglo-Saxon, and we have one operative whose hobby is dodging bullets."

"By heavens, isn't that dangerous?"

"He has fantastic reaction time and a keen sight. He watches your trigger finger and can see it flex. But I've been working on a finger movement. . . ."

Steward paused, reconsidered his line of conversation, and said, "The bureau uses him to weed out temperamently unfit rookies. My own hobby has no practical value, unless religious values are considered practical. I'm speaking, now, of enclitics."

"I've developed an interest in religion of late," Hansen interjected quickly. "It occurred to me that if the freeze develops far enough, the priesthood might be a logical calling for a Navy man. It's not too much of a change."

"Strange," Steward mused, "I've been thinking about a monastic career myself. I had a heart attack six months ago, that's why I'm on limited duty, and. . . ."

Hansen expressed amazement. "It's limited duty when you're assigned to protect a future President?"

"It's not physically exhausting to pull a trigger. I was thinking of the Birch Mountain Monastery, in particular. It's manned by a silent order. If I could retire there, get away from the infernal chatter, it would be easy to trace the development of enclitics."

"Wouldn't God be a consideration?"

"God's dead."

"Who said so?" McCormick blurted.

"We get a lot of inside information in the department," Steward said.

"Wasn't it quite a shock to learn this?" Hansen asked.

"Not too much," Steward said. "We still have Mr. Powers."

"If God's dead, Professor," McCormick asked, "why're there so many churches?"

"I didn't say religion is dead. Religion can be an ethical order, like Buddhism, or a social and economic order, here in the West. But, above all, religion is a personal convenience. Personally, I've come to the point in life when death is near, but I have been very fortunate in that I have spent most of my youth in the study of applied nothingness. As it were, I've become adjusted to nothingness by degrees. You are aware, of course, Captain, that there are stages in the evolution of nothingness?"

"No, sir, I'm not," Hansen said, suddenly interested. Odd minds had been the rule on this tour of duty, and

Steward was promising to have the oddest mind of all. "Tell me about it."

"Comes now the enclitic *te*," Steward said. "Most enclitics are elided. Where can you go from an elision?"

He paused.

Hansen didn't know, of course, and he awaited an answer.

"You go to the hiatus, the silent pause between two unelided vowels. Now, of what technical value is silence? Plenty! Observe the hiatus: In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the rhyme scheme is basically terza rima with the occasional interpositioning of a hendecasyllable. But, the hendecasyllable is, in actual fact, a twelve-footed line, with the twelfth foot furnished as hiatus following the first syllable, accented or unaccented. In Canto XXIX, when Dante and Virgil stand above the cloister of Malebolge. . . ."

Two hours later, when the gray stone wall of the monastery hove into sight atop its hill, Hansen felt an urge to send a telegram to Admiral Primrose placing hiatus on the list of proscribed topics for persons dealing with Operative Steward.

Charm keynoted the dinner.

The dining room, vaulted and spacious, reserved for the First-Lady-to-be, had a medieval atmosphere. Cowled and barefooted waiters brought trenchers loaded with viands and a delicate white wine from the monastery's own vineyard. It was sipped before the catfish course, and a rich, full-bodied red wine before the marinated side meat. Three FBI agents, dressed as monks, joined them at the dinner table.

There was feminine charm in the coolly efficient, yet witty, nurse and the full-bodied Miss Barnard, dressed appropriately in a wine-colored gown of velvet with a medieval bodice laced across her white blouse. Her wardrobe had been donated by a Richmond theatrical costume house.

Conversation, carried on in the naval tradition of no religion, no politics, and no sex, was guided and controlled by the Father Superior whose self-immolation as a

monk was relieved by his decisiveness of manner remaining from his old days as a Navy admiral, and it was limited to prearranged topics suggested by the FBI monitoring agent as those most likely to interest Miss Barnard.

Her interests were mainly curiosities, since her life in the cove had been restricted, so Hansen felt at home with her. Even the badinage among guests was woven around noncontroversial subjects. Miss Barnard spoke very little. "I'll thank you for some more peas" and "I've had a sufficiency, thank you" constituted most of her conversation until McCormick drew her out in an animated discussion of how long mash should be allowed to cook.

Despite the charm of their hostess, Hansen found himself eager for the older folks to withdraw and leave the parlor to the young people. Religion had hammered at his attention ever since Admiral Primrose's monologue in the station wagon. Now that he had heard the arguments of a flag officer who had deserted God in favor of the High Command, he was eager to hear the arguments of a former flag officer who had deserted the High Command for God.

Steward and the three Federal monks excused themselves, going, Hansen knew, to the communications room to warm up the monitoring equipment for Steward who planned to listen to the McCormick-Barnard tête-à-tête "live" while it was being taped. Over coffee, saucered and blown to spare Cora Lee social embarrassment, the Father and Hansen lingered awhile with the young couple to mitigate the discomfort of a sudden mass exodus.

Finally, alone in the passage with the Father, Hansen requested an audience and was pleased when the Father patted him on the back and said, "My son, I always have time for an old comrade."

"I'm glad you put it that way, Father, for your comrade is transmitting May Day. All my life I believed in God, the Navy, and my family. Admiral Primrose has come up with some good arguments which have almost convinced me I've got to choose the Navy. My family is two girls, and the admiral is pessimistic about the female withdrawal. If he's right, I'll have to abandon my girls and go over to God or the Navy, but the Navy High Command's been

behaving rather strangely, lately. To top it all off, along comes the FBI and tells me God is dead."

"If God is dead," the Father said, "then He has gone to heaven, and that cancels that argument out."

Hansen almost gasped. The Father's theological reasoning was so lucid and incontrovertible that a scratched horse was suddenly back in the race.

"Father, I would like to believe in all three—God, the Navy, and my girls, but I've been around the tracks enough to know it's hard to win a three-horse parlay. You've made a choice, Father. How does a man figure this form chart?"

As Hansen spoke, the Father ushered him into his office, motioned him into a chair, and seated himself, listening intently. Suddenly, he raised his hand for silence.

He sat for a moment, eyes closed, head slightly bowed. For a moment, Hansen thought he was taking time out for prayer, but when he raised his eyes, they were alert and confident. "My son, I can't help you with your women problems because I'm a celibate and not qualified to answer, unless celibacy *is* the answer. But there is no conflict between God and the High Command. God is the High Command. You're confusing the issue, semantically. You were not betting on a three-horse parlay. You were seeking a winner in a three-horse match; I have now scratched one of the horses. It's a two-horse match, and you wish a tip on the winner. Is that not correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Of course, I cannot answer you," the Father said, and Hansen's heart sank. But it soared again when the Father added, "But I can help you handicap the starters."

"That's all any man could ask, Father. Two horses running and a solid tip on the winner."

"For the sake of my own sensibilities, Captain, I'd like to change the names of our horses. Let's call God faith and women, hope. Besides, those terms will put us on firmer theological turf."

"That's all right with me, Father."

"My son, are you a Christian?"

There the question was again, and Hansen met it head on. He was not a Jew and he was not a Mohammedan. "Father, I'm a Christian."

"Then, you accept the Virgin Birth?"

"Yes, but let me qualify that right at the start, Father; accepting the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ doesn't keep me from sympathizing with Joseph, one whit, and Vita-Lerp isn't the Holy Ghost. I'm a father, too, and I have to admit I'm worried about my daughter. Father, would you like it if your daughter married a capsule?"

The Father's expression of spiritual serenity was broken by a sardonic smile, and he wiped the question away with a swipe of his hand before his face. "Oh, no, my son! You're not trapping me with that argument. I know where the pope and I stand on birth control. I want to know where you stand."

"I'll go along with Jesus," Hansen said, "but His is the only parthenogenesis that's getting my okay. I'm one hundred percent against Vita-Lerp."

"Well," the Father said, rubbing his hands together to signify his task was finished, "that scratches hope, so lay every dime you've got on faith. Faith is your horse, my son. God willing, you will find peace in Jesus."

Captain Hansen thought for a moment. "Father, I'm a military man, and I just can't seem to pin Jesus down."

"Therein lies the beauty of Christ. Read as far as you wish into His Word and the boundaries of the Scripture constantly expand with new significance."

"I'm not much of a reader, Father. I learn best by example. Words don't seem to. . . ."

Again the Father lifted his hand for silence, his serenity quickened by inspiration. "My son, the Lord has directed you to us. If you profit by example, by all odds the most convincing example of a life lived by pure faith is lived right within these walls by the late Brother Johannis."

Even Steward, the grammarian, would have had trouble parsing that sentence, Hansen thought, as the Father continued. "Brother Johannis lost his belief in God, but the power of his faith is such that I am proposing him for canonization while he still lives, and my proposal has been taken so seriously that the devil's advocate is arriving within the fortnight from Rome to adjudge his claim to sainthood. Brother Johannis lives in a belief in the absence of life. His cell is only three doors down, adjoining our

young lady's bathroom. Captain, would you care to view the living remains of our late Brother Johannis?"

Nothing seemed cranky about the layout, Pope thought, as he sat on the edge of the bed and took off his shoes. "You're a gentleman," the girl said.

"When there's time, I like to be considerate," he said, "and it seems from the activity around here that you've got all night. What's happening in New York?"

"This town is so dead, mister, that I'm thinking of going back to Omaha for action."

"Are you a native of Omaha?"

"You bet."

"I dated a girl, once, in Omaha," he told her, "but she was a judo artist who didn't take kindly to my approach." He threw his eyes out of focus and felt her thigh. Her muscle tone was good but, considering her work, not exceptional. "You don't press nerves and all that, do you?"

"No," she said. "Glands is my trade. Mister, there's something about you. I'd be grateful if you'd hold off long enough for me to do a little exercise."

This is getting cranky, Pope thought, slipping off the last leg of his trousers. The girl was lying behind him, stretched out. Her fingers fluted over the small of his back and walked around his thigh in a rippling caress. He twisted around and leaned back, looking down at her. "What kind of exercise?"

"Just this, a finger exercise. My piano teacher showed it to me. It's sort of a mood piece."

She walked her fingertips around his waist, fluttering over his navel. Her eyes were closed, her lips moistened. One knee was cocked and waving slowly from side to side. Pope understood. This was her holy time, and she was rapt. He joined her, playing his own mood piece on her stomach, an *andante* supporting her *allegro*. When their silent music swelled to a crescendo, became a duet on organs, she said, "I'm ready."

Pope preferred professionals to amateurs even though he appreciated the enthusiasm of the latter. This girl had passion controlled by skill. She restrained his thighs with her hands while she parried his thrust with a back arch, teasing

herself; and her avidity was tempered by a peculiar reluctance, an almost virginal shyness, as if fear wished to evade what her desire wished to pursue. Her performance went beyond commercial art.

Now he was a boy, once more, conning the kitchen maid in his first tryst when his parents were gone from the house. He remembered the exquisite compliment Beulah paid a stripling when she slipped a dab of butter into her palm and went with him to his secret "cave" under the muscadine vines along the back-yard fence. His nostrils tingled again to odors of musk and morning glories, and the memory triggered an end to dalliance. With an ingasp and an upflip, the girl met his downsurge and Pope moaned, "Oh, Mama!"

Those were the last words of John Pope.

The girl from Omaha was weeping softly when a big blonde, dressed in a kimono, entered from the next room to help disengage the body. "Marge," she said to the blonde, I mortally hated to see that boy go."

"You mean you hated to see him mortally go," Marge said, rolling Pope onto his back. "Check his wallet while I wrestle his pants on."

"He was a gentleman," Thelma said, "to the very end."

"They could be gentle, when they wanted something, and he died happy. Look at that expression on his face. Now, brace up, honey. We got to get this thing out of here."

Thelma braced up and reached into Pope's coat pocket as Marge slid on his shoes. She glanced through his wallet and turned to Marge. "Say, this rube was a G-man!"

"That explains it," Marge said. "He was weaseling his way. Thelma, I'll bet that gorilla out front knew he was a Fed. If he don't come out, Big Fats will come in. And that gorilla ain't no gentleman. . . ." She slapped Pope's shoe heel softly against her palm. "Jeez, honey, I've got one helluvan idea. We're closing this joint, tonight. Load yourself with a double charge."

She tossed the shoe on the bed and walked to the window, leaning out. Five stories below, a garbage truck with a scoop and a closed top was parked in the alley. Marge took a penny from her kimono and tossed it below.

When the coin struck the hood of the truck, the driver leaned out and looked up. Marge held her finger to her nose, then spiraled it in front of her, and spread her hands in the "safe" position of a baseball umpire.

She watched as the truck drove away.

"Why'd you do that?" Thelma asked.

"Here, lend me a hand with this stiff. I want you to go out and tell the gorilla you'd like to give him one for the road, then give me the signal when you're ready for the lift-off."

"Now, *that* I won't mind," Thelma said, lifting Pope's legs. "But what'll we do with two bodies?"

"Leave that to me, honey. When I'm through with this bastard, the FBI'll disown him. Mother Carey ought to give up a medal for this night's work!"

"To paraphrase Santayana, Captain, 'Living, Brother Johannis made it easier for us to die, and dying he has made it easier for us to live.' "

The Father Superior opened the door on a cell uncarpeted and barely furnished. On the right wall, a candle burned below an icon of Mary and reflected onto the face of a large electric clock above, which was stopped at four thirty.

When the Father turned on the electric bulb that dangled from the center of the ceiling, Hansen saw a hooded monk lying on a board bunk, his right side against the wall beneath a narrow window. His hands lay folded over a heavy crucifix on his stomach. A bottle of fluid attached to the wall was connected to the monk's right arm by a tube, but his eyes were open and he was not breathing.

"He's been in this position for ten years," the Father explained. Leaning over the body, he lifted a hand mirror from the window ledge, placed it beneath the monk's nostrils, and held it. No moisture clouded the glass.

"He's breathing," the Father said, "but his respiration is so slow it doesn't form moisture. His pulse is undetectable by standard methods, and his body temperature is far below normal. Any doctor, giving him a casual inspection, would write out his death certificate. But look!"

He turned the mirror and took an alarm clock from the

ledge, wound it, set the alarm, and placed it, ticking, on a strip of bare planking to the left of the monk's mid-section. He pulled the alarm release and stepped back.

"We don't perform this experiment often, only when needed as an example for some brother who is troubled in his faith. It'll not be performed again until the devil's advocate arrives from the Vatican."

"You said Johannis was a backslider, Father," Hansen said. "Yet you use him as an example of faith."

"Indeed, he was an apostate, but he had to have something to live by, so he decided to believe in the passage of time. He set himself a code of behavior governed by obedience to clocks, a system of horological ethics, I suppose; but there occurred an incident which we at the monastery like to think of as a miracle. One night an electrical storm blew up, and the power supply failed. Brother Johannis' wristwatch stopped at the precise moment the power failure stopped the wall clock. . . ."

Suddenly, the Father's words were interrupted by the ringing of the alarm clock beside the monk.

"Watch this," he whispered.

Slowly, the monk's left arm lifted. Moving at the elbow in an outward arc, holding to its horizontal plane, the lower arm jerked downward and outward. When the arm was fully extended, the hand was poised over the plunger of the alarm. For a moment, the palm was held rigid above the plunger. Then the hand dropped, pressing down the plunger. As Hansen stared, the hand, in one movement, jackknifed back into position and fell onto the crucifix.

Brother Johannis had shut off the alarm.

As the Father Superior returned the alarm clock to the ledge, he explained. "Brother Johannis awakened as usual the morning after the storm. When he lifted his eyes to the wall, he saw the clock was stopped at four thirty. Glancing at his watch, he saw that it was also stopped at four thirty. To you, this would mean little other than an unusual coincidence, perhaps, but to the believer, Brother Johannis, it meant time had stopped. According to his faith, if time had stopped, then Brother Johannis was stopped. In short, he was dead. He's unique in this respect

—all other men die from the passage of time, but Brother Johannis died from a cessation of time.

"When the Father Superior, my predecessor, came to view the corpse, he noticed the clock and the watch, and his suspicions were aroused. We have a brother who is a doctor, and he was called in. He agreed with the Father Superior that it was a case of suspended animation, and the doctor hit upon the idea of reviving Brother Johannis with an alarm clock. It was then that this discovery was made."

The Father Superior stood in the center of the room to turn off the lights. As he spoke, his voice carried through the small chamber.

"Brother Johannis has faith that he is dead. We have not tried to undermine his faith. In his condition, his total cost of living amounts only to his cell space and two bottles of glucose water a year, which he eliminates by evaporation. We could keep his weight constant on even less glucose if we did not use him in demonstrations, but he's worth the extra glucose. As an example of the power of faith, he means infinitely more to the brotherhood dead than alive. Alive he was an execrable workman and a poor example of the power of faith."

"Should you comment on his aptitude in his presence, Father?" Hansen asked.

"No matter. If his faith is pure, he is truly dead and cannot hear me; if he hears, he's faking and so of poor faith. But the evidence is in his favor," the Superior added as he turned off the light. "He's lain there for ten years and has no bedsores."

Returning down the hall, the Father continued: "What you've seen points out an obvious fact—there is no limit to the power of faith. You may even believe in your wife and daughter if you wish. If they betray you, you can regard their betrayal as merely a test of faith. . . . Well, I must excuse myself and go meditate. I know you'll forgive me, Captain."

He stood for a moment, reflecting, with his hand on the doorknob. "The communications shack is around the corner, first door on the left. You know, you have to admire those FBI boys. They're certainly thorough. They've

installed one phone in the entire monastery, and they've tapped it."

Hansen felt more at ease after his talk with the Father. Obviously, there was more to religion than he had assumed. Still, it was a pleasure to enter the communications shack with the Navy blue lights and the directed activity.

"Captain, your boy is phenomenal," Steward greeted him. "He's completed two hundred and twelve separate remarks without a dangling modifier, disagreement in number, or prepositional ending."

Hansen was pleased with the professor's enthusiasm but more concerned with the progress of the courtship. Hansen had not read the evening's paper, but he had seen headlines when they drove through Charlottesville: Dr. Carey had announced for the Presidency.

"Very well, Professor," he said, "but how's he doing with the feminine gender?"

"McCormick hasn't made his move yet. Mostly, he's listening, letting her adjust to his presence. Listen."

Steward turned up a speaker. Cora Lee was talking.

". . . that's real sweet of you. John, who brung me here, told me I was pretty, too. Course, you're the only two boys I even saw since Mama took me out of school, so I reckon I'm two up and two down, as they say in baseball. You ever play baseball?"

"Some. What else this John say to you?"

Hansen rejoiced at the jealousy edging McCormick's question. Young love never ran smoothly.

"Who's John?" Hansen asked.

"John Pope." One of the hooded FBI men answered from the blue shadows, and Hansen turned his attention back to the receiving set.

"Oh, he told me you were coming courting and that you were going to be the next President of the United States."

"Well, Cora Lee, if he told you that, I may just as well out with it. I'm here to court. I'd like to talk to your papa about you."

"You can't, Angus. They got him in Atlanta."

"What's he in for?"

"Ten years. He's done done five . . . but somebody talked

to Mama about you, and she called me on the telephone."

"What'd she say?"

"She says if it's the Lord's will and the government's doing, them taking another Barnard won't matter much. She say's they're willing to pay off the mortgage if I let you come a-courting. She said she was willing if I was, but it doesn't matter to her, win, lose, or draw."

"Looky, Cora Lee. They got you going to school up here and me going to school down in Washington. Why don't you come down and let's go to school together?"

"That wouldn't be right proper, Angus. I've not been spoke for."

"Well, I'm speaking for you, now, Cora Lee."

"Angus, I really appreciate you saying that, but I don't rightly think I can accept."

Here was a frightening new wrinkle, and Hansen alerted. If this mountain girl turned down the world's greatest lover, then Lothario X was a false profile, Primrose had erred, Operation Chicken Pluck would fail, Mother Carey would have herself a Presidency, and, after that, Ultimate Thule.

"Cora Lee, this beats me. Are you already spoke for?"

"That's natural colloquial English, for these parts," Steward assured himself, aloud.

"Well, not exactly," Cora Lee said.

"Pope must have locked in on her." A Federal monk spoke from the shadows. "That Pope could have the Presidency for four terms if he was willing to take a desk job."

Pride of organization was talking, Hansen knew, but something had gone wrong with this courtship, and the same dumb amazement he felt was in McCormick's voice. "Cora Lee, how can a girl be spoke for not exactly?"

"I never been spoke for, but I've done been spoke for to."

There was an astonished silence, and McCormick blurted, "Who you done been spoke for to with?"

"His name's puddin' and tame," her voice lilted from the speaker. "Ask me again and I'll tell you the same."

"Cora Lee," McCormick said, "I can beat the time of any man lest you're promised to some boy right here in

these hills. Where's this boy you done been spoke for to with at?"

A thud from Steward's direction caused Hansen to glance over and down, to see that the grammarian operative had toppled from his stool. In the blue light of the radio shack, Hansen could see the eyes staring into infinity, and he knew faulty grammar had killed the grammarian. A heart which had beat through three prepositions at the end of a sentence had been stopped by four.

CHAPTER 12.

CAPTAIN HANSEN preferred hiatuses to the topic he knew would arise on the trip to the airport. With Admiral Primrose, alone, he could have kept the subject tabled. With Defense joining them, the conversational mixture grew volatile. When Dalton Lamar decided to hitchhike with Defense, Hansen knew that a ewe grazing on a roadside lawn would trigger the flash point.

Since the Secretary of the Interior was hitchhiking, Defense assigned him the pull-down seat forward, across from the captain. As they pulled away from the Pentagon, Interior said to Hansen, "I hear you witnessed a tragedy last night."

"Yes, sir. One of the FBI men suffered a heart attack while monitoring the young people's conversation."

"Whooo-eee! What were they talking about?"

Providentially, Defense intervened to change the subject. "Gentlemen, I got a directive from State this morning, allocating percentages from the preinventory allotment. State figures twenty percent for State for arranging the allocation, ten percent to Agriculture for handling the legwork, ten percent to Interior, and sixty percent to Defense. Any surplus goes to the Senate to be disposed of as the majority leader sees fit, by order of the President."

"How do you figure sixty percent for Defense, Ogie?" Dalton Lamar seemed aggrieved.

"Well, Dalt," Defense said, "Labor canceled out when Frumenti was committed to Saint Elizabeths, this morning. So we figured ten percent for administrative overhead, ten percent for Navy, ten percent for Army, ten percent for Air, and twenty percent for the Marines."

"Twenty percent for the Corps!" Dalton Lamar exploded. "But the gyrenes are a part of the Navy."

"There was that surplus from Labor," Pickens explained, "and, well—you know Porky."

As the two civilians discussed the budget, Hansen's thoughts returned to religious problems. If he accepted faith, he would have to take up Bible-reading for Jesus and finish Mahan for the High Command. If the Russian girls went to the General Staff, as Helga suspected, he would certainly go for his family. Of course, if no Russian girls came off the plane. . . . He didn't care to think about that.

When Defense's party arrived at the officials' gate, there was a large group of civilians behind restraining ropes. For a secret trade mission, it was well attended, and Hansen voiced the observation to General Flugel who waddled up under a load of medals in his dress blues with the red stripe down the leg. Flugel dismissed the gathering as clerks from State and Agriculture who had learned of the swap when handling the paper work.

Hansen noticed Senator Dubois behind the restraining line and went over to shake hands. Of all present, in or out of uniform, Senator Dubois was the most impressive, with his tall, aristocratic good looks and thatch of white hair. He seemed apologetic for his presence. "I thought I'd just amble over, Cap'n, to see those white ladies cakewalk off the plane."

Dubois's deference and soft accent were pleasant. If all Negroes emulated this one, Hansen thought, there'd be no racial ill will; but Interior was not so pleased by the senator's presence, Hansen found when he returned to the group. "If that watermelon eater so much as whistles," the South Carolinian said, "I'm going to cut me a slice of CASP."

"CASP?" Hansen was happy that Primrose was occupied

with State, for there had been a question mark in his ejaculation.

Interior good-naturedly explained. "It's a word sociologists invented. It means colored Anglo-Saxon Protestant."

"I didn't know you felt so strongly about color," Hansen remarked.

"I didn't, until this weekend," Lamar said. "I had this little girl down in Alexandria, and she had this thing against light rays and radio waves. Recluse, I reckon you'd call her. I mean, she was an insulated recluse. Never went out into sunlight or starlight, never listened to radio or watched television. Ben, she wouldn't even talk on the telephone for fear she'd catch cancer of the eardrums. We used to correspond by notes; but that little girl was really something."

Dalton Lamar sighed. A mystic look of loss came into his eyes. "Last week, her colored maid slipped her a capsule and Saturday morning, I got my 'Dear John' note, by special delivery."

"Too bad," Captain Hansen commiserated.

"Well, I got a plan, Walloper. Old Ack-Ack's going to help." He looked over at his older friend as if he expected a life preserver to come sailing out of Defense's pocket, and he looked so young and lost and pathetic that Hansen turned away to join Primrose and Flugel and rid himself of compassion in the emotionally aseptic presence of the military.

The admiral was explaining to Flugel that he had lost his plea to billet the girls in the Marine barracks because the Russian ambassador had insisted that they spend their first night at the Red embassy. Flugel's language drove Hansen closer to State, who was now talking to Interior in a fatherly voice so heavily accented that Hansen had to strain to understand some of his words.

"There are villages on the Kane Basin," State was explaining, "and the bushmen of the Kalahari and the Carstenz Topper areas, but the largest uncontaminated area is in the triangle between the Lanak La, Shaba Gompa, and the Nanda Devi. Wouldn't you agree, Defense? But Lanak La is a pass and it's over eighteen thousand feet up."

A Marine enlisted man with a walkie-talkie came up, saluted the admiral, and said, "Sir, the tower reports it's clearing the field for the Ilyushin Six twenty."

"Cross your fingers, Captain," the admiral said. "If the girls come out, you'll still have a home to go home to."

"I'll have a home, sir."

"I'll wager a day's leave, Friday, against a day's work, Saturday," Primrose said.

"Admiral, you've just put a three-day pass to Virginia Beach in my pocket."

"There she's blowing," Porky Flugel bellowed.

Dipping below a veil of high haze and banking lazily, the giant six-jet Ilyushin hove into view, her red star glinting in Maryland's sunlight. With engines screaming, it nosed down as if the pilot were flying into the ground, but it swooped at the bottom of the dive, canted its wing angle, and dropped as lightly to the runway as a leaf fluttering onto a pool of water.

"Jesus," Flugel said, "that pilot lands like a ballet dancer."

Engines muted to sibilance, the aircraft, clumsy, trundled toward the gate, and as it neared the waiting officials, the Marine band broke into a slow-tempo version of *La Marseillaise*.

Slowly, the door opened. From its emptiness, a lattice extended and unfolded, frame after flopping frame, until a long ramp reached from the door of the plane to the ground. With a swish, a red carpet rolled from the plane's interior down the entire length of the ramp and a good six yards beyond. It was the famous Russian red-carpet treatment, where the Reds furnished their own carpet.

A man wearing a silk hat, striped trousers, and carrying a wicker basket filled with bottles stepped to the doorway and blew a kiss to the crowd.

"Harjanian's brought his own vodka," Primrose said.

Harjanian, if such it were, bowed with a flourish to the waiting officials, swept his hand toward the doorway in a gesture of fanfare, and stepped back into the plane.

Out of the dark interior walked a woman. The band stopped, precisely in the middle of a bar. Blond and regally tall, she stood in the sunlight, motionless for a

moment. Her proportions matched her height, a fact made instantly obvious by the red leotard she wore. Hansen hated to admit it, but this Russian was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, and when she began her progress down the gangplank, she floated with incredible buoyancy.

"Isn't that Alicia Mayonovna?" State turned to Primrose.

Primrose wasn't listening. A second woman had emerged, a statuesque redhead, whose litheness beneath her leotard was that of a controlled panther. Even the neck muscles, which threw her proud head back, were beautiful. Hansen had to catch his breath as he revised his judgment on the first woman. Admiral Primose almost yelped, "Marushka!"

Marushka restarted the band, but the tune was different.

They came in slow procession, all moving with ineffable grace, all beautiful, and Hansen was forced to comment aloud, "By heavens, Admiral, these girls are lovely!"

"They should be," the admiral snapped. "They're the front row of the Bolshoi Ballet."

"What do you make of this, Sug?" Acworth Cobb turned to the admiral.

"Negative-negative," Primrose snapped. "Harjanian is one smart Armenian."

There were more than ten, there were twenty, floating past a Marine guard which stood rigidly at attention.

"He'll want our whole wheat crop," Cobb added.

"I'll get Agriculture as soon as he lands," Interior said, "and have him call Canada."

"I suppose, Admiral," Hansen said, "this means my Friday."

"Captain, you can have Thursday and Friday, with my blessing. But, Captain, eat sparingly of wheat products."

"Well, Sug," State said, "I reckon this means we'll have to throw something to the Senate and House. There's twenty of them."

With his next remark, Primrose scratched the High Command from the list of contenders for Hansen's faith.

"Senate is already in. The President made an arrangement with Senator Dubois that if he waived his claim to

any of the first ten on the initial shipment, he would have first choice on any over ten, half to him and half to the remainder of the legislature."

"Hellfire," State said, "old Honeysuckle's done cut himself in on five prime pieces."

Helga had been right! Those eager lads in the Marine band, now lustily playing away on *A Hot Time in the Old Town,* had been betrayed, sold out to the lechery of their own officers and the government. With absolute certainty, Hansen knew there would be no apportionment of the remaining shipment to enlisted personnel, unless the Russians sent 480 female lepers.

Four hundred and seventy-nine!

"Look at that!" Flugel bellowed. "Sug, I called my shot. I said she landed like a G - - d - - - - ballet dancer."

The twenty-first female stood in the doorway of the plane. She was short and broad with a Mongol's jet-black hair, and pinned upon her leotard, above a magnificent left breast, were the silver wings of an aviator.

"Oglethorpe," Flugel turned to Defense. "Dubois can't take fifty percent of an odd number without splitting her down the middle. I want that stuff!"

A surprisingly considerate Secretary of Defense turned to the captain. "Ben, you've been keeping your own counsel. Would you like it?"

"I'm positive that I would, sir, but I'm married."

"Very well, Porky. You can share her with Dalt. There's plenty there for both."

Hansen depended on his reflexes to carry him alongside the admiral when the Secretary of the Interior suggested a toast to Mother Russia in the VIP lounge.

After a double bourbon downed quickly to allay his bitterness, Hansen loosened up over a second and discussed with animation the girls whose arrival had brought rationality to these men regarding the so-called men versus women conflict. He was particularly interested in the lady pilot. For him, Helga was the most beautiful woman in the world, but he had to admit that Helga did not have the pelvic development of the little Mongolian aviatrix. The Mongol created a nostalgia in a salt-water sailor for the good old days of hammocks, and after his second double,

he said to Flugel, "You know, General, to me the most attractive girl of them all was your little flygirl."

"By God, Ben, I agree with you That madam had 'em."

"There's no true beauty without some hugeness of proportion," Defense said.

"Of course, since she came out late, she stood alone," Hansen rationalized aloud, and then a thought struck him: These men had taken his trust in women somewhat lightly. Now, he would turn tables on them and play the pessimist.

"Harjanian never came out," Hansen spoke slowly, "because the little Mongol went back to strangle him with his own scarf. That's why she came out last."

"She was changing into leotards," Flugel said.

"No, sir," Hansen insisted. "The flygirl's on Vita-Lerp—spiked with hashish."

"Ben might have something," Primrose said. "Porky, you look like a messenger boy. Grab a bottle of vodka from the bar and bull your way aboard the plane to deliver it to Harjanian, as a gift from me."

Well, Hansen thought, twenty minutes later as he climbed into the limousine and turned down the folding seat, he couldn't put his faith in these boys, but you didn't have to approve of something to enjoy it. He was reminded of the Sunday-school teacher who went to the motel when the limousine's telephone buzzed.

Nobody called that number unless it was urgent business, Hansen knew, but whose business? Defense's, Interior's, Primrose's, or had Helga's loyal partisans uncovered a secret message in a ladies' washroom and were passing it along to him for immediate action?

It was Primrose's business, and Primrose's words were being scrambled as they came out of his mouth. It was a weird experience for Hansen, listening to a spoken, scrambled message.

Suddenly Primrose quit speaking and held the phone in front of him, looking at it in disbelief. Still holding the phone, he leaned over Defense, picked up the speaking tube to the driver, and said, "To the White House, driver. And use the siren. No, belay the siren!"

With a lurch, the limousine bucked forward, and the siren opened up. "I said, 'Belay the siren,' driver."

"Your permission, Sug," Defense said, practically tearing the speaking tube from the admiral's grip.

"Turn off the siren, driver."

The siren stopped.

"He's not Navy," Defense said. "He thought you meant belabor the siren. Give me the phone, Admiral. That was Piagorsky, wasn't it?"

Piagorsky, Hansen recalled, was the name of the Russian admiral, the naval attaché to the Russian embassy, who had approved Queen Swap.

"Yes. He was asking for asylum. But the line went dead."

"So did Piagorsky," Defense said. "Operator, this is the Defense Secretary. Get me the White House, top priority . . . I see. . . . Thank you."

He hung up. "It's busy. The President is talking to State."

"You pass my apartment, Oglethorpe," Interior said. "Could you drop me off?"

"Certainly, Dalt. Would you open the door just before we stop? Driver, slow down long enough for Mr. Lamar to exit when we pass his apartment."

"Sug," Dalton Lamar said, "doesn't a BOAC leave for New Delhi at noon?"

"At twelve fifteen," the admiral answered. Then, he asked, "Operation Abominable Snowman?"

"Yes, Sug. I think it's my best bet. . . . Ogie, will you tell Acworth to turn in my resignation to the President. Give Ack-Ack my warmest affection and tell him I've gone to hunt yeti."

"Certainly, Dalt," Defense answered, and Hansen could swear that there was a mist in Pickens' eyes. "Farewell, my old and loyal friend. Go with God."

"I'd like to, Ogie, but She doesn't want me. Good-bye, y'all."

He opened the door and jumped as the car slowed, waved once, and the car was gunned forward as the phone rang.

Defense picked it up. "Yes, sir. . . . Yes, sir. . . . Yes, sir."

He hung it up.

"Alicia is the new ambassadress. The ambassador and Admiral Piagorsky both died of heart attacks, simultaneously. State's on his way, but Dem wants you as alternate interpreter, and me as Russologist. Do you think we should cancel all leaves?"

"Not until we've talked to Ivan, if he's still alive."

"I hope he's sober," the Defense Secretary said.

Although Hansen was confused, mention of canceled leaves alerted him to a military situation, and he said, "Shall I remain in Washington over the weekend, Admiral?"

"No, Captain," Primrose shook his head. "A bet's a bet. Besides, you may be our only listening post."

"You had better reread *Lady Macbeth,* Sug," Pickens said. "It's an appropriate drama for these parlous times."

"Absolutely not," the admiral said. "Even Prospero could not have conjured up the Bolshoi Ballet over one weekend."

Privately, Hansen felt that both men were using poor timing for a literary discussion as they hurtled toward the White House, but both lapsed into silence and the silence continued until they pulled up before the building to park behind the Secretary of State's limousine, which had arrived before them.

State was waiting for them.

"We'll go directly to the basement," he said. "The President's there, with Mr. Powers."

They were walking into the White House as they talked, and they passed through the reception room, down a hall to a high-speed elevator. At the bottom, the elevator opened onto a small anteroom, and facing them across the anteroom was an open door leading into the White House bomb shelter. The door was of thick steel, resembling the door of a bank vault. After they walked in, Defense started to close it, but the President called from inside, "Leave the door open, Mr. Pickens."

They passed through another anteroom which revealed a small lavatory through an open door to the right. On the left was a cubicle containing radio equipment. Ahead of them, in the room they were entering, was a table surrounded by chairs. Against the far wall was a settee under

a battle lamp. The interior was done in battleship gray, and the only spot of color was a bright-red phone on the table.

The President and Mr. Powers were seated on the settee.

"Gentlemen," the President spoke without preliminaries, "draw up chairs. Mr. Powers and I were discussing a matter when the late Russian ambassador called. From there, you know the developments. Incidentally, Captain Hansen, General Flugel called from the airport. Harjanian was strangled aboard the plane, as, I understand, you predicted. Under less morbid conditions, I might compliment you for your insight. But the picture is even blacker, gentlemen. Mr. Powers has been analyzing the missing persons reports from police departments throughout the nation for the past two weeks, and has come up with some sinister statistics. Ordinarily, women exceed men in those reports by something like an eighty-to-twenty proportion. Last week, ninety percent of the reports were made by men reporting men missing. Furthermore, last night Mr. Powers lost a key operative under very suspicious circumstances. It would seem, gentlemen, that the feminists have commenced the final solution of the male problem, and I am ordering all cabinet heads and the High Command to practice celibacy."

"But Piagorsky and the ambassador were realists, Mr. President," State said. "How could they. . . ."

"Russian women are realists, too," the President snapped. "And, Captain Hansen, see to it that McCormick refrains."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"At the moment," the President continued, "our most pressing problem is to determine if the Russian monosexual movement is from the outposts inward. If so, our best defensive measure would be to revive Operation Queen Swap."

"What *is* Operation Queen Swap, Mr. President?" Mr. Powers was pleading.

"Our military forces occupy Russia, Mr. Powers, while their military forces occupy the United States. Now, I'm going to call Premier Gregorovitch to ascertain, indirectly of course, if he is truly in control of the military apparatus in his country."

"Mr. President," Mr. Powers' face had reddened visibly, "are you suggesting that we turn this country over to the Russians?"

"It's more of an exchange of countries," the President explained. "Both occupying armies can enforce conventional breeding by military means, and the head of neither state is then called upon to violate his country's constitution."

President Habersham turned back to his advisers from whom he had asked no advice. "If the premier is not aware that his embassy has been taken over by the monosexists, this will indicate that the Russian feminists are moving inward from an outer perimeter."

"Sir," Mr. Powers interrupted brusquely, "while we're over there being subverted by their women, their men will be over here subverting our women."

"At the moment, our interests are more fundamental. Mr. Cobb, will you call the premier."

"If he picks up that phone, I'll resign," Mr. Powers said.

"Please reconsider, Mr. Powers. Mr. Pickens, will you turn on the conference switch. I wish to hear every word."

Secretary Cobb spoke into the phone in Russian when a male voice answered. "He'll be here, directly," Mr. Cobb said.

"I resign," said Mr. Powers.

"Please enunciate clearly, Mr. Cobb. Mr. Powers, since you won't reconsider, your resignation is accepted. I'll notify Disbursing to give you a full day's pay."

"When I get through with the press . . ." Mr. Powers began.

State interrupted. "I can hear his footsteps, sir. They seem steady."

Defense turned on the conference switch and the voice of the Russian premier came into the room.

"Your pay stops at eleven forty-five, Washington time," the President was saying, even as State commenced to translate.

"How are you, Mr. President, and how are things in Mexico and Canada?"

"Not good, Mr. Premier. Not good in Canada and worse in Mexico. How is Albania?"

"It was never good in Albania."

"How are things in Moscow, Mr. Premier?"

"Mr. President, I am an old man, but a fire still smolders. The young girls, the beautiful young girls, walk through the Parks of Recreation and Culture, but they are for themselves. In Sevastopol, I have done much for Sevastopol, one would think that they would love me more in Sevastopol. . . ."

State quit interpreting and said, "He seems to be wandering, sir."

"Just interpret, State. Don't editorialize," the President snapped.

"I summer in Sevastopol. . . ."

"After forty years in the bureau," Mr. Powers said, "I. . . ."

"Mr. Powers, you're not supposed to be in this room. This is the War Room. Only officials of the government are permitted. Please close the door on your way out."

Ashen-faced, Mr. Powers rose and staggered for the exit. Hansen thought the President rather abrupt in his dismissal of Mr. Powers, but this mild-mannered President was obviously mild in manner only. Hansen's attention was drawn back to the flow of Russian and State's interpreting.

"And the young girls look only at the flowers. They do not look at me, their premier. Mr. President, are you holding a conference?"

"No, Mr. Premier. I'm listening."

"They have been debating in the supreme council, Mr. President, and they are not yet finished. The decision may not necessarily go in our favor, Mr. President, yours and mine."

"It's rather late for a meeting of the supreme council. It's almost midnight in Moscow, isn't it, Mr. Premier?"

"Yes, Mr. President. The *shoudas* are growing longer. . . ."

"What's a *shouda,* State? Please interpret."

"*Shouda,* suh. Thangs seen in daylaht except at hah noon."

"Admiral, you interpret," the President said. "Else, I'll need an interpreter for the interpreter."

Under stress, the President could be rough, Hansen realized, as the admiral took over, translating smoothly.

"But I do not hate them, Mr. President. My mother was a woman. . . ."

Suddenly, the voice paused. Hansen thought he heard a sob, and when the voice returned he could sense its incredulity through the foreign language: "But their fathers were men."

"Is he drunk?" the President whispered.

Primrose spat something in Russian, and the President barked, "I'm asking you, not him!"

"I'm asking him," the admiral snapped back, "because he's a tippler and he and I both know it."

"He calls everyone comrade when he's drunk," State said.

"No, Mr. Cobb," the voice of the premier came soddenly in English. "Not my wife."

"I'm sorry, Ivan," the Secretary of State said, in English.

"Let *me* talk!" the President shouted.

"Yes, I'm drunk with sadness," the premier continued in Russian, "for the tears I cannot shed would create another Volga. But I don't blame you, Mr. President. We treated them as equals over here, too. But they are not our equals. They are our. . . ."

There was a loud report followed by sudden silence. As the men in the bunker looked at each other in surmise, the voice of a woman, lilting, speaking English with an Oxford accent, filled the room.

"Maria Katerinovna, h'yo! I am to inform you that the new premieress of all the Russias is Ailya Ailyanovna. Henceforward, would you direct communications through diplomatic channels. Our embassy in Washington will assist you in transmitting messages."

There was a click and total silence.

"They shot him," the President said.

"Sir," Admiral Primrose said, "may I call your attention to the fact that 'Ailya Ailyanovna' means Ailya, the daughter of Ailya. They've removed the father's name from the surnames."

Helga might have been incorrect in assuming the move-

ment was purely local, Hansen thought. Unless it was a coincidence, female attitudes were the same all over the world, for Joan Paula's letter had said, "If we were logical, I would be Joan Paula Helgasdotter."

The President stood up. "Gentlemen, the Sino-Russian bloc has fallen. Once more, the United States is the last great hope of earth, and the last great hope of the United States is the McCormick-Dubois ticket. Let us go and replay the tape."

Following behind the President, they walked out of a War Room which was useless now, forever, except as a storage bin, but from force of habit, the Secretary of State locked the door.

Walking toward the elevator, the President remarked, "Such petty defiance. Mr. Powers left the door open."

As they squeezed into the elevator, Defense turned to State. "Acworth, Dalton Lamar asked me to ask you to tender his resignation to the President. He has gone to hunt yeti."

State turned to the President. "Mr. President, the Secretary of the Interior has resigned for urgent personal reasons."

"Just when I need to worry about appointments least!"

Despite his turmoil, Hansen admired the calmness which permitted these men to observe the chain of command in a crowded elevator and after such terrifying news. Even so, he thought Mr. Powers had been rather shabbily treated by all present, and the President's remark about the door had been unfair. If Mr. Powers had wished to spite the President, it would have been far more inconveniencing to leave the elevator topside rather than send it back down, as Mr. Powers had done. Leaving the door open had not been an act of defiance.

Hansen's assumption was correct. Mr. Powers had never left the War Room. Nauseated by the President's footsy-playing with the Reds, he had rushed to the lavatory. When the light went out and the door clicked shut, Mr. Powers was locked in the War Room eighty feet beneath the White House. His only means of communication with the outside was a telephone to Soviet Russia.

CHAPTER 13.

UPSTAIRS, as they gathered in the office to play back the tapes, a red light glowed on the President's desk console. He flicked on a switch and Mr. Powers' voice came clearly into the room, ". . . directing you to call the President of the United States and tell him to check the basement."

"One moment, Mr. Powers, the premieress would like a word with you."

"Dear me, Mr. Powers." The voice was lilting and friendly, without an accent. "Did they forget and lock you in the War Room?"

"That's classified information. Who are you?"

"Ailya Ailyanovna, premieress of all the Russias. You knew me as Ailya Halapoff when you detailed John Pope to woo me."

"Oh, yes. I recall. Pope always spoke highly of you."

Hansen caught the significance of her remarks. The premieress was speaking to an old friend, off the record and informally. A security break of major proportions had been dropped into the President's lap.

"He spoke highly of you, Mr. Powers." Her voice grew suddenly gentle. "How is John?"

"John's dead."

"John Pope is dead? For heaven's sake! How?"

"He was killed trying to make love to a gorilla."

"My goodness! Where on earth did he find a gorilla?"

"It was a human gorilla. A goon."

"A male?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"That John Pope! He'd try anything. But you, Mr. Powers. You are calling me, asking me to deliver a message to your President, yet you often called me a Commie rat."

"Well, you're a friend of John Pope's, and you understand, Miss Halapoff, that. . . ."

"Premieress Ailyanovna, if you please, Mr. Powers."

"Premieress Ailyanovna, you understand, there was nothing personal in my calling you a Commie rat."

"Of course, I understand, Mr. Powers." Her voice was low and gentle, almost motherly. "But, just a moment, Mr. Powers, I want you to hear something."

There was a silence, and then a sound, far away and muffled, reminding Hansen of Brother Johannis' alarm clock, and the voice returned, pleasant, cultivated.

"There! I've just executed the second squad of Company B, Second Platoon, of the Kremlin Guard. I had nothing *personal* against a single man in that squad, or in the whole company which has gone before."

"Are you telling me, Premieress, that you've overthrown the Reds?"

"Definitely."

"Russia is not *Red* anymore?"

"Except in spots, Mr. Powers. The Kremlin courtyard, for instance. Males are being liquidated to conserve grain better fed to pigs. For that reason, I must let you starve, Mr. Powers."

"Now, hold on, Premieress. If Mother Carey wins this election, you and she are going to be at sword's point, and I've dug up a lot of dirt on Mother Carey."

"Mr. Powers, I am a friend of Mother Carey."

"What about her opposition? They're going to run McCormick and Senator Dubois against her. McCormick hasn't been around long enough, but I've got plenty on

Dubois. Premieress Ailyanovna, I've got *two* dossiers on Dubois. He's pushing Medicare for unwed mothers because he's got seventeen illegitimate children, and, get this, Premieress, he's not a Negro. Now, I'm not blowing smoke, Premieress. He's not a Negro, and I've got documented evidence on him in the secret files."

The President leaned over and picked up the red phone.

"Mr. Powers, Admiral Primrose and Captain Hansen will be down to release you. Thank you, Premieress."

When the director, still pale from his ordeal, stood before the President, the President poured him a bourbon and water.

"Mr. Powers, through an incredible juxtaposition of events, you were thrown into a classical position of vulnerability to the Communist brainwashing technique. The woman recognized it immediately. You were alone, without friends, stripped of your dignity and self-respect, impotent, and completely dependent upon her. It was an ordeal few men are called upon to experience in the whole of history. Here, this drink will help you recover your composure."

Mr. Powers had to hold the glass with both hands to keep it from sloshing, but he managed to get the drink down in a series of gulps.

"President Habersham, I was scared down there in that hole. I've got this touch of claustrophobia, and I'm afraid of rats because when I was little we lived in a tenement in Boston and my father used to punish me by locking me in a closet where the rats came and I was frightened of rats because my baby sister had been killed by them and her face half-eaten off in her crib, and my mother just gave up and died when that happened and I was eight and I couldn't understand it when they put her in that hole because we're Catholics and don't believe in cremation, and so I could never marry because I couldn't bear loving anyone I knew would die and be buried in a hole because I loved my mother and I love the bureau because it won't die, but I didn't have the bureau anymore when I was fired and I was down there in that dark hole and I have this touch of claustrophobia—but I told you about that—and those rat thoughts kept coming out of the dark and I was dying in a hole where the rats were and I

wouldn't have told that woman anything but her voice seemed so sweet and gentle and it was the only thing I had to hang onto and I didn't want her to hang up and leave me down there alone in that hole and I would have drained the Potomac for her if she didn't hang up because I have this little touch of claustro. . . ."

"Now, now, Mr. Powers," the President said, "I'm not going to let anyone put you back in that hole, and I'm not going to let any rats bother you because you are an outstanding American patriot, and it's not dishonorable to be frightened. You are in a room filled with terrified men, and we are turning to you for help. I'm asking you, Mr. Powers, not to resign as our director because the country needs you."

Strangely, the President was speaking in a low monotone which seemed to help Mr. Powers get a grip on himself. But Powers spoke, suddenly. "She has taken my conspiracy, Mr. President. That woman has taken my Red conspiracy."

"There is no end to conspiracies, Mr. Powers," the President soothed him. "Dr. Carey has given you a nice sex conspiracy. And we are depending on you, Mr. Powers, to unearth this lethal technique they used to make Mr. Pope so rigid in death. You and I had our little policy disagreement over Operation Queen Swap, but that has been settled in your favor. So I'm asking you to stay on as director because I need your administrative genius and your abilities as a detective. Now, you'll stay on for me, won't you, Mr. Powers? Because I'm your friend and your friend needs you."

"Mr. President," Mr. Powers said, "I'll do anything you ask, and I'll serve as director as long as I live."

Mr. Powers was so touched by the President's kindness that he was weeping.

"Your emotional condition, Mr. Powers, is understandable, but try to control your tears. This tape of your conversation with the premieress could cause great harm to the image of the bureau, so I think it should be safeguarded in your secret files. Don't you agree, Mr. Powers?"

"Yes, sir."

"Of course, your indiscretion has compromised our

Vice Presidential candidate, and we Democrats are pledged to support Senator Dubois. However, there are four Republican senators who form a majority of the nominating committee. Will you give Mr. Powers a list of their names, Mr. Culpepper? If we knew more about these gentlemen, their hobbies and interests, perhaps we might persuade them that it is against the national interest to vote for Senator Dubois. If your information becomes public, our ticket would lose the Negro vote."

Culpepper handed Mr. Powers the list, and the President shoved the telephone across his desk to the director. "Mr. Powers, would you do this for me: Would you call your dossier clerk, Senate Division, and have him send me these four dossiers over immediately, by special messenger?"

"Mr. President, I love you. I'd do anything for you."

It was the most amazing example of compassion in high places Hansen had ever witnessed. After the dossiers were delivered and Mr. Powers left with the tape, the President continued in his praise. "Mr. Powers is an administrative genius who communicates his zeal. Every man in his organization has a hatred of rats."

"Didn't he know that the hot line was officially monitored?" State asked.

"He had been told, but he did not believe," the President said, "so the hot line is, also, unofficially monitored. In his very understandable panic, Mr. Powers forgot that, too."

Oglethorpe Pickens must have had a premonition, for he said, "He who lives by the tap will die by the tap." Then he lifted his glass. "To the soul of Mr. Powers. May God in Her mercy grant him conspiracies of angels."

CHAPTER 14.

IF A MAN had a taste for madness, Naval Plans and Operations was interesting work, and Hansen was cultivating the taste by osmosis. During his four-day leave, he moved his family to a rented house in Georgetown and resumed his new tour of duty with such gusto that he began to bring some of his projects home with him.

Helga had been rather pleased by the manner in which the Russian women had given comeuppance to a High Command which had attempted to seduce them, but Hansen was pleased for a different reason—Russia was eliminated as a nuclear threat. Against such a background his own planning seemed pointless, but orders were orders.

Primrose assigned him targets by geographical areas which amounted, in many instances, to one bomb per state. Arizona was easy to nuke. Oregon presented problems with its conifers, deciduous trees, mountains, and eastern grasslands.

Helga, who had a talent for plans and operations, lent a hand with his homework. She could whip out a slide rule and figure a math problem faster than a computer, and she devised a rule of thumb for the optimum blast

altitude of a nuclear device of any given megatonnage, which got a lot of comment around the office. Name her a state and she could adjust for the flash point of green deciduous wood and snap right back with the optimum altitude. Once the flash point of hardwood in May was reached, conifers and grass went along for the ride.

He called it the Helgalian Method, and around the Pentagon they thought he had named it in honor of his wife. Hansen let the assumption stand. In some circles it would not have been considered proper for a civilian to work on a top-secret project. Technically, Helga was a civilian.

Hansen vaporized Texas, moved on to Oklahoma and Kansas, then jumped to Georgia and Alabama. Finally, with forced nonchalance, Primrose tossed him Virginia, and Hansen coolly accepted the task. Working until midnight with one Polaris missile, he and Helga spotted the drop so accurately that the only spot in the Virginia–northern North Carolina complex where anything bigger than a scarab could survive was a strip of Cape Hatteras.

In many ways, those weeks in early August rising to a natural climax in the joint convention of the Republican and Democratic parties, plus the coming eighteenth birthday of Joan Paula, furnished Hansen with one of the most interesting tours of duty in his naval career.

Cora Lee finally accepted McCormick's suit, and she had been transferred to Camp David to put her closer to Washington and her enthralled suitor. Camp David, now rechristened Honeymoon Cottage, also offered better security facilities since a Marine battalion trained for guard duty was billeted on the property.

He and Helga had located an old-fashioned ranch-type house formerly owned by a landscape artist who would have qualified for the High Command: He had wisteria arbors, morning glory vines, and an intricate box-hedge maze on the large back lot. In addition, there was a studio in the rear of the garage, with the maid's quarters above, and there was one-half of a basketball court in the paved area before the garage, with the basket above the garage doors. Helga was sold on the house, principally because of the studio. She was taking adult education

classes in tailoring and taxidermy, and the studio was ideal for cutting clothes and stuffing squirrels.

Hansen raised an eyebrow at the taxidermy, but Helga explained, "Cutting and sewing in tailoring reinforces my skills in cutting and sewing in taxidermy. As you know, Ben, I'm a conservationist, but I have no time for lobbying or committee meetings. The next best thing to conservation is preservation."

It was a fun house, a beautiful place for a cocktail party unless a guest chanced to wander unescorted into the maze. Since the climax of August occurred on the twenty-ninth with the nominating convention in Baltimore, and since Joan Paula's birthday fell on the same date, Hansen was dragooned into giving a cocktail party to welcome the newly appointed cabinet officers, Secretary of Labor McWhorter Douglas and Secretary of Interior Brockton Hall, who had joined the sessions in the admiral's office.

Dr. Houston Drexel dropped by the Pentagon more and more often. He had once been Dr. Carey's superior in the World Health Organization, and he had blocked her appointment as his successor. "It was too rough for a woman," he told Hansen. "It was a job in which you really had to put out, and she wouldn't."

Helga was pushing her underground activities with vigor and had organized a Georgetown chapter of the Loyal League. Her new vice president was Caron Drake, wife of a lieutenant commander on sea duty, and Caron was frequently around the house on club business with Helga. Sue Benson, who had been made president of the Virginia Beach chapter, an honor she deserved, was also a frequent house guest.

Only one disappointment touched the life of the captain.

Recalling Dalton Lamar's exodus from car and country on the day the Russians lost, he was impressed by the man's use of planning and operations principles in his Operation Abominable Snowman, although the operation, itself, had been premature. As a pastime, Hansen planned himself an operation based on the direst of contingencies. He wrangled his psychological profile from ONI, updating it from his midshipman days with a quick test from Dr. Drexel, and set up his tactical situation:

Situation: Helga is converted to the FEM. Joan Paula is dismissed from college because of self-impregnation. Primrose and the Joint Chiefs defect to Premieress Ailyanovna. President Habersham is a secret agent for Mother Carey who wins the election. The FBI is infiltrated by Lesbians.

He fed the situation and the profile into the Mark 37 with a request for solutions compatible with his profile. When his chief yeoman returned the answer in a sealed envelope, he read with more than mild curiosity:

1. Take vows and enter monastery.
2. Change attitude toward females.
3. Adopt homosexual practices and go drag.

Obviously, the Mark 37 had a malfunction in the personality analysis section. Hansen knew his appreciation of the female could never be altered and as for Number 3, he'd rather be dead than wear a miniskirt. However, the primary recommendation intrigued him. He had been impressed by the spiritual serenity and peace of mind he had found in the Father Superior at the Birch Mountain Monastery, so he dropped a note to the Father inquiring about his health and expressing curiosity about the canonization of Brother Johannis.

Within three days, he had received a penciled reply scrawled in box letters:

GREETINGS TO CAPTAIN B. F. HANSEN, USN. WE REGRET THAT THE FORMER NAVAL FATHER SUPERIOR LOST FAITH AND DIED. BROTHER JOHANNIS ROSE TO HIS OWN TRUMP TO PURSUE THE HARLOT.
BE OF GOOD CHEER FOR OUR SUPERIOR BROTHER DIED A-SHOUTING "WINE DOES MORE THAN MILTON CAN TO JUSTIFY GOD'S WAYS TO MAN."
A BROTHER, FORMER DOCTOR, SAYS OUR BROTHER DIED OF ALCOHOL. SNAKES COILED ROUND HIM. IMPS PITCHFORKED HIM. I HOLD THAT DEVIL'S ADVOCATE FLED OUR ORDER AT SUCH SPEED THAT HE LEFT HIS DEVILS BEHIND. RITES OF EXORCISM HAVE BEEN HELD.

BEWARE THE BABYLONIAN WHORE. SHE IS NIGHER THAN AFORE.

F. S. OT-C

Primrose commiserated with Hansen over the Father Superior's death, but he was not surprised at the choice of his successor.

"You see, Ben," the admiral said, "the monks go there to suffer and do penance for their sins. The Admiral Father Superior ran a taut ship but a happy ship. The monks didn't suffer enough under his command. Probably they developed guilt feelings for not meeting their suffering quotas. You can't suffer a little extra on Wednesday to make up for suffering you missed on Tuesday. God knew the Admiral Father Superior was simply not qualified for command in that area."

Hansen left the discussion feeling strangely comforted. Primrose had the same knack for explaining the command problems of God that the Father Superior had owned for explaining God. Although he continued to regret the brothers' choice of the Admiral Father Superior's successor, Hansen knew it must have been trying on the selection board to thrash out the qualifications of the commander of a monastic operation while observing a vow of silence.

Besides, Hansen consoled himself, things were rough all over. France had elected a Feminist president, and a woman MP rose in the House of Commons to ask a question and she never sat down. Helga shook her head sadly when Sweden went under, and the Reichstag of the newly reunified Germany selected a chancelloress who vowed *die Mutterland* would never again war against Britannia, *la belle France*, and Mother Russia.

On the home front, things were looking up. Moran, of Mississippi, was the new director of the FBI and he had declared a war on crime. Syndicate men were being killed so fast that the newspapers were publishing casualty lists. *Time* said it was a vendetta brought about by the slaying of Mr. Powers when he was gunned down on the steps of the bureau as he hurried back with the tape for the secret files, but Defense kept calling it Pope's War. In

mentioning it during a session, he said he wished Moran would call it off, since his boys were killing McCormick votes.

Hansen's political education was moving apace. As the Friday of convention and cocktails neared, Primrose said the party was timed perfectly because he wanted to be gassed up and near friends when Dubois discovered he had been railroaded out of the Vice Presidency.

"But the President promised him Democratic support, and he has a four to three Republican majority on the nominating committee," Hansen recalled.

"He'll get the Democrat vote," Primrose promised.

Underlying all Hansen's interest was his growing excitement over the coming convention, and Helga was equally agog over the cocktail party. As Defense went, so went State, so Pickens wangled an invitation for Acworth Cobb. Hansen himself invited Drex, Dr. Houston Drexel.

On the day his divorce became final, Drexel dropped by Hansen's office to bend the only sympathetic ear in the military, as he put it. Drexel was depressed, and Hansen had time to listen because he was nuking Arkansas, one of his easier states. Obviously Drexel had a tender feeling for his former wife and was hurt by her loss.

"The feminine withdrawal had nothing to do with our breakup," the doctor volunteered. "I was to blame. Margaret was a girl who liked to sleep in of a morning. But I have this compelling urge for sex at 4:15 every morning, not at 5:05 or 4:20 but 4:15. Every blessed morning, at 4:15, flip, and there it was. Margaret called it her instantaneous insomnia. I'll say this for the girl, she responded loyally because she knew it was either my rest or hers and that my work at Health, Education, and Welfare was important. But her doctor recommended the divorce, and he's male. Divorce him or crack up from loss of sleep, he told her. But Margaret loved me. At the end, she was begging me to resign and move to a later time zone so I'd make my demands at an hour more convenient for her. I might have resigned, but I'd rather be divorced than live in California."

"And what do you do now, Drex, at 4:15 every morning?"

"Forty-five push-ups and then take a cold shower."

His story touched Hansen, and he seemed so lonely that Hansen issued the invitation on the spot.

Hansen had not counted on six guests, since there would be only four girls—Helga, Joan Paula, who would qualify as a grown young lady on the day of the party, Caron, who had agreed to come over and help out, and little Sue Benson who would be a house guest the weekend of the party, up from Virginia Beach on Loyal League business.

Helga was ecstatic. Five cabinet members and the Chief of Staff at one cocktail party easily qualified her as the hostess of the season.

When Hansen arrived home on the Friday, he found the patio festooned with Chinese lanterns, all decks swabbed, and the brightwork in the kitchen gleaming brightly. After conducting his materiel inspection, he lined the personnel up in the living room and found them to his satisfaction in their bright cocktail dresses. He gave them a "Well done," and went into his bathroom to prepare for his guests.

As he shaved and showered, he felt that he had been somewhat remiss because he had failed to compliment Helga on her most marvelous accomplishment of the day, a perfect harmonizing of hostesses.

Commander Drake's wife in a cocktail dress was completely different from the sensual, languid woman he had seen around the house in slacks, and she was in perfect contrast to Sue Benson. Caron Drake's glossy black hair swept almost to her shoulders before it curled under, whereas Sue's red hair was bouffant and curled outward at the bottom. Caron glided and swayed as she walked, while Sue strode and jiggled. Sue's voice rang like bells, and she had a straightforward, spread-leg stance which froze a man with the hope that she would leap, while Caron spoke with a husky sibilance that gave intimacy to her hellos and she beckoned a man with curves and concavities.

With their low-cut necklines, the girls were a study in mammary contrasts: Caron's were lobular and pendant, suggesting Oriental exoticism, whereas Sue's were globular

and pneumatic, suggesting Occidental eroticism. Neither woman could hold a candle to Helga, however, whose cool Nordic beauty exemplified controlled and focused romantic power. Sexually, Helga had command presence.

Yet, apart from romance, Hansen had to admit that Helga's matronly poise was less striking, by ever so little, than their daughter's virginal vitality. He was glad that Joan Paula was taking her first drink under parental supervision.

When Hansen greeted his guests and introduced them to the hostesses, he took avuncular pride in the girls, and fraternal pride in the restrained approval of them by his guests. He had become somewhat concerned about restraint, with male attitudes growing so perfervid, and he feared that Caron might mistake Acworth Cobb's tic for a lewd wink. But Caron acknowledged his introduction so prettily that Hansen knew Helga must have alerted her. She winked back.

Helga served the get-together martini in the living room, and Primrose was so appreciative he challenged the captain to desert bourbon and branch water for the driest martini ever assembled. A suggestion from an admiral was a command, and Hansen switched drinks with unfeigned gusto, noticing that Helga was as delighted by the admiral's compliments as a schoolgirl. Two great command presences were mixing smoothly.

Hansen had briefed his guests that this was his daughter's first drink, and Dr. Drexel, the courtly and handsome Mustang, proposed a ribbon-cutting ceremony. All gathered around as Joan Paula took her first sip, and the admiral inquired, "Now, Joan Paula, doesn't that martini meet with your approval?"

Joan Paula took a second sip to confirm her opinion and shook her head. "No, sir. If I'd wanted a vermouth frappé, I would have ordered one."

Laughter at her repartee broke the ice.

State insisted on bourbon and water for his bread and potatoes drinking, and Caron requested permission to mix his drink to her own secret recipe.

Laws of social gravitation were setting in.

Defense, who had shown an interest in Sue Benson,

even before he met her, sat beside her to discuss his basketball career at the University of Alabama, with Labor adding an occasional detail. Joan Paula sat between HEW and Interior, while Helga zeroed in on the admiral. It was a warm afternoon and the martini pitcher reflected the heat.

The maid was supposed to take over at six, but she was late, and so Hansen, as host, went in and mixed a new batch to Helga's formula which was very sparing on the vermouth, Joan Paula's remark to the contrary notwithstanding. As Hansen dipped the cork from the vermouth bottle into the pitcher of gin, he commented to himself that six weeks ago he might have found the formula somewhat unusual. Duty with the High Command had certainly broadened his viewpoint.

As he refilled glasses from the frosted flagon, he stopped to chat with State, whose drink awaited replenishment by Caron who seemed smitten by the older man.

When Caron delivered and asked State's opinion of the second bourbon and water, he answered, "Ma'am, that's just about the best bourbon and water I ever squeezed my lips around."

"Are you Southerners as slow in everything as you are in talking?" she asked.

"We think smooth and easy, ma'am. Our words sort of cuddle up and hug each other."

"I must say, Mr. Cobb, your mind must be a very warm and loving place."

"On the job, I've got to be cold and hard, but in my heart I reckon I'm the most peace-loving man you ever met, surely the most beauty loving."

"Then, by all means, I must show you Captain Hansen's wisteria arbor before the sun sets, Helga's stuffed animals, and a delightful maze in the back yard with all kinds of delicious little nooks and grottoes."

"Mrs. Drake, there's nothing more attractive to me than the downhang of a drooping wisteria blossom."

"The wisteria's not blooming," Hansen interjected.

"Then, that maze would do right well. I'd just love to see any little nook or grotto you'd be gracious enough to show me, Mrs. Drake."

"Please call me Caron, Mr. Cobb."

"I'd love to. 'Caron' flows like the Oostanaula in the moonlight."

As Caron led the Secretary of State out to the maze, Hansen dropped over to put Defense at ease with Sue Benson, but Defense was already at ease, teaching her basketball, obviously, because she was standing in front of him with that cocky little leg spread. "Now, tell me, Ogling Ogie," she was saying, "how do I guard against a fall-away jump?"

"Hold my drink, Ben," Defense said, "and stand back. . . . Now, you're guarding me. Spread your legs a little farther apart. Hold your arms higher."

She made a stalwart little guard, the captain thought, as Defense hunched his great height above her, patting an imaginary basketball.

"Now, I'm dribbling."

She giggled. "I thought puppies did that on carpets."

"You lean forward to guard me. Suddenly, I fall back, and that brings you farther forward, off balance, but while I'm falling back, I catch myself and arch forward, over you, like this, and shoot. If I'm lucky, I can see those two points flashing down there on that scoreboard."

"Defense," the captain said, "I've got a hoop over the garage door and a basketball in the maid's room above the garage. If Sue's interested, you could demonstrate how it's done while there's still daylight."

"What d'you say, Ogling Ogie?" Sue challenged. "If you're game enough to test my guard, I'm game enough to keep you from sinking a basket."

"You're pretty good at guarding," Defense said, "but I was all-Alabama."

Hand in hand, they rushed out to the patio and across it to the maid's room above the garage.

Defense had splashed his drink, slightly, onto the captain. Drusilla had not shown up, and the party was humming. So the captain decided to do the serving.

He returned with a fresh beaker to the group around the coffee table who were listening with interest as Helga and the admiral engaged in a vivacious conversation about

cockroaches. Joan Paula had taken only a few sips of her first martini, but HEW's and Interior's were stone dry.

He was happy that Joan Paula was starting her drinking in a temperate manner.

"Papa," Joan Paula said, "your little commanding officer is the most fascinating man I've ever seen. He reminds me of Alexander Pope, without the hump."

Hansen winced at her "little," but Primrose spoke up in genuine admiration mingled with a touch of irritation directed at the captain. "Ben, why didn't you tell me you had the most beautiful mother-daughter combination in all of Washington?"

"And you never told me that Sug was bilingual," Helga said.

By heavens, she was calling the admiral Sug. Hansen was so flustered he uttered a trite figure of speech.

"Why, honey, he speaks more languages than a dog has fleas."

"Are you trilingual, sir?" Joan Paula asked.

"You're getting warm," the admiral said.

"Quadralingual?"

"You're getting cool."

"Cunnilingual?"

Primrose turned to Helga, smiling his pleasure. "It's amazing how well-informed the younger generation is, nowadays."

"I'm not too well-informed," Joan Paula said, slumping down, teen-ager style, on the sofa. "All I remember from my French lessons is a title from a poem by John Keats, *La Jeune Fille avec Beaucoup Merci.*"

"Age before beauty," Helga retorted, exercising her command presence. "But since she mentioned the poem, Admiral, do you find any significance in the four kisses that the knight placed on the lady?"

"Not until you asked me," the admiral confessed.

Literary discussions bored Hansen, and he was relieved when Joan Paula leaned her head on Drexel's shoulder and said, "Doctor, do you carry aspirins? Mama gives me a headache."

"Young lady," Helga said sharply, "if you have a headache, go to your room and lie down."

"My air conditioner's stuck."

"Then, open the window, wide."

"It's stuck, too. Dr. Houston, can you operate on stuck windows?"

"I'm a stuck window surgeon."

"I'll need medical help in getting to my room." She looked imploringly at HEW.

"I took an oath to help the suffering."

As Joan Paula hobbled out with the aid of HEW, Hansen went into the study and rolled out the TV set, plugging it into the living-room jack. He then went into the master bedroom and brought out Helga's portable, which he set up on the patio. As he tuned in, the announcer came on with a preliminary analysis of the convention. President Habersham was a certain choice for renomination in this historical first joint convention of the Republican and Democratic parties.

Admiral Primrose said there was no point in calling State in from the maze or Defense in from the basketball court since they were both appointees, only quasi-politicians, and would not be interested in the roll call of the states.

On the first ballot, Arkansas nominated its favorite son, Demorest Habersham, to cries of "Speech! Speech!"

Habersham rose. After warning banner bearers not to litter the hall with placards when the convention was over, he went into a talk about not being overconfident and girding oneself for a tough fight ahead. His speech was a hummer.

When a gentleman from Louisiana rose to nominate Senator Dubois, and introduced the patriarch as one of the fathers of the first joint convention, his remark drew prolonged laughter and finally a standing ovation which indicated to Captain Hansen that the senator's powers of paternity were known to many besides Mr. Powers.

Listening to the delegates praise their favorite sons, Hansen didn't see how McCormick's name could ever get on the ballot but, surprisingly, the second roll call narrowed the field to two candidates as delegate after delegate fell in behind Habersham or Dubois.

On the third ballot, Habersham arose and made such a

logical and persuasive speech asking for new young faces in the political arena that it seemed natural and sincere when he threw his ballot to McCormick. At the precise moment he stood back and pronounced "Angus Hull McCormick," a banner unfurled downward to reveal a giant full-color portrait of McCormick in dress blues and wearing the fruit salad of a grateful nation across his left breast.

Most of the guests had wandered in from the playing fields and gardens by the third ballot. After the President's nominating speech, Hansen went in to fix a fresh batch of martinis for the thirsty.

Sue and Caron were rinsing glasses. Hansen grabbed a towel and pitched in, hearing Sue say, "It was easy to guard against his fall-away jump shots, but he sunk a basket with a reverse lay-up when I had my back turned, so I allowed him two free throws. His first was masterful, but his second rolled around the rim."

Joan Paula came in to see if she could be of help, but they were almost finished. Hansen asked about her headache.

"I feel wonderful. Drex didn't have any aspirin, but he gave me an injection. Papa, if I took up nursing, do you think I could get into the Navy Nursing Corps?"

"I don't think you'd like the bedpan brigades," Caron answered, "but I'll sound out the doctor to see if he knows any good nursing schools. Captain, have you a quiet spot I might lure the doctor to, to discuss your daughter's career as a nurse?"

"The study's empty, but Old Drex is glued to the television set."

"I'll unglue him," Caron said, gliding out of the kitchen.

At the stroke of 2000, Joan Paula had the second martini of her life as she engaged in an animated conversation with Brockton Hall, whose interest in botany was showing. Joan Paula wagered that a morning glory would open from the light of a flashlight, and Hall called her bet. They got a flashlight from the kitchen and hurried to the rear garden wall where the morning glories grew.

Even as they left, Dubois was rising to transfer his

state's vote to McCormick, and he delivered one of his honeysuckle specials which closed on the deferential note which was his trademark. "And so I weave the twenty-two votes of that noble and gracious land of Louisiana into a garland, and place it on the brow of that fine young Southern gentleman whom you white folks need and deserve as President, Angus Hull McCormick."

After Louisiana, it was a shoo-in. New York swung it to McCormick and the roll call became a formality.

Dr. Drexel and Caron came in from the study to get in on McCormick's acceptance speech, and Hansen relaxed over his fifth martini to hear Sue Benson say to McWhorter Douglas, "I like any game that's played with balls."

Her remark gave the captain pause until he realized that the sturdy little athlete was challenging Labor to a game of Ping-Pong in the basement rumpus room. Labor figured they could get in a couple of quick games before the acceptance speech, and he was correct. There was another call of the states to make McCormick's nomination unanimous, and Hansen went out to the patio to ring the triangle and summon his guests to hear McCormick's acceptance speech. It was a good thing that the introductory speaker was so long-winded. It took all of twenty minutes for the guests to assemble.

There was an intake of breath from the ladies as McCormick walked onto the TV screen, and a sigh was expelled as he began to speak. In his gentle, warm, and intimate voice, he extolled the virtues of home and hearthside, of building a life together, of greetings and warm meals awaiting after a hard day's work. Helga's eyes misted over, and she reached out and squeezed the captain's hand. McCormick had the audience in the palm of his hand, inside the convention hall and inside the Hansen living room.

Then, McCormick paused. The moment had come when he would request his running mate on the Vice-Presidential ticket.

"I am proud to request my friend and fellow Southerner, that noble and just patriarch, the Republican senator

from. . . ." He looked over at his idiot sheet. "From Florida."

Well, Hansen reflected, the Republicans had done it again. Just as Primrose had predicted, they had nominated the wrong man.

Primrose turned to State. "That speech is the greatest thing you've done since the Northeast Asia Accord."

"No, Admiral," Cobb disputed him gently. "It's the second-greatest thing I've done."

In touching sympathy with the Secretary of State's inner reverence, Caron Drake reached over and squeezed his hand. "You're so capable, Ack-Ack," she said.

Suddenly Helga sang out, loud and clear, "Girls, the admiral and I have sat here all evening. Before I prepare the buffet, why don't we girls escort the admiral out and show him the grounds?"

Her suggestion brought unanimous applause and shrieks of delight from the ladies present.

"Gentlemen," the admiral said, "it looks as if I'm being shanghaied. Would you keep an eye on the eleven o'clock news? I want a report on Dubois' reaction."

All the men gathered around the television set in silence as the admiral, with his escort of side girls, was squealed over the side.

Hansen, settling down to his sixth martini, felt like complimenting his male guests for their restraint. Under prevailing conditions of mass celibacy, he had feared improprieties inadvertently voiced, but circumspection had been the order of the evening. Even as he complimented his guests, inwardly, a few minutes before he passed out, a hint of death-row humor came in a remark from State.

"Wonder how Old Dalton Lamar's making out in Tibet."

CHAPTER 15.

DALTON LAMAR had done well in Tibet until almost the precise moment of the Defense Secretary's remark, which was made just before midnight, Friday, Washington time, but a little before noon, Saturday, Tibet time, near the settlement of Tsien La, population 19, elevation 15,826 feet.

At first, it had been a matter of getting acclimated. Not only was the hamlet far above timber line, it was above the optimum for Rocky Mountain goats. But after a man learned to walk and breathe at the same time, the air was bracing.

Overcoming linguistic barriers with sign language had been easy, but social mores were more difficult. At first, he had worked himself into an untenable position with the father of his present family by communicating with the wrong daughter, but he had extricated himself with a judo toss, no doubt a record for such things. He estimated its distance at 8,500 feet, roughly. Clouds below precluded a more accurate estimate.

It had taken only minutes for him to adjust to the odor

of rancid yak butter which the girls used as hair ointment and as a skin lotion, although he still found himself moving to windward, occasionally, of the girl he happened to be courting.

By American standards, the diet was tedious for anyone who had not acquired a taste for yak. He ate yak steaks broiled over yak chips, with a side dish of yak curds followed by yak cheese and topped off by a cup of yak milk, but he enjoyed the life. He had formed an equitable division of labor with the working force of the village, a fourteen-year-old lad who tended the yak herd while Lamar entertained the ladies.

With his blue eyes and loving ways, he was a novelty in a land where over half the menfolk were priests and the name Dalton Lamar commanded respect. When he first crawled down the trail and announced himself, the late village elder had bowed deeply, and the other villagers had followed suit. They had thought him the Dalai Lama.

It wasn't Shangri-La, but it was better than Washington, D.C., in the summer, and it was all his. Thus his territorial imperatives were clamoring that Saturday morning when he heard a drone and looked up to see a helicopter hovering over his mountain.

With the rotor blades invisible over the slender fuselage, the helicopter reminded him of a fingerling sidling up a stream of clear water, and at its altitude, it had to be Russian. It would spot the yak herd on the plateau, and if it chose to land, the yak boy would not have sense enough to lead them away from the women.

Lamar grabbed his rifle and headed for the pass.

This was Chinese territory, and the Russians were violating China's airspace. If the Russki airmen were figuring on a female foray, he could shoot them and toss their bodies into India. Indians didn't have jurisdiction over Russians murdered by Chinese.

His prechosen point of defense was a cluster of boulders around a shoulder of the cliff away from the village where the path to the grazing grounds widened to an area about sixty yards wide, the north half of which, in the shadow of the cliff, was a permanent snowfield. On the far side

of the area, almost three hundred yards away, the path cut a narrow defile through a crest before it dropped down to the grazing plateau.

He made it to the boulders and crouched down, inspecting the helicopter through the telescope of his elephant gun.

The machine was hovering and losing altitude. At its present height, he couldn't determine whether the pilot was attempting to land or dropping for a closer look, but under the magnification of his sights, the red star was missing from the fuselage. Very present, however, was the white globe on a blue field of the United Nations.

That neutral flag might fool the Chinks, he thought, but it was not about to fool Old Dalton Lamar.

His heart sank with the sinking aircraft. It was landing on his plateau. Once its rotor blades sank beneath the crest line, he adjusted his sights for two hundred yards and waited with growing eagerness and anger.

Lamar was not a rabid anti-Communist, but he was anti-male, and as long as he had to kill a man, he'd prefer to shoot a Russian or a Chinese rather than an Englishman or an Italian. He was rather happy they were not Italians. With a woman at stake, Italians, he suspected, would try harder.

He hoped the yak boy had sense enough to lead them to the next village, thirty miles away, but he stifled the hope. If the boy had that much sense, he'd have sense enough to deploy the Russians and advance on Lamar in a skirmish line.

With a clip in the rifle and three in his pockets, he figured he had more than enough ammunition to take care of a full load from the helicopter. Estimating their tactics, Lamar reasoned that they would come single file through the cleft with the yak boy in the lead as their guide. He didn't want to kill the boy. If he did, he would be short-handed around the ranch.

First through the defile came a yak. It was a cow with distended udders, and indignation prodded Lamar's anger at the sight. Not only were the Ivans after his women, they were forcing his boy to drive his heifer in for

milking so they could have an evening of drinking and wenching at his expense.

After the yak came the yak boy, and at an interval behind the boy came a Russian, red star glinting on the fold of his fur cap, with his rifle at the ready.

Lamar sighted through his telescope, focusing his crosshairs on the soldier's chest. At this range, his field of vision encompassed the whole soldier, and Lamar could see the face of a beardless youth, barely out of his teens. Those were the worst kind!

He squeezed off a bullet.

When the heavy-caliber slug hit the Russian's chest, the soldier did a standing backflip with his rifle at the ready and rocketed back through the defile, the soles of his boots vanishing last. Immediately, there was an answering crack from a smaller-caliber rifle, and the yak boy pitched forward, shot from behind. Before the thunder of the elephant gun and the rip of the carbine ceased to echo from the peaks, two human beings lay dead.

Apparently, the Russians assumed the yak boy had led them into a trap, and the Tibetan had paid with his life for the Russians' mistake.

Now, the silence of the Himalayas was broken only by the clip-clop of the ambling yak.

Very likely, Lamar figured, the Russians would think him a squad of Chinese soldiers and decide that life was too dear a price to pay for an evening's entertainment.

He crouched, waiting for the chug-chug of the helicopter's motor.

After half an hour's wait, with the westering sun casting a glare on the icefield, it occurred to him that these were the boys who had invented Russian roulette. For them, life was not too dear a price to pay for an evening's entertainment: Paying the price with a life was part of the evening's entertainment.

Distracted by the glare in his eyes and by the yak, which mistook him for something to eat and ambled up to nose him, Lamar did not notice a brown shape belly through the defile and worm along the edge of the snowfield to his upper right, slipping from boulder to boulder. When the

yak finally ambled away and wended on toward the village, Lamar grew more alert from the certainty that the helicopter was not taking off.

Scanning the terrain carefully, he glimpsed a pair of boots disappearing behind a boulder above him and slightly behind him. He had been outflanked. The Russian would have a straight run for the settlement, and his girls were exposed.

Some ancestral ghost from Pickett's Brigade stirred in Dalton Lamar. Now it was either git or git got. He rose and charged, bending low, and, as he charged, he split the silence of the Himalayas with a Rebel yell, following it up with a battle cry which carried the defiance and fury of his spurned sex.

A carbine spit. Dalton Lamar spun, landed on his back, and slithered a few feet uphill over the snow.

From behind a boulder, the brown clump stood up, lifted a carbine high in the air, and shouted toward the defile with the singsong accent of Leningrad: "He's finished, girls. Forward!"

Lamar's fallen body drew them out of hiding and brought them waddling over the snowfield as the sniper clambered down the slope. They gathered around the body where it lay, the rifle still clutched at port arms, the eyes mirroring the blue Tibetan sky.

One of the soldiers, wearing the epaulets of a captain, looked down and said, almost sadly, "His eyes were very blue. What was he shouting, little sister, as he charged?"

"Something in a language that I could not understand. Perhaps Italian. He was screaming 'Poo-see!' "

For three weeks following the cocktail party, Hansen was known around the Pentagon as the host with the most, even though much happened in those weeks of greater national importance.

Dr. Carey came up with a movie actress for Vice President—Kip Wednesday, who was all basketballs and poise. She had been married six times and seemed good for six more except that she was disillusioned by men and most of her speeches were tales of blasted hopes in search

of happiness with males. According to Defense, she was attempting to organize a Males Anonymous.

Despite the opposition, McCormick was well ahead of the FEM ticket. Gallup gave him 80 percent of the men and 50 percent of the women.

McCormick spoke for all men, everywhere, men huddling in lonely farmhouses on the Northern Plains, men rolling along highways in Diesel rigs or gathering at bars of friendly taverns which had once been family taverns. As a man sincerely in love, he spoke with a voice that stirred old gallantries in hearts now diverted, but the high point, always, for his speeches, for Hansen, came when he invited Cora Lee to come to the rostrum and stand beside him.

Two weeks after the convention, Dubois announced that he could no longer support McCormick. Dubois had converted to the Catholic Church and he felt that the candidate did not have the interests of Negro or Catholic constituents at heart. Dubois withdrew from both parties to form the Afro-Catholic Party.

Despite such pebbles on the pavement, the McCormick steamroller kept rolling, and the romance between Mac and Cora Lee was on everyone's tongue.

Hansen seldom listened to Dr. Carey. Her fiscal policy was insane; she proposed to scrap all armaments despite the country's investment in ships, armor, planes, and nuclear weapons. Her foreign policy was equally ludicrous; she would eliminate all tariffs and permit freedom of exit or entry across borders without passports. She would eliminate NASA and space exploration. "If anyone out there wants to visit us, let them pay their own passage."

Two weeks before November 2, Dr. Carey, in a rather contrite speech, admitted that she was not entirely against males and had, in fact, been hoping for an invitation to the McCormick-Barnard nuptials. After her wedding speech, the polls stabilized, and three days later she even recovered a little lost ground by promising the use of her yacht for a honeymoon cruise. It would be better, she hinted, if McCormick lost the election, for then he could have a carefree honeymoon.

President Habersham entered the fray. Since the FEM's were attempting to make political capital of young love, the couple could have the Presidential yacht which would be made available immediately after the wedding, scheduled for November 3.

One morning in mid-October, shortly after the battle of the yachts, Defense, HEW, and Labor dropped by the admiral's office while Hansen was present to discuss the latest polls; 88 percent of the males and 48 percent of the females were for McCormick. There was a certain amount of crowing in the talk, and Hansen decided to needle the boys. "Percentagewise, gentlemen, it looks good. Numerically, it could get a little sticky. . . ."

"Ben, you've got something," Primrose said. "What's our latest mortality rate, Bones?"

"Better let me check the latest figures," Dr. Drexel said, and he virtually ran from the office.

"I had lunch with Farnsworth yesterday," Defense commented, "and he mentioned that felony convictions had soared in the past two months."

"Ogie," the admiral said, "let's feed the figures to the Mark Thirty-seven and get our deadline."

"Well," Captain Hansen said, "if you gentlemen will excuse me, I've got to get back to my office and nuke Nebraska."

Fatigue, more than Nebraska, prompted Hansen's departure. With the Helgalian formula, he could have figured the Nebraska drop in half an hour, but the activity had stepped up so around the house that he was almost hoping that Helga would resume night courses in comparative literature.

At 1530, Primrose called, using the blue and gold phone. "Ben, where'll you be, election night?"

"At home."

"We fed your theory into the box, and it comes out November twenty-eight. That's too close for comfort. If our mortality and felonization rates step up appreciably, we might have to work faster on Operation Ultimate Thule."

"Well," Hansen said, groping through his tired brain

for some rejoinder. Dr. Carey had promised to cancel the Venus probe, so they would not have the cold stars as Dubois had promised, and he added, "As long as we've got the priesthood. . . ."

"I hadn't thought of that!" Primrose almost shouted. "Let me feed it to the Mark Thirty-seven. I'll call you back."

Hansen went back to his planning board. With the tactical situation as presented, he had a problem. Either he would have to recommend a widening of the Soo Canal or request that the Navy construct smaller subs.

At 1610 the blue and gold phone rang again. "Captain Hansen, prepare your wife and daughter for a quick trip to Madagascar. The critical date is October thirty-one.

"You'll receive no official orders, but on election night, stay close to your telephone. If the security officer calls, identify yourself with the countersign: 'Primrose says, "Evacuate." '

"If it's flash green, proceed according to routine. If it's yellow, prepare to leave with your family within two days. If it's flash red, proceed immediately to Dulles Airport, alone, and board Air Force One."

"Aye, aye, sir," Hansen said, and trudged back to his drawing board.

From the admiral's remarks, he could detect the broad outlines of Operation Ultimate Thule. No wonder Primrose had spoken of the alternate plan with such dread. Surviving remnants of Western civilization would join Kenyatta and a handful of Moslems for a last-ditch defense of bisexual society on Madagascar. Life would be rough on that steaming island. Helga was wearing him to a frazzle in the North Temperate Zone. He hoped Madagascar had an adult education program which would offer Helga something physically more taxing than tailoring and taxidermy.

Helga was so excited by the trip to Madagascar that she took her shears to the toolshed and sharpened them to cut out a pair of denim shorts and a bra halter for jungle

wear, chanting "Me, Jane." With some trepidations, Hansen realized that she would create a stir among the veiled wives of the Moslems and the muumuu-clad black women.

On the day of the election, the Bensons motored up from Norfolk. Sue was eager to share the victory with her fellow partisan fighter, but Sue's husband, no longer Ensign Benson but plain Mr. Benson, was apparently looking for a place to drink, since the bars were closed. Benson had resigned from the service to open an organically grown foods store in Virginia Beach. "I don't relate to ordinance supply and trajectory problems as I do to wheat germs and alfalfa," Benson explained, "and I'm more interested in maintaining the purity of body cells than in disarranging them."

"From the way you're talking, young man, it seems to me you've embraced that woman's platform."

"If by 'that woman' you mean Mother Carey, I certainly have, sir. I voted a straight FEM ticket."

"Are you insane, Benson?"

"No, sir. I'm a realist. We've been living in a matriarchy for the last two hundred years and we might as well face it."

"While your young lady has been beating the bushes to save our hides, you've betrayed her on the home front."

"Not at all, Captain. Sue and I talked this over long ago, and we decided to hold to our identities. Two mature adults cannot relate to each other in a master-servant, dominant-regressive sexual pattern."

"Since you brought up the subject in mixed company," the captain said, "I'll tell you, if that woman gets in, she'll dissolve marriage."

"It's any woman's prerogative to dissolve a marriage."

Helga, seated beside the television set and scissoring away on an old pair of Levis, rushed to her husband's defense. "Ben's right. That woman would not be above divorcing people by edict, if she could."

Their conversation was interrupted by the first projection from Poll-Pro. On the basis of fragmentary returns from Maine and New Hampshire, the computer gave the election to McCormick by 81 electoral votes, 30 votes less than *Time's* consensus. Dejected, Hansen wandered

into the kitchen to fix himself a drink. Helga, sensing his mood, followed him.

"She's cutting into his margin by having the girls entice the men, and she's having fine weather for it. I checked the meteorological charts, and Florida is the only high-humidity area."

"It won't matter much, there," the captain said. "*Time* put Florida in the 'Safe for Carey' column because of Miami."

"I'll lay my femininity against your masculinity that Florida goes McCormick."

Since the presence of house guests had denied Helga her pre- and postprandial activities, Hansen felt in the mood to accept a wager he couldn't lose. "We'll drink on that.'

They drank.

Before midnight, Florida went for McCormick.

New York was the big disappointment. Initial returns from upstate showed McCormick ahead 2 to 1, but when the precincts began to report in the metropolitan area, the picture shifted rapidly. Harlem went solid for Dubois. The Catholic vote was split down the middle, half for Carey and half for Dubois. The Jewish and Puerto Rican vote was 4 to 1 for Carey. After all the minority group votes were tallied, there weren't enough male Protestant Caucasians to elect a mayor for Cordele, Georgia.

Despite the loss of New York, Poll-Pro was holding steady at an 81-vote plurality for McCormick.

Hansen was shocked by New York and submerged when Pennsylvania was dragged down by Philadelphia. New England went solidly McCormick, and so did the Atlantic Coast states from New Jersey to Florida, but McCormick was not piling up the expected lead. No sooner would an Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, and West Virginia stand up for McCormick than, plop, they would be bowled over by an Ohio and Michigan going for Carey.

But Poll-Pro held steady at an 81-vote plurality for McCormick.

Along toward morning, a totally unexpected trend developed. Dubois was carrying Louisiana and Mississippi and not merely cutting into McCormick's plurality as

predicted. Most of the Middle West farm states and the Rocky Mountain states held for McCormick, but Missouri and Illinois went for Carey. Texas squeaked by. Along the border, the Mexican-Americans with their woman-oriented culture almost swung the state for Carey until Dallas came barreling in with 92 percent for McCormick.

By 1 A.M., it was obvious that the key state was California, regardless of the way Oregon and Washington went, which meant that Poll-Pro, holding steady at 81, was predicting McCormick would take California and one other Pacific Coast state.

Dr. Carey came on television at 1:15 to assure her followers that victory was in the bag, basing her prediction on the automatic response of the California electorate to a ballot with a movie star's name on it, but when the cameras switched to Los Angeles, Dr. Carey's words rang hollow. A shot of the Democratic-Republican headquarters at the Olympic Hotel revealed a happy and enthusiastic crowd. Word had just come in that Orange County was going 98 percent for McCormick, and celebrants were waving placards reading: WE ADORE YOU, MAC and MAD ABOUT THE BOY.

Benson, who apparently had no compunctions about nonorganically grown bourbon, was slopping his shirt front and muttering in alcoholic jubilance, "She's gonna murder 'im in LA."

"*In vino veritas,*" Helga said solemnly.

"In bourbon, bunk!" Sue snapped. "If she wins, it will be the end of the world we've known."

"Give her credit," Helga temporized. "I don't think there's any malice in her, and I'm sure that if Operation Gone Gander succeeds, Operation Caponette will be carried out objectively."

By heavens, he thought, so the FEM's had their own Plans and Operations section. Forcing his tone to remain casual, he asked, "What is this Operation Caponette?"

"It's taken from the old word 'capon,'" Helga explained. "You know. What they do to roosters to make them plump—snip. Snip." She demonstrated by cutting the air with her tailoring shears. "But the New Grammar puts a feminine ending on all masculine nouns."

"The New Grammar," Sue added thoughtfully, "has only the feminine and neuter genders."

Grammar was the last thing Hansen was interested in.

"Is she serious?" he asked.

"She is," Helga said, "but it's really not so dreadful. Caponizing applies only to prepubertal lads with their mother's consent, to felons, and to social undesirables. Under certain circumstances, wives may have their husbands submitted."

"She's not taking my masculinity under any circumstances."

"Of course not, dear," Helga said, snip-snapping her shears roguishly in his direction. "You're promised to me because Florida went to McCormick."

He was on the point of telling her that there were some subjects he did not care to joke about when the phone rang.

"That's probably for me," he said. "Keep an eye on California."

He took the phone in the bedroom, closing the door. Over the phone, a man's voice asked, "Is this Captain Hansen?"

"It is."

"Captain Hansen, this is Major Thorne, Pentagon Security Detail. Would you, sir, complete this sentence? Two, four, six, eight. . . ."

"Primrose says, 'Evacuate.' "

"Correct, sir. Flash red! This is not a drill, Captain."

His uniform, topcoat, and hat were in the closet. His Navy jeep was parked on the street.

Quickly, he donned his uniform, thinking, at last they had come to Operation Ultimate Thule, and now was not the time for explanations and good-byes. If he went out to kiss Helga farewell, that drunken simp Benson would realize a major operation was afoot.

He would have to make it up to Helga and Joan Paula when they got to Madagascar, but for the moment, Helga would have to realize there were some things a man was more attached to than his family.

He left via the window, carrying only his unread Mahan.

By the time he reached the officials' gate and Airforce One, the jeep's radio was reporting that California and Washington had gone under. Only Oregon and Poll-Pro were still holding steady, Poll-Pro at 81.

CHAPTER 16.

OUTSIDE THE SKIN of Air Force One, the Arctic night swept past at 1,000 miles per hour. (Hansen had glanced through the port at the configuration of the stars, and figured their course at north-northwest. They were not headed for Madagascar.) As Hansen discarded a surplus king to draw to an inside straight, Air Chief Lafayette (pronounced *Lay-fayit*) Talliaferro (pronounced *Tolliver*) slithered the cards around the table with a sidewise riffle and tossed Hansen a four of hearts. Hansen folded, and Army Chief Telmore Ware picked up the pot with three queens.

General Ware was the only non-Southerner in the game, but he played poker like a Southerner, raising on his come card, and Hansen liked the man. Because the others kept shouldering him aside, Hansen tried to include Ware in the conversation, asking, "General, what became of that brilliant analyst you had on your staff, General Hobart?"

"Hogarth," Ware corrected him as a look of sadness touched his eyes. "A keen mind. He was murdered while on liaison duty in Omaha, only a week ago."

"Murdered?"

"Yes, a strange case. Two girls came from New York to set up a house and were doing a good business, but an early snow fell one afternoon, and MP's, passing the house, noticed footprints went in but none came out. . . ."

"It's time, gentlemen." Admiral Primrose stood in the doorway leading aft to the President's conference room.

Silently, the players folded their cards and filed out of the press section of the plane, the khaki of Army, the light blue of Air, the dark blue and gold of Navy, and the nondescript hues of the civilians. Only Marine green was missing. Porky Flugel had gone forward to fly the plane.

A weary President smiled as they entered and the admiral went over to the cockpit communication phone. "General Flugel, please put us back on automatic pilot, turn the plane over to its commander, and report to the conference room."

"Gentlemen," the President said, after Flugel had arrived, "I'm here as a symbol, only, of the hopes of free men everywhere. Yet, if I, myself, were truly free, I would call for a beaker of hemlock rather than invoke what I hereby invoke. Operation Ultimate Thule." He paused to gather his thoughts.

"Gentlemen, unborn generations of our sons ride with us on this plane, for women have decided to eliminate the pain and conflict we have brought to them, by eliminating us. Since I have forsaken the constitutional approach and adopted a military solution, I am turning this meeting over to Admiral Primrose with only one directive from me: Transportation must be provided for those of you who would reject our solution."

Quickly he arose from the table and seated himself on the divan lining the after bulkhead, and Primrose moved to the head of the table.

Hansen caught the symbolism of the shift. The planning was over, the course was set, and the military men were taking over for action.

"Gentlemen," Admiral Primrose began, "if the plan I reveal weakens your resolve, then focus your mind on

that old man, too weak to subdue the six or seven females his appetite demanded daily, whose betrayal has brought us to this expediency. Remember Honeysuckle Dubois! (He pronounced it *Da-boy*.)

"On my left, by yonder bulkhead, sits a statesman," the admiral continued. "Behind us lies a country wrecked by a politician. Remember Honeysuckle Dubois!

"First, I wish to apologize for a slight discrepancy. Madagascar was a cover story designed by General Ware and me to release decoys in the wrong direction. Madagascar has been infiltrated. Our destination is Thule Air Force Base, whence we transfer inland to a headquarters bunker beneath the Greenland ice cap. Code name of the U.S. Government in Exile is Shiloh. For the past three months our planners have been stockpiling materiel and personnel on the Greenland Dew Line. Median age of the personnel is nineteen. Air General Lindenberry, commanding, is thirty-four. Inland from the bunker is a silo housing a cluster of Cherokee missiles. . . ."

"Nuke the broads!" Lafe Talliaferro ejaculated.

"General, I have the floor. The Cherokee Cluster was established as a doomsday facility in the event that our country was overrun and occupied by a hostile power. This has happened.

"As a fail-safe measure, the Cluster has never been equipped with inertial guidance devices, but the IGD's inputs have been plotted by Captain Hansen who has completed all but eight of the continental states. . . ."

By heavens, Hansen thought.

". . . and the IGD's have been forwarded to Shiloh by General Ware. Incidentally, General, where are they?"

"In your private stores in the bunker, Admiral, in two cases marked CANDIED PINEAPPLE RINGS. Each can is stamped on the bottom with the name of the state it is assigned to."

The admiral continued: "Once we have completed the remaining states, the Cherokees will be ready for arming. They have neuterino warheads, so our physical facilities will be relatively undamaged.

"Dr. Houston Drexel has been left behind to deliver an

ultimatum, signed by the President, to the head of the FEM. It directs the FEM to deliver aboard the hospital ship *Gluckstag,* now moored at Charleston, South Carolina, one thousand seven hundred uncontaminated and nubile females, between ages seventeen and nineteen, to the dock at Thule by midnight, December twenty. If by that time the shipment has not been received, the Cherokee Cluster will be launched.

"After the launch, troops will boärd transport planes and be flown to specified re-seeding areas as conventional inseminators.

"If the conditions of the ultimatum are met, the Cherokee Cluster will not be launched. Conventional breeding will be accelerated in the ice bunkers. In eighteen years, I shall return with an army trained to use the bayonet on recalcitrant females. That, gentlemen, is Operation Ultimate Thule in broad outline. Particular details will be found in the folder. You will neither send nor receive personal mail, and Shiloh will maintain radio silence at all times. Official communications will take place only between the Acting Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Beauchamp, and Thule Air Force Base. I am now open to questions from the floor."

"What if they nuke us first?" Talliaferro asked.

"Dr. Drexel is delaying the delivery of the ultimatum to permit us to arm the Cherokee Cluster with IGD's for all states. For ten days, they'll not know where to nuke. Then, if they should attempt to melt the Greenland ice cap, Washington would be up to the Capitol's dome in water before they could get down to us."

"Admiral," Flugel said, "if you're hitting the Ozark area, you can count me out."

"We're hitting the Ozarks," the admiral said.

"Then, excuse me from this conference," Flugel said, "because I've got me a mine shaft in the Ozarks and a girl to share my shaft."

Labor, Interior, and the Attorney General decided to return. "But where'll we land?" Farnsworth asked.

"I'll take you as far as Arkansas," Flugel said, "and demonstrate parachuting techniques. I'll guarantee that you'll get to the ground."

"We'll provide the plane," the admiral said, "and the President's pilot. He has already decided to return, but Air Force One will stay with the President.

"The decision will be Carey's, not ours. If she does choose cremation, which I doubt, it will be a humane death. What cleaner, more antiseptic manner of demise is there than vaporization? No estates to settle, no litigation, no loved ones left to mourn, and no funeral expenses."

After the meeting, Hansen returned to the press section, his mind troubled. Death was his profession, but the slaughter of millions of his countrymen made his job distasteful. No matter how humane vaporization might be, its advantages were offset by the fact that his wife and daughter would be a part of the vapor. Benjamin Franklin Hansen would die with the women he loved, and he would so inform Admiral Primrose when they reached Thule.

There was no time for another poker session. Already the ship's compression system was creaking and groaning with their descent, and the players all sat apart, somber. General Ware motioned to Hansen to come and sit beside him.

"Ben, are you staying or going back?"

"General, it's a hard decision to make. As a military man, I appreciate our situation, but I have a wonderful wife and daughter at point zero."

"Your wife had not withdrawn, I take it?"

"No, sir."

"Mine hadn't either," the general said. "She was more loving than ever. Ben, I can't talk freely, and I'm not telling you how to decide, but my advice to you is to stay with Primrose."

"Do you approve of his plan?"

"I helped formulate it," the general said. "It's called the Primrose-Ware hard line. My big bluffs always work."

Ware lapsed into silence as the plane's lights flashed the signal for safety belts. As Hansen strapped himself into his seat, he had the definite feeling that Ware had been trying to tell him something without compromising security. He decided to take Ware's advice and stay with Primrose.

After Flugel's gentle touchdown at Thule, they were greeted at the airport by a cold blast of air and the young-

est general in the Air Force, General Lindenberry. As they shook hands all around, Lindenberry said to the admiral, "My men wish to thank you, sir, for. . . ."

"We'll discuss personnel later, General. Is Transport Service's plane number thirty-six ready for immediate departure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. General Flugel will be returning to Uncle Sugar with the Secretaries of Labor and Interior and the President's personal pilot. What's the plane taking off now?"

"Naval Air Transport Service's number twelve, Admiral."

"Very well. After TS thirty-six takes off, close the airport to all traffic. General Flugel, I'm ordering you to follow Flight Plan A to confuse the FEM's as to our location. Approach Kennedy from the southwest, giving the call letters for Air Force Two. The Vice President's returning from the Azores, so the tower will not be suspicious. Use the standard approach to Kennedy, but once you're over the field, gun the plane through the sound barrier and head wherever you wish. Understood?"

"Yes, sir," Flugel answered.

The admiral and general shook hands, and the general's party boarded a small jeep to be taken to their plane. It was seven in the morning, but it was pitch dark in Greenland.

The President's group watched from the waiting room window as the blue flame from Flugel's jet moved down the runway, rose into the darkness, and faded in the east. Primrose, standing apart with Hansen, said, "I knew Porky couldn't wait six weeks."

Hansen tried to cheer him up. "Well, sir, he'll be eating cornbread and black-eyed peas for lunch."

"No, Captain," the admiral said. "He won't last till breakfast. Not a word of this to the President, but Flugel will never reach Kennedy."

Almost to himself, he continued, "The FEM's must be shown that we're in earnest. There's a lead line connected to Porky's altimeter, and the line's connected to a transformer. The transformer's connected to an electromagnetic

plunger, and the plunger will connect to a ball of plutonium. The plutonium's beneath the deck of the cockpit one foot forward of Flugel's crotch."

Hansen stiffened at the implication in Primrose's words. General Ware had steered him right.

"Flugel will follow my flight plan," Primrose continued, "because he loves to burst eardrums. He'll be forty degrees, fifteen minutes, north latitude, seventy-three degrees west longitude when he drops to ten thousand feet. The bomb is self-armed at ten thousand feet, going up, and it is activated at ten thousand feet, coming down. General Flugel is going to solve lower Manhattan's traffic problems for some time to come."

Suddenly the admiral turned and walked over to Lindenberry. "General, we're ready to assume quarters in Shiloh."

Via jet-propelled snow cab, it was an hour's drive to the bunker, and after the high-speed elevator had dropped them to the 5,000-foot level, Hansen was surprised at the size of the carpeted wardroom which acted as a reception hall.

From a diagram spread on the wardroom table, General Lindenberry showed them the layout and their accomodations. The wardroom was at the hub of three projecting spokes which radiated under the ice. Along one spoke were aligned the staterooms of the Presidential party. Along another were the administrative offices, communications facilities, and enlisted men's quarters. The third was designed for rest and recreation, but the R&R spoke ended in a huge storeroom, large enough to house a blimp.

"I hope, General," the admiral commented, "that your supply sergeant can find my preserved pineapple rings in that hangar."

"Preserved pineapple rings must be a new fad in the States, sir," the general said. "Those nurses you sent to celebrate the election with the headquarters crew were. . . ."

"What nurses?"

"Those fifty Navy nurses. Of course, we realized we didn't need a physical. . . ."

Admiral Primrose, leaning over the chart, broke in. "Your communications room. Ah, here it is."

General Ware said, "What have Navy nurses to do with canned pineapples?"

"Well, sir, the girls insisted on a can of preserved pineapple rings apiece . . ." Lindenberry began.

"Did you meet the pilot of NATS number twelve?" the admiral asked.

"Yes, sir. Commander Howells."

"Did the crew pilfer the pineapples for the girls?" General Ware asked.

"Yes, sir."

"General Lindenberry," the admiral said, "those were bogus nurses with bogus orders."

"Sir, I didn't doubt your orders. . . ."

"But you did doubt the nurses?" General Ware snapped.

"Well, sir, you had to see them to believe them. . . . For a can of pineapples. . . ."

"Never mind, General Lindenberry," the admiral said, and glanced at his watch. "General Ware, only three persons knew the purpose of Shiloh, you and I and the President. Isn't that correct, General?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then one of us is responsible for this security leak."

"Self-evident, sir."

"Only two persons were aware that the Cherokee Cluster needed inertial guidance devices. Isn't that true, General?"

"Correct, Admiral."

"You and I were those two persons, so the President is eliminated as the source of the leak."

"That's right, sir."

"Only one person was aware that the IGD's were being shipped as candied pineapple rings. Correct, General?"

"Yes, sir."

"You were that person, so I'm eliminated as the source of the security leak."

"Yes, sir."

"General, you're under arrest for treason."

"Well, I'll be shot at sunrise."

If it had been August over Greenland, General Ware would have been approximately correct. His trial took fifteen minutes.

Admiral Primrose did not go topside to observe the execution, but summoned Hansen and Lindenberry to the communications shack where Lindenberry telephoned Thule to get the call letters of NATS number 12.

Over shortwave radio, Admiral Primrose contacted the pilot, and introduced himself. "Commander, will you circle at forty fifteen north, seventy-three west, until you pick up Air Force Two, and provide Veep with an honorary escort into Kennedy?"

"Aye, aye, sir," came the voice of the NATS pilot.

"Incidentally, Commander Howells, the pilot of the Veep's plane is a Gyrene. You have my permission to buzz him a couple of times to show him the Navy still has wings."

"Thank you, Admiral!"

"That's the spirit, Commander. Report when you sight the Veep."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Twenty minutes later, through a crackle of static that could not conceal the Navy pilot's enthusiasm, he reported: "I have him on my screen, sir. I've got the altitude and the guts, Admiral. I'm going in. Tallyho."

"Keep transmitting," the admiral said. "I want to hear this."

There were three long minutes of static, and then there was silence.

"General, will you send a dispatch to CNO, Washington, reporting that NATS number twelve crashed on arrival at Thule with the loss of all hands?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

As the general telephoned the base in compliance, Primrose ushered Hansen into the passageway.

"Well, Ben," he said, "we've denied the old girl proof that she got our guidance devices, and when she sees that second sun rising in the northeast, Mother Carey's going to chicken."

A subdued group of witnesses returning from the execu-

tion greeted them in the wardroom. Each man sat apart, oppressed by what he had seen and by the knowledge that the doom of all had been sealed.

Admiral Primrose shattered their gloom. "I know, gentlemen, that you mourn the regrettable death of General Ware. His execution will not be entered on his service record.

"I mourn General Ware because he loved to bluff, and he's not here to see us pull the greatest bluff in history. Gentlemen, I've just learned that the plane bearing Dr. Carey's nurses crashed at sea. That old biddy doesn't know our Cherokee Cluster is not activated, and we're going to bluff her out of one thousand seven hundred prime pieces of poontang."

It had been a wedding of champagne and tears. Women whom McCormick had never seen used his marriage to Cora Lee as their last chance at a sentimental binge. After the ceremony, Dr. Carey's all-girl crew got the yacht away from the dock at Newport News with a minimum of scraped paint and the loss of only one bollard off the dock. They sailed for the West Indies.

While hauling in a tarpon off Martinique, McCormick fell into the sea and caught a cold. The cold grew worse and finally settled in his groin, so McCormick put in for Charlotte Amalie and its naval infirmary.

He put on his uniform to call at the medical facility, which was being phased out, and went in to see the medical officer, an old commander with the air of a family physician.

"Doctor," McCormick apologized, "I don't usually make a sick call out of a bad cold, but this one keeps hanging on, and it's settled in my privates. I got a runny nose fore and aft."

After the inspection, the doctor nodded his head in sympathy and wrote out a prescription. "Now, Commander, I'm writing you a prescription for gonorrhea. If it doesn't clear up the trouble in two or three days, you come back and we'll start treating that bad cold."

"You telling me I got a dose of clap, Doctor?"

"Don't sound disappointed, Commander. You may go down in medical history as the last case on record."

McCormick went back to the *Miss Vita*. The quartermistress on watch told him Cora Lee was sunbathing on the fantail. He gave the girls liberty for the afternoon, cast off all lines, and went to the bridge to set the automatic pilot on a course that would clear the harbor. Then he went below, opened the throttle to flank speed, and unhooked all engine-room fire hoses. He set the auxiliary fire pump going and opened the main sea valve to the fire hoses. The valve was now a scuttlecock. He climbed the ladder to topside and went aft.

Bikinied to the sunlight, Cora Lee had been drowsing on the after deck. She awakened to the throb of engines, and looked up into the angry face of her husband. "What's the matter, honey?"

"Woman, I trusted you. Pure and undefiled, I came to you and courted you. I gave you flowers. I gave you candy. I gave you love. I gave you my name. Then, you turn right around, Jezebel, and give me a dose."

"That dose something like the drizzles?"

"It's something you caught when you let another man do it to you."

"Honey, no man's ever done it to me but you."

Her unfeigned bewilderment drew him up short. She might be a liar, but she was not an actress.

"Cora Lee, are you telling me you've never done it with another man?"

"I didn't say that. I said no man ever did it to me."

Her remark confused him. "Are you telling me that you did it to a man without him doing it to you?"

"Angus, I'm not certain sure I ever did it to a living man."

"Cora Lee, you either did or you didn't. You can be sure of that."

"No. I can't be sure I did it to a living man, and the one I'm sure of, I'm not sure was living."

McCormick's anger subsided into confusion. Cora Lee was honestly trying to explain something to him. He could almost see her mind groping for words. He drew up a

deck stool beside her chair and forced calmness into his voice. "Let's take this one at a time. First, who was the living man you're not sure of?"

"That FBI man, I might have done it to him, but I was all doped up. As I recollect, we were talking in Chaucer. Now that don't seem right to me, does it you, Angus, for folks to haul off and start talking Chaucer?"

He nodded agreement. It didn't seem right for two people to start talking in Chaucer when he had never heard of the language, and he'd heard a lot of languages.

"Now, I thought I did it to him," she continued, "but I could have dreamed it all along. All I can remember of that boy was his eyes. Seems to me I'd remember more than just his eyes."

McCormick knew how to clear up her puzzlement on the first man very easily. "Tell me, Cora Lee, did this FBI man ever come back?"

"He never did, Angus."

"If he didn't come back, you just dreamed him. So we can forget him. Now, how about the man you wasn't sure was alive?"

"When I was in that monastery where you met me, the nurse told me a dead monk was laid out in the next room. One day I took a shower, and I didn't have anything else to do so I opened the door and peeked in. There he was, stretched out on some planks and cold as clay. All the time I'd been there, I'd been wondering if them monks wore bloomers under their skirts. I was naked as a jaybird, but he was dead, so I slipped into his room and felt up under his skirt. He didn't have nary a stitch underneath that skirt, Angus, and when I touched him, Lo and Behold! Part of him was resurrecting. I remembered from the Scriptures how they put a virgin in with King David to see if he was alive or not. There I was, a virgin, with that poor old monk lying there cold and dead, maybe, with nobody to take care of him. So I got up on the plank and squatted. Then I heard somebody coming and I figured I'd better get out of there, so I jumped down. But Brother Johannis jumped up, and he

started grabbing at me, yelling, 'Come back, you angel of Babylon.'

"Now, Angus, you know I never been in Babylon in my whole life, so I got scared. About that time, that Father fellow came through the door with a little man they said came from Rome, except he didn't talk like anybody from Georgia I ever heard talk. I reckon I knocked the little fellow down, and maybe Brother Johannis tromped him a little bit, because Brother Johannis was after me to a fare-thee-well.

"I reckon I ran half a mile down that hall, with Brother Johannis right behind. Then I ducked into a big room where some of them brothers was eating and I scooted around their table. Not one of them had ever said a word before, but they all started yelling pretty things at me and cheering Brother Johannis on. But I reckon he must have got winded because I gained on him. I got back to my room and shut the door. Next morning, they took me to Camp David.

"Now, Angus, they said Brother Johannis was dead, and he sure looked like it, lying there as cold as ice with his eyes open. What I can't figure is this: Did he come alive before, during, or after?"

She shook her head in mystification, and McCormick knew she spoke the truth. Poor judgment, he thought, was all she could really be blamed for. In her innocence, curiosity, and compassion, she lost sight of the kind of person she was trying to do a good deed for.

"Cora Lee," he said in a gentle voice, "you caught gonorrhea from that monk. The reason why they go to that place is because they're sinners. You ought not ever trust a monk, Cora Lee, not even a dead monk."

"Believe me, Angus, I won't anymore. The only men I'd trust are sailors because my Angus is a sailor."

No man could resist such innocence.

He leaned over and embraced her. Her tale of romantic pursuit must have put her in a mood, for she wrapped him in her arms and would not let him go. Soon, she was making the low, liquid sounds he liked to hear. He was so wrapped up in her love and her arms that, at first, he

was unaware that her gurgle had changed to a gargle. When McCormick remembered he had scuttled the ship, it was minutes too late and fathoms too deep for him to do anything but drown in ecstasy.

CHAPTER 17.

HAD IT NOT BEEN for a slow rise in tension, life might have been pleasant in the bunker.

Television reception was excellent, via satellite, and news programs commanded the greatest interest after Flugel exploded. On the afternoon of little D-Day, Dr. Carey herself appeared on television to exhort her constituents to remain calm and stay in their living rooms, as she was doing. Her exhortations brought smiles to the viewers because they recognized the battle lamp above her living-room sofa.

Ten days after the arrival of the U.S. Government in Exile, Thule radar was jammed from Labrador and all television transmissions ceased. Drexel had delivered the ultimatum.

More oppressive than the loss of television, to Hansen, were the uncoded radio signals they picked up on the command frequency. The fleet was being called in from foreign bases. Hansen listened with heavy heart as the familiar names came over the air: *Wasp* and *Ticonderoga, Enterprise* and *Essex, Robert E. Lee* and *Patrick Henry.*

In his mind's eye he could see the great gray ships butting arctic seas or slicing tropic dawns, sailing back to scrap-heaps. Hansen did not suffer the poignancy of loss, alone. Talliaferro confided to him that at night he could not sleep because he fancied he heard, through 5,000 feet of ice, the thunder of jets in the polar night heading for their final touchdown.

As days passed, the radio silence oppressed Shiloh. Cabinet members and the military command played poker in the wardroom, read or told stories that colored progressively from light gray to smutty and to black. For the most part, President Habersham remained in his suite writing his memoirs. Primrose stayed in his communications office waiting for radio messages that never arrived. Even the Thule phone on the wall never rang.

On the wall, too, the clock, set on Washington, D.C., time, ticked into December, and fretfulness grew among them. Hansen lost two hundred dollars in one hour at poker as tension drove him to draw for inside straights, and he was so irritable that he checked Pickens' figures to confirm his losses.

All gathered in the wardroom for meals except the President who occasionally joined them at dinner to break their monotony with ceremony. On the morning of December 12, after Primrose had taken his seat at the head of the table, breakfast was served. Acworth Cobb had ordered a stack of pancakes which he invariably ate with blackstrap molasses sprinkled with wheat germ. It was a ritual Cobb had gone through many times without comment from anyone, but on this morning, after Cobb had set his shaker of wheat germ beside his plate, Pickens, in a bantering but edgy tone, asked, "What's the wheat germ for, Ack-Ack?"

"To put lead in my pencil."

"What do you want lead in your pencil for?" Pickens persisted. "You aren't writing anybody."

"I like to know it's there, Ogie."

Pickens was silent but watchful as Cobb prepared his stack in his usual manner, cutting a neat plug from the stack, dead center, and spearing the six-layered plug with

his fork, removing it, and laying it on the edge of the plate. Then he placed a pat of butter crosswise atop the hole he had created by removing the plug, and waited until the heat from the pancakes melted the sides of the butter and allowed it to slip and fall into the hole. After the butter oozed into the hole, Cobb lifted the molasses pitcher and allowed a thin stream to flow into the hole atop the melted butter.

"Acworth," Pickens said, "why in the hell do you do that like you do it?"

"The melting butter, Oglethorpe, lubricates the orifice and permits the molasses to flow into the hole without impediment. Once the molasses has filled the hole, it spreads out evenly to saturate the stack from the inside, thereby insuring that there'll be no dry spots in the center of the stack."

"Where'd you learn the trick?"

"From my old black mammy, down in Georgia. She was the wisest, kindest, and most generous woman I ever did see. I loved her in a way I could never love my mother. She raised me from a lap puppy. Many a night I fell asleep on her ample bosoms, and when I grew fretful, she would prepare a sugar teat for me, using molasses instead of sugar water, and she never used a rag for a teat. I grew to young manhood under her love and care, although she was not an old woman. When I was fourteen, she was only thirty-four, but prematurely gray."

He sprinkled a dab of wheat germ near the hole in his stack and looked down on his handiwork with wistful eyes. "In a way, Ogie, I'm communing with that dear woman every time I fix my pancakes."

Cobb sat without lifting knife or folk, oblivious to everything except his pancakes. It was obvious to Hansen that Pickens was not sharing his friend's mood of reverie one whit. The Defense Secretary was glaring across the table at Cobb. Suddenly he gripped the edge of the table and leaned forward. His face was red, and the veins on his neck were jutting. "Come off it, Cobb!" he yelled. "That's your breakfast. Either eat it or fuck it!"

Secretary of State Acworth Cobb complied by eating.

Still rapt over the stack, he sliced off a chunk of pancakes and lifted it to his mouth. "No, sir, Oglethorpe, I never take a bite of pancakes and molasses without thinking of that old black mammy of mine. Did you say something, son?"

"No, sir." Pickens subsided. "I didn't say a thing."

A far more delicate scene occurred at lunch on December 14 when Admiral Primrose merely commented socially on reports from the sick bay. Only ten men were in the Century Camp Hospital with knife wounds, and the admiral remarked, "Only ten cuttings, so far. For a bunch of good old Southern boys, the men are holding up well under arctic duty."

"It would be less, sir," Talliaferro blurted, "if you'd thought to stockpile a few broads with the boys."

Superficially, Talliaferro's remark sounded polite, but no mere Air Force general dared question the judgment of an admiral, and certainly not in the admiral's presence. In the hush that fell over the table, Primrose merely smiled. "If you'll recall, Lafe, the plan was to nuke and land if the FEM's didn't come through with our young ladies. Would you send fighting cocks into the pit without their spurs sharp?"

"No, sir," Talliaferro gulped, and excused himself from the table.

"Sug," Defense commented, "it's her silence that's getting to us. Here we sit, with all of our chips in the pot, and no one is calling and no one is folding."

"Yes," the admiral agreed. "It would help if we could get some hard-core news from home."

"I could ring up Harvey Arnold, in BuPers," Hansen commented.

"All Shiloh communications are to CNO," the admiral said.

"Yes, sir," Hansen agreed, "but Arnold would think I was calling him from a telephone booth."

"How could you arrange that?" Defense asked.

"Distance dialing," the captain said. "Our telephone's connected to Thule." He looked over at the admiral. "And Thule's connected with Newfoundland, Newfound-

land is connected to Labrador, Labrador's connected to Nova Scotia, and Nova Scotia feeds into the continental telephone system."

As the admiral's mouth dropped open, Hansen thought his mild attempt at facetiousness might have been a *faux pas,* but Primrose closed his mouth on a grin. "Ben, you're incredible. Orderly, remind me to write a commendation for Captain Hansen. Ogie, get the President."

President Habersham entered, smiling for the first time in weeks, and said, "So, Hansen has found the purloined letter."

By now, Hansen could recognize a literary allusion when he heard one, and that one was from Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Defense, who was scribbling on a pad, said, "Here's a rough outline of Captain Hansen's conversation, sir, for your approval."

"Mr. Cobb, Admiral, let's check this over."

Admiral Primrose called Thule to get the call monitored, as State set up the conference call speakers, and Defense brought him the outline of his conversation. "Here's the agenda, Ben. It's rough, and you can take it in any order. We don't want you to sound as if you're giving a canned talk."

Finally, Hansen picked up the telephone, asked the Thule operator for an outside line, and as soon as he heard the dial tone, he called the BuPers number. Four times the phone rang before it was answered by a harassed female voice. "U.S. Navy, Bureau of Personnel."

"Harvey Arnold, please. Extension three-eight-two-one."

"Hold it, Charlie. I've only got two hands."

There was a silence of more than a minute. Then, Captain Arnold's familiar voice boomed through the wardroom. "Captain Byrd's office, Lieutenant Arnold, hyo."

"Aren't you a little confused, Harvey? You're the captain. Byrd's a Wave lieutenant."

"Ben! I thought you were dead or neutered. . . . Haven't you heard? There are no more Waves. I'm a lieutenant in the male auxiliary. Mother Carey graciously retained a few of us, at lower ranks, of course, to keep a cadre of

experienced hands around until the changeover's completed."

It was a petrified Hansen who read woodenly from the agenda.

"How's the family, Harvey?"

"The wife and daughter's OK. My son died last week from postoperative complications."

"What operation?"

"Well, the wife and I talked it over. We didn't want the kid riding the back of the bus all his life, so we went for broke."

Again Hansen was forced to resort to the agenda. "How's the traffic situation in Washington?"

In context, the question seemed irrelevant.

"None to speak of. Most of the ladies stay home."

"Don't men drive?" The question was all Hansen's.

"Not when a moving violation disqualifies you. Walking's hard on the heels but easy on the balls. . . . Say, where are you?"

"Harvey, I'm so far out in the sticks the sun rises and sets between me and Washington. I'm with a group studying traffic problems. We did a pretty good job solving lower Manhattan's."

Anybody who knew anybody, Hansen felt, could tell that this agenda had been written by Oglethorpe Pickens.

"That's interesting," Harvey remarked, and paused. "But the ladies are controlling traffic very efficiently with electronic devices. They have them everywhere."

Hansen understood.

"What are you doing next Saturday, Harvey?"

"My wife's driving me over to watch the Washington Monument be torn down."

"Harvey, I suggest you take your wife and daughter out of town. Something big's going to break over Washington, Saturday."

"Then I'll want my wife and daughter right here, Ben."

"Well, if you're going out of town alone, don't drop by Norad or Sac headquarters. All the holes are booby-trapped."

"Ben, you stupid ass, I told you the phones were

tapped! She's holed up in Norad. If you'd kept your mouth shut, you could have buried her under the mountain."

His voice was rising to a shrill, hysterical shriek, when it was suddenly silenced. Then, a familiar voice came on the line. "Thenk yop."

Captain Byrd hung up the line.

Slowly Hansen turned and walked back to the table, sickened. His telephone call, which had been motivated by the friendliest of impulses, had been converted into an execution by Pickens' list of questions.

"We've got her scared," State said. "She ought to come out."

However, he felt slightly better when he heard Primrose say to his orderly, "Make a note for me to recommend Captain Harvey Arnold, USN, for the Navy medal, posthumously."

His call to Harvey bore a strange fruit.

As luck would have it, he was at poker the morning of December 20, D-Day, five thousand dollars down, depressed by the failure of their bluff and playing with a group of men so cold and cautious that they might as well have been Yankees. Hansen dealt, and State anted one hundred dollars. Defense called and raised the ante one hundred. Talliaferro stayed in the game.

Hansen had dealt himself nothing, but he was dealing and depressed so he decided to stay in the game. He held his two highest cards, an ace and ten of clubs, and drew three. Talliaferro, who had merely called, stood pat, and Hansen smelled a sandbag.

When Hansen lifted his cards and fanned them to his view, he said to himself, quickly, to keep his hands from trembling, "Death is my profession."

Down a dry gulch he had staggered and walked into the El Dorado of the inside-straighter; the cards that unfolded to his view were the king-queen-jack of clubs. Drawing to a three-card gut shot, he had hit a royal flush.

Defense, with a half flicker of irony in his eyes, bet into Talliaferro's pat hand. Talliaferro raised him a hundred. Now was the time, Hansen decided, to separate the cabinet officers from the protocol clerks. With icy calm, he

shoved in a thousand chips, the man who had drawn three cards, the man who was known to bluff.

He was so intent on the game that he did not hear the telephone ring and would not have known it had not the orderly walked up to the table and said, "Captain Hansen, a Dr. Drexel is calling from the White House."

"That's it!" State said, rising with such haste that he knocked over the card table onto which Defense had already tossed his cards. Talliaferro threw his hand, four nines, face up on the floor, saying, "I'll get the President."

"Stall him," Defense whispered, "until the President arrives."

"Walk slowly to the phone, Captain," the admiral called from the sofa where he had been reading. "He'll wait."

Hansen walked slowly to the phone. He picked it up and said, "Hello."

Dr. Drexel's familiar voice floated through the wardroom, "Ben, old buddy, what're you doing?"

"Hi, Drex. Playing a little poker."

"Say, if the boys don't mind, I'd like to fly up and get in the game."

"Let me take it under advisement, Drex. . . ."

The President had arrived, but he was busily directing an orderly to clean up the mess around the overturned card table. He looked up at Hansen and nodded an affirmative.

"I've taken it under advisement. Come on up. How long will it take you to get here?"

"Oh, about three hours."

"Good. I'll meet you at the airport." He read the note Defense handed him. "Is your plane equipped with IFF?"

"It's Air Force Two."

"Then it has IFF. Be sure the pilot has it on."

When he returned to the table, the cards had been returned to the deck and the chips racked, and the President and the Chief of Staff wanted to brief him on what to say and what not to say to Dr. Drexel on the way from the airport.

In the dark of the Greenland noon, Hansen snowcabbed to the airport and waited in Operations for the first pulsating blip from Air Force Two to appear on the radarscope.

After the blip appeared and the operations officer contacted the pilot, it was pleasant for Hansen to stand in Operations and listen to the terse military language. It was almost as if he were back on the bridge of a ship.

"Hello, Veep. This is Thule. Alter heading to one-sixty and altitude to thirty angels. Over."

"Hello, Thule. This is Veep. Am coming to course one-sixty, angels thirty."

They watched as the dot swung 500 miles out, a diffuse blob but visible through the laser-induced radar window from Labrador.

"Veep, reduce speed to mach point five."

"Wilco. Am reducing to half a mach."

They watched for five minutes as the blip came in.

"Veep, this is Thule. Reduce to landing speed. I'm turning on the lights. Over."

"Wilco. Thank you, Thule."

"Veep, these are special orders from Shiloh. You have VIP aboard. After you land, all personnel will deplane. Do not attempt to take off again. Over."

"I read you, Thule. What happens if I do?"

"You will be shot down, Veep."

Hansen went below as the long finger of the mobile exit ramp nosed toward the taxiing plane and waited at attentive ease by the doorway to the landing ramp. In the six weeks since he had last seen Houston Drexel, several empires greater than Rome's had fallen, but he was less interested in the profundities of history than in direct news from Uncle Sugar.

Hansen was caught completely by surprise when a lanky pilot emerged through the door and held it open for a lady who wore a fawn-gray, waist-length coat trimmed at the collar with mink and a matching fawn-gray miniskirt, fawn-gray mesh hose, and mink ankle boots. When she raised her arm, flicked her hand, and called, "Yoo-hoo, Ben, here I am," he knew.

Beneath the blond wig, the mascara, the false eyelashes, and three layers of makeup, showed the vaguely recognizable lineaments of Dr. Houston Drexel.

"My dear," Dr. Drexel said, imitating the falsetto of a hoarse female to the T, "can you imagine me sitting alone in the cabin of that plane for three hours with no one to talk to? I thought we'd literally never get here. Oh, you are handsome, Ben. I hope you're not angry with me for my little deception over the phone, making you think I was the old Drexel. You will forgive me, won't you, Ben?"

Suddenly he whirled, one arm on hip, the other lifted in a coy arch above his head, in a perfect pantomime of a posing woman. "How do you like my new figure?"

Hansen felt he might be reading into Drexel the same qualities that Flugel had read into the espionage photographs of the Russian beach, but old Drex did seem to have changed. His pectoral muscles were pendulous under the blouse, and his buttocks were blobs of jelly under his too-tight miniskirt. In addition, his voice sounded about an octave higher than it had sounded over the phone.

Falling in with the spirit of the masquerade, Hansen said, "Your legs are right fetching, Drex, and that's a sweet perfume."

"The girls tell me my legs are *me*. And the perfume is Courtesan at forty dollars an ounce, a gift from Mother Carey."

Drexel wasn't wrong about the legs. They were a little heavy around the ankles, but the kneecaps merged into the rest of the leg quite attractively.

"How can you use this disguise in a washroom, Houston?"

"Oh, you naughty boy! This isn't a disguise. Ben, I've been christened and rechristened. You are now looking at Dallas Georgias. The first name is our given name and the second is our mother's. Mother was named Georgia, but I prefer to pronounce the first *G* hard. Of course, I couldn't use Houston, but I'm still a Texan."

"Well, I'd better get you out of here, quick. The soldiers might . . . ."

"Oh, forgive me, Ben. Major Eagleson, meet one of my oldest and dearest friends, Captain Ben Hansen, USN, Retired."

"Retired? Since when?"

"Now, don't you fret, Ben. Mother Carey wants me to assure you, personally, that you're retired on full pension and she has an opening for you in the naval auxiliary."

Hansen steered her toward the exit, saying, "How are things working out in the Air Force, Major?"

"The mother still has a need for jet jockeys, and I'll serve until my time comes. I was a chicken colonel in the old Air Force."

Dallas Georgias swept into the bunker wardroom unescorted because the ex-chicken colonel was a chicken major. Coming out of the elevator, Hansen was so embarrassed by his former friend's appearance that he hung back, trying to get the major as a buffer between him and the ovulated HEW Secretary. But Eagleson tried to use his lower rank to get the captain to precede him. After they bowed each other from the elevator and *do-ci-doed* through the reception area, Hansen heard Defense whistle.

By the time he arrived in the wardroom, General Talliaferro was helping her out of her coat, and the Secretary of State was greeting her with Old South courtliness, holding her hand and gazing attentively up into her eyes, but his pose was somewhat hampered by an activated tic. Primrose was standing back, rigid, and the President remained seated and hostile.

Hansen wished to introduce the major, but Dallas was already talking a purple streak, so he took off his coat, nodded to the major to follow, and went into the officers' cloakroom.

General Talliaferro was hanging up Miss Georgias' coat, stroking the fur, and sniffing. "Say, Ben," he said. "Why didn't you tell me Old Drex was a woman?"

"Didn't know it myself."

"If Acworth Cobb thinks he can beat my time, that old goober grabber just doesn't know Lafe Talliaferro."

"General Talliaferro, this is Major, formerly Colonel, Eagleson. He was Miss Georgias' pilot."

"Welcome aboard, boy. You fly most of the way on auto?"

"No, sir," Eagleson answered. "The lady's on Vita-Lerp."

"Well, we'll put her on cold turkey for a few hours, and she'll kick the habit."

As Hansen returned to the wardroom, he heard Defense ask, "Say, Dal. Where'd you get those breasts?"

With her coat off, Miss Georgias was voluminous.

"Estrogen and Styrofoam, Ogie. Now, gentlemen, Mother Carey has requested that I do nothing but play poker. But first, I have a little social chitchat—President Habersham's wife has sent him a note with the Mother Presiding's approval, and Captain Hansen's daughter has done likewise, without the Mother Presiding's advice or consent . . . . Oh, my bag. What a mess!"

"Orderly, set up the projector," Admiral Primrose said.

"Dal, has that Styrofoam got any bounce?" Defense asked.

"Ogie, you naughty boy!"

Judging from his knowledge of Houston Drexel, Hansen decided that Oglethorpe Pickens had the inside track in the race to see Dallas Georgias' incision.

"Ah, here they are. Yours, Mr. President, and yours, Captain Hansen."

"Give them both to Admiral Primrose," the President said.

She handed them to Primrose who took them and said, "Gentlemen, as you read these letters, check them for obvious correlations, for they may well be in reference code which our cipher analysts will not be able to crack. Scan them carefully. I'll project the President's, first."

When the lights dimmed and the letter focused on the screen, Hansen found Bertha Habersham's scrawl so illegible that he was forced to scan it carefully. it read:

DEMOREST HABERSHAM!

Well, I never! You, out there on that ice cap, behaving like an idiot. And out there with those persons, Primrose and Flugel. Yes, I've heard about them.

You ought to be ashamed of yourself, and I bet you didn't even take your rubbers.

You come home this minute, and stop your tomfoolery. When I get my hands on you, Demorest Habersham, I'm going to skin you alive.

BERTHA

"What do you read, Admiral?" the President asked.

"I'm afraid it's literal, sir. Too bad. But it could give us a legal basis for Operation Meat Cleaver."

By heavens, Hansen thought, Primrose never gave up on Plans and Operations.

"You're quite right, Admiral. Let's have J.P.'s note."

Hansen was startled to hear the President use his own familiar name for Joan Paula, but he put his thoughts aside when her familiar and beloved handwriting flashed on the screen.

AMAPOLA,

Mother and I had a falling out over you. She wanted me to change my name to Joan Paula Helgas, but that got my fighting blood up. I'm fifth-generation Navy, and even though I can't use your name, I can exercise my options and keep the tradition alive, which I did.

So, mother shipped out. She's *wintering* on Cape Hatteras and shivering in her boots, no doubt.

Come home, Papa, and quit kicking a dead horse. The Navy needs ship handlers and I swing enough weight in the service to get you a job as an instructor. Besides I have your Christmas presents wrapped and ready.

You tell that nasty little Primrose that it's about time for him to shape up and ship out. He's getting to the age where *Coriolanus* reads like the tail of a juvenile.

As ever,

JOAN PAULA JOANS, LT., USN

"What does 'Amapola' mean, Captain?" Primrose asked.

Hansen was braced for the titter that followed his answer. "My pretty little poppy, sir."

"Do you read any references in the letter that aren't obvious?" the President asked.

"Yes, sir," Hansen said. "When I planned the nuking of Virginia and North Carolina, I told Helga that the bight of Hatteras would be the safest spot."

"Good," Defense said. "Word of the Cherokee Cluster has leaked out. The pressure must be on the old biddy to negotiate."

"Admiral?" the President asked.

"I've read enough, sir, to convince me that Supplementary Plan A for Operation Meat Cleaver should be invoked. That girl is a genius, just like her father and even more like her mother."

There was a lull in the conversation as the sergeant in charge of the projector raised the house lights, but the voice of the President broke the silence.

"Gentlemen, start your poker game."

CHAPTER 18.

"It's YOUR DEAL, DREXEL," the admiral said.

"Mr. President, the Mother Presiding is willing to drop charges against all who come home, with the exceptions of Admiral Primrose and General Flugel. They will face reduced charges."

"What is the nature of those charges?" the President asked.

"Morals offense, sir."

"Do you have Dr. Carey's offer in writing?" the President asked.

"She's written an official note, sir."

"Then give us the note," the President said.

"I have it here, somewhere. Oh, this bag. . . ."

She finally fished the message out. Primrose took it and handed it to the orderly. Again the lights were dimmed and the projector flashed the bold, back-slanted handwriting of Dr. Henrietta Carey on the screen:

BOYS,

Your behavior is nothing short of indecent, but, as Mother Presiding over the whole political family,

I'm willing to forgive if you come home this minute and quit defying me. Of course, you can't have my girls. My mind is made up on that score. But if you really have the gall to drop those bombs on your own country, then give me three days to think it over.

If you give up this mad plan and come home, I'll grant complete amnesty to all who return, with the exception of Primrose and Flugel. Nice people would not be seen in public with those two. Bertha wants a few words with Demorest, but due process does not apply in family quarrels.

DOCTOR HENRIETTA CAREY, MP

After the lights rose, Hansen heard four men achieve a hubbub of voices. He and Lafe remained silent, but Primrose, the hybrid between the civilian and military establishments, joined in.

Defense: "If she had any, we'd have her by them."

The President: "She endorsed it with the Great Seal. No one gave her permission to use that seal."

Primrose: "She must have put it together with scissors and a pastepot."

State: "What's that woman doing, talking about due process?"

The President: "She used the Great Seal."

"Drexel, what does she mean by complete amnesty?" Cobb asked.

"You get to retain your . . . er . . . possessions, provided there are no more legal transgressions."

"Such as a traffic ticket," Primrose snapped.

"Mr. President," Drexel asked, "shall I call Dr. Carey and tell her negotiations are going to take a few days?"

"They aren't," the President said. "Dr. Drexel, as former Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, have you retained enough loyalty to tell us why the male mortality rate is so high on the mainland?"

"No, sir."

President Habersham leaned back in his chair, apparently considering Dr. Carey's offer. To Hansen, her proposal seemed reasonable enough. The only man present

who would lose by it would be Primrose, since Flugel was dead, and Primrose wouldn't be losing much since the admiral was pushing sixty.

"Sergeant," the President finally addressed the orderly, "would you take this woman to the quarters reserved for Secretary Drexel and hold her under guard until I'm ready to release her? And don't let her have her bag."

Dallas let loose with a string of cuss words that would have been the envy of the Old Navy. When she was finally hauled away, they could hear her screaming in her quarters. A search of her bag revealed six capsules larger than a man's thumb.

"Mr. President," Primrose said, "my evaluation of the correspondence leads me to believe that chances are fifty-fifty the *Gluckstag* is on its way."

"I agree, Admiral," President Habersham said, "but I'm now less concerned with the *Gluckstag* than with the loophole her proposal opens for a constitutional justification for Meat Cleaver."

"Sir, that loophole would be your noose," Cobb said.

"Exactly," the President agreed. "And I'm counting on female illogic to hang me before Inauguration Day. Admiral, I gather from Joan Paula's letter to her dad that she's cooperating with John Paul Jones?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll go back and get my traffic ticket," the President said, "and you can set up JPJ, Admiral, if it's agreeable."

Hansen had not the faintest idea what the conversation concerned, although he was flattered that the President knew his daughter. He wished Primrose would lift the ban on direct questions.

"Agreed, sir," the admiral said, "and our logical man for John Paul Jones is Captain Hansen." He turned to Hansen. "Ben, you've been keeping your own counsel here. What's your opinion of the situation?"

"I'm in full accord with the President, Admiral."

"That's guts," Defense said.

"I'll have to think about a pilot." The President glanced at his watch. "I hate to ask for one of Lindenberry's boys. They're due for a little rest and recreation in about eight hours."

"We've got Eagleson, sir," Talliaferro said.

"There might be a matter of divided loyalties there, General. He's a major in her air force."

"No problem at all, Mr. President," the general demurred. "I think I can demonstrate his loyalty to your satisfaction, sir."

"If you can do that . . . . Mr. Cobb, I'm appointing you President pro tempore under stipulations of the National Emergency Act."

"Very well, sir," State said, as shrieks became audible in the wardroom, "but, right now, I'd better go calm Dal."

Talliaferro had sent an orderly to get Eagleson. As Cobb left, the President turned to Primrose. "We'd better activate those orders for Captain Hansen, and while I'm about it, I'll sign his other papers. Now, Admiral, when you finish writing my memoirs, stress the constitutional motive behind my return, and change the title. Make it *Memoirs of a Former President* rather than *Memoirs of the Last President*. And don't be too harsh on Senator Dubois.

"Captain Hansen and I will depart from the bunker at ten thirty tonight, which should put us in the landing pattern at Dulles shortly after midnight. But don't officially transmit Captain Hansen's orders. Your signature would constitute *de facto* recognition of her government."

Major Eagleson entered and saluted General Talliaferro. "Major Eagleson reporting, sir."

"Major Eagleson, do you have any mental reservations about flying the President back to Dulles tonight, in Air Force One?"

"None at all, sir."

"You realize, Major, there's been some friction between President Habersham and Dr. Carey, and that you have been taking orders from Dr. Carey. Do you find any conflict of interests there?"

"Conflict of their interests, sir. Not mine."

"What are your interests, Major?"

"To obey orders to the best of my ability, never to tell a lie, and to do at least one good deed each day."

"That will be all, Major. Now, salute me, do four about faces, and return to your quarters."

Major Eagleson saluted, spun around twice, and departed with a brisk, military stride.

Talliaferro said, "He's the only living automatic pilot in the Air Force—hers or ours."

"He'll do, General," the President said, "but figure his flight plan to enter the pattern ten minutes after midnight. If the bluff hasn't worked by then, it will be up to Hansen.

"Incidentally, you may as well go ahead with the captain. Mr. Pickens can witness, and while Captain Hansen's getting briefed, I'll get packed. By the way, if the *Gluckstag* does not arrive, what is D-Day for Operation Meat Cleaver?"

"March fifteen."

"Make that April fifteen, Admiral. The bayous are often flooded in March."

It was Hansen's first visit to the admiral's quarters in the ice bunker and it was pleasantly nostalgic to enter and see Defense sprawled on the settee as of yore. The only basic change from the admiral's old office was that the map on the wall behind his desk was now a map of the United States instead of the world.

One glance at the map told Hansen he was looking at the plan for Operation Meat Cleaver. A large blunt arrow stabbed inward from the shoreline north of Boston, and a longer arrow swept inward and arced eastward from New Orleans. Primrose's grand design was laid bare by the map —a feint from Plymouth Rock while the major prong stabbed into the soft underbelly of Southern womanhood. However, the grand design was slightly confusing to Hansen. Both the feint and the main attack were being kicked off from seacoasts: Primrose was mounting an amphibious assault with airplanes . . . unless he was bent on securing his lines of retreat. In that event, Hansen could envision plans beyond plans if Meat Cleaver failed. Operation Pin Prick, perhaps, staged from the Dry Tortugas with rowboats.

Otherwise, not even the quotations had changed much,

Hansen realized, when Defense spoke up. "Some are born to greatness, some acquire greatness, but, Ben, you're the first man I ever met who was shafted by it."

"We're going to miss this man, Ogie. Ah, here we are!"

Primrose found the file he was seeking, and Hansen spoke to reassure them. "Don't despair about the bluff, gentlemen. They're still jamming our radar."

"Oh, we'll succeed, Ben." The admiral needed no reassurance. "Operation Meat Cleaver is buttressed by John Paul Jones, and you're in charge of John Paul Jones."

"I wasn't aware, sir, that we had an Operation John Paul Jones."

"JPJ," the admiral explained as he pulled a sheaf of documents from his desk, "is predicated on a retrograde motion in the female power structure. According to our intelligence, the high-water mark of female aggrandizement occurred on November two."

He handed the sheaf of papers to Hansen who could tell at a glance that they were a set of orders and twleve copies.

FROM: Chief of Naval Operations
TO: Lieutenant (j.g.) Benjamin F. Hansen, USNR (MA)
SUBJECT: Change of Duty
REFERENCE: (a) Executive Fiat #47

1. In accordance with the reference (a) which should not be quoted, you are hereby ordered to proceed immediately by first available transportation and report to the Commanding Officer, Anacostia Training Station, Washington, D.C., for further duty.

2. Government and/or commercial transportation (exclusive of taxicabs) is hereby authorized.

3. A per diem allowance of $3.83 will be allowed while in transit.

CAPTAIN HELEN B. ANNES
By direction

"They came last week," the admiral said, "but Air Force One is your first available transportation."

"If I obey these orders, sir, I'm recognizing their authority, which I don't."

"With you, Captain, the recognition is merely personal, not official," Primrose said.

"Now, when you land at Dulles tonight, leave the President. Make no attempt to assist him, but go straight to the call desk. Have the girl at the desk page Miss Dessy Monas. Then wait. You'll be contacted by an agent whose password will be, 'As I live and breathe, if it isn't the Dock Walloper.' Your countersign will be, 'By heavens!'

"After your initial meeting, further instructions on Operation JPJ will come from our stateside agent. Now, to the pleasant task."

He reached into his center drawer. There was no fumbling this time.

"Captain Hansen, my last commendation put you over the top. You were recommended for a spot promotion to Vice Admiral, and the recommendation has been signed by the President. You are now Admiral Benjamin Franklin Hansen, USN."

He stood up and extended his hand. "Welcome aboard, Walloper."

"Thank you, Sug. I certainly appreciate this."

"Very well, Admiral Hansen," Primrose said, "it's back to business. We'll let the President announce your promotion at his last supper. The news will help liven up the meal if we haven't heard from the *Gluckstag*. Your new uniform will be ready in the tailor shop at 1600, that is, your junior grade lieutenant's uniform. For a while you'll have to be an undercover admiral."

CHAPTER 19.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF HANSEN'S promotion was the only lively feature of the President's last supper. Acworth Cobb was not even present, having stayed in the quarters of the late Dr. Drexel to keep the caterwauling Dallas Georgias silent. Thule had no word from the *Gluckstag*, and the silent telephone which the High Command had counted on to reduce Dr. Carey to a nervous wreck had boomeranged against them. President Habersham almost spilled his soup from his spoon because his eyes kept flicking toward the telephone.

After supper, after Hansen had received congratulations from Talliaferro and Cobb who now made an appearance, the President retired to his quarters to write his last will and testament, to be affixed to his memoirs. The men who remained in the wardroom were silent, intent on the hands of the wardroom clock moving toward ten thirty for Hansen and toward midnight for Homo sapiens.

When the hour hand ceased to be a factor in Admiral Hansen's wait, Admiral Primrose walked over to the conference table, motioned to the orderly, gave him a few brief instructions, and called his staff and the cabinet members to him.

"Gentlemen, it is 2200 and the President leaves in half an hour. Soon we'll be saying good-bye, forever, to the Walloper, and I've been thinking of a few appropriate remarks that he might say to us.

"Walloper, would you consent to tell us, and let us put your words on tape, of your first love in Bangkok?"

As they all leaned forward, Hansen had time to clear his throat of a suspicious lump that kept rising in it, before the enlisted man put a microphone before him.

"If they unsex me," he began, "theirs will be a partial victory only. Nothing can ever dispel the spiritual musk of me which lingers over the places where I have loved. One spot, in particular, is old Bangkok—aptly named city.

"It was on a night in the springtime when I first met her, among temples silvered by a rising moon . . . ."

Dallas Georgias, née Houston Drexel, the gelded Mustang from SMU, rode alone and whimpering in the press section of Air Force One while President Habersham and Admiral Hansen rode aft and amidships in the President's conference room. President Habersham was moody and solicitous of silence, but Admiral Hansen, disguised in his junior grade lieutenant's uniform, had questions that urgently needed answers. Sug had assumed that Hansen knew why he was being sent back to the States, but the admiral had overestimated the junior admiral's knowledge.

As a matter, to him, of chilling fact, Hansen had not the slightest idea what Operation John Paul Jones entailed, and the man who rode beside him, the man who was to lay the legal groundwork for Operation Meat Cleaver, was his only remaining source of information. Yet direct questions were out, more than ever now, since he had been promoted to omniscience.

"Sug might have been overly optimistic about JPJ," he ventured. "Empires don't fall in a day."

"Ours did," the President said, "on November two."

Looking out at the stars, Hansen was reminded that it was almost Christmas, and the reminder led him to a new angle of inquiry. "Well, Mr. President, I suppose you'll

have to start thinking about a Christmas present for your little lady."

"I know what she wants," the President said, "but I don't know how to wrap them."

"Perhaps, sir, there might be a reconciliation by Christmas."

"That would be a logical act," the President said, "and I'm counting on them not to act logically. If women were Homo sapiens, we could figure on them delaying the execution till after the inauguration. . . ."

"Sir, are you implying that females are not human beings?" Hansen's astonishment was responsible for the direct question.

Surprisingly, the President chuckled. "I suppose they aren't gibbons, but they're certainly not sapient. No male would have left that promise of amnesty as a legal loophole for me to stick my neck in. Of course, it was a woman's trick, primarily, to drive a wedge between Sug and me. She didn't know that I was looking for a chance to split with the Primrose hard line and get back on a constitutional course. Constitutional measures form the only approach that can be justified by history. I had to go along with Primrose as a last ditch measure, but my conscience bothered me. I could never see a purely military solution to the problem, but I'm confident of the rightness of my actions now. After they've killed me while I'm still in office, then the ladies will be nuked in accord with Section Eight, Article One, of the Constitution."

Thank heaven for Annapolis and the required course in constitutional law. Now Hansen could follow the President's legal reasoning. He was returning to create a *de facto* insurrection which could be put down by force of arms, but that did not explain why Hansen was returning to the country with the President.

Admiral Hansen lapsed into his own silence.

Precisely five minutes after midnight, the President said, "Well, Ben, either the *Gluckstag* has arrived or it hasn't. Let's find out if Primrose's little bluff worked."

He leaned over and switched on the intercom to the cockpit. "Colonel Eagleson, please contact Shiloh and ask if the *Gluckstag* has landed."

"Yes, sir."

He waited for an answer, leaning toward the squawk box, and the answer came quickly. "Shiloh reports negative, sir."

President Habersham sat back. "Well, Ben, our little bluff didn't work. No matter, we can still help the cause if I can get myself killed before inauguration and if you can get that Christmas present up to Old Sug."

Anything he said to Habersham, Hansen realized suddenly, was off the record. If the President wanted to get himself killed, Hansen had enough confidence in Demorest Habersham to know that he was talking to a dead civilian.

"What do you think the boys would like for Christmas, sir?"

"After you've sent them those candied pineapple rings, they won't have time for opening other presents."

So, he had been sent to get replacements for the inertial navigation devices to activate the Cherokee Cluster!

This was no job for an admiral. Any storekeeper, first class, in the male auxiliary naval reserve could requisition inertial navigating devices. Hansen was disgusted. As a thinker, Admiral Primrose had flaws; he approached the simplest problem as if it were a challenge to a computer.

This entire little spat with the women was not a military problem, at all. It was a task for diplomacy. Once he had established contact with the real underground, he was going to show Sug his error. He was going to bring about peace with honor.

He would send Admiral Primrose a Christmas present, all right, but it wasn't going to be candied pineapple rings. A book would be far more appropriate as a gift for that constant reader. Yes, he would send the Chief of the Combined Chiefs of Staff a leather-bound novel—leather would not mildew in an ice bunker even after a couple of decades. Admiral Primrose was going to receive from Admiral Hansen a deluxe edition of *Alice in Wonderland.*

CHAPTER 20.

AFTER THE POLICEWOMEN had taken the President away in a paddy wagon, Admiral Hansen ran into trouble, himself, in the waiting room. He had asked the girl at the desk to page Miss Dessy Monas, when he turned to find trouble in the form of a very large black policewoman holding a long billy club at both ends and standing spraddle-legged before him. The legs that jutted from beneath the blue serge miniskirt resembled two old-fashioned pot-bellied stoves, the only connotation of warmth anywhere about her.

"Picking up somebody's baggage, Charlie?"

"No. I'm waiting an answer to a page."

"You don't wait here. This is the ladies' waiting room. You wait over there."

She swung the billy club in a flipping arc and pointed it toward a door marked MEN.

"I don't have to go to the men's room."

"Since when you don't have to go to the men's room?"

"Officer, I object to being segregated. As a naval officer, I never judged a man by his sex, color, creed, or previous condition of servi. . . ."

"You want to tell it to the judge, Charlie?"

Well, he thought, as he hurried to the men's room, her people had taken it for three hundred years. He should be able to take it for the next twenty-five or so, unless he decided to curtail his three score and ten by sending the candied pineapple rings to Sug.

Inside, the head was dingy, littered, with a yellow-streaked urinal lining the far wall. Three benches had been moved in from the main waiting room and they were bare except for a naval rating who was snoozing away with his head resting on his sea bag and his hat down over his eyes.

To calm his indignation over the plight of his President, arrested for speeding inside the city limits when his plane touched down at 120 miles an hour, Hansen walked over to read the graffiti above the urinals. As he read, he heard his page squeaked over the squawk boxes, one of which was affixed in the corner of the men's room. If they piped the announcements into the men's room, males must not be considered completely subhuman, he thought.

"Amusing, aren't they?"

He wheeled at the sound of Helga's voice, and the woman he loved stood before him, a smile of delight on her face, wearing bell-bottomed trousers and a coat of Navy blue.

"As I live and breathe," she said, "if it isn't the Dock Walloper!"

"By heavens, Helga!"

"Who did you expect? Senator Dubois?"

"Would I be hugging him like this?"

"Waltz me away from the urinal, Benjy. Its wave length is jamming my perfume."

He waltzed her away, asking, "Say, what happened between you and Joan Paula?"

"Nothing. We staged a tiff for the Blubber Presiding . . . . JP took over the communications watch at Anacostia. An emergency developed, or she would have come with me. We'll have to take a taxi back. I was too excited to drive over."

"My per diem doesn't permit taxis."

"I'll pay the fare."

"Good. I'm ordered to report to Anacostia."

"We know. That's Joan Paula's command, and she's one of us."

"Who's 'us'?"

"The Men's Preservation League. It's one of those bleeding heart organizations for promoting civil rights," she said. "But we can gossip in the cab." She hoisted the sea bag on her shoulder and looked around her. "I must speak to the girls about these men's rooms."

He had to let her carry the sea bag, since he was an officer and she was posing as a rating, but she walked easily under her burden. Outside, on the empty platform, she called the cab and held open the door for him. He crawled in, but he thought she was carrying things too far and said so.

"Don't you worry," she said. "You may be a fourth-class citizen to the government but you're a collector's item for the girls."

"Happy to see me?"

"Ecstatic, you brute. Those V-bombs lack character. They make a terrific first impression, but after six months or so it's like shaking hands with your brother."

"Helga. I was appointed Vice Admiral."

"Good. Joan Paula will be thrilled to know she has an admiral to order around. She's putting you in charge of seamanship instruction. Women are such dreadful ship handlers. When the President signaled he was landing, Fatso Carey tried to recall the *Gluckstag*. The ship was late, anyway. The woman skipper—that slob in the White House wouldn't trust a man with a shipload of girls—got lost because her radar was jammed and she ran aground on Cape Atholl trying to make the turn for home. Joan Paula had to stick around communications because she's helping direct rescue operations through Thule. Young Lindenberry had to send snow cabs to pick up the girls, or those poor things would be freezing to death. Fatso Carey would like *that*. That woman's vicious, Ben."

"The cruelty isn't one-sided, Helga. You know, I'm down here to pick up some inertial guidance devices. . . ."

"Oh, no, you aren't! Joan Paula suspended that op-

eration. You're all she wanted. She'll brief you on Operation Tethered Bull and Operation Jelly Roll—but let's not talk about unpleasant things. Joan Paula's changing your orders to 'proceed and report' so you'll have two weeks alone with me on Hatteras. It's quiet down there in winter, and there'll be no PE's snooping around. Oh, another bit of pleasant news. Senator Dubois is dead."

"Postoperative complications, I hope," Hansen said.

"Oh, no. Carey promised him something for his defection. She sent him an eight-girl relay team from the Rockettes, and he died on the seventh lap. Ben, this is no country for old men."

"I would never die on any lap," he said, recalling Helga's idiosyncrasy.

She squeezed his hand in what developed was a warm misunderstanding. "I'm glad, Ben, because it's not my nature to be selfish, and I'm going to have to share you with the other girls until the Greenland crop matures."

There was no further time for sentiment as the taxi came to halt before the sentry gate at Anacostia.

"You report in, Ben. Say hello to Joan Paula, and hurry back. Our car's parked in the lot, and I'll be waiting at the gate."

Hansen was surprised and relieved when a Bam sentry, uniformed in conventional green, snapped to attention and saluted before checking his orders. She then called a Wave orderly over who also saluted and said, "This way, sir."

Military etiquette was still being observed.

He followed the Wave into the administration building and down a long corridor to a door marked OFFICER IN CHARGE, TRAINING DETAIL. The Wave knocked three times and opened the door to Joan Paula's "Come in."

Joan Paula, seated at her desk and bent over a communications log book, did not look up when they entered or when he sang out, "Lieutenant junior grade Hansen reporting, ma'am."

"At ease, Lieutenant. Carry on, Orderly."

Coppery highlights burnished her auburn hair. Her white blouse was crisply pressed. On sight, he would have

given her a 4.0 for military appearance, and the new half stripe, gleaming on her blue coat sleeve, showed him someone else also appreciated her.

When she heard the orderly close the door, she looked up, smiled, and raised her arm to show him the stripe. "Got the extra one yesterday, Papa. It's not a bloody war, but it's a sickly season."

She arose and extended her hand for a handshake.

"Did you bring me a seal from Greenland?"

"You didn't requisition one."

"Same old Papa. Draw up a chair."

"Is a handshake all I get?"

"That's all you get at a naval facility," she said, "because rank must be observed. But I have something else to satisfy the amenities."

With Hansen efficiency, she slid open the drawer of her desk and drew out two water glasses, a decanter of water, and a fifth of bourbon.

"The hooch is nonreg," she said, pouring, "but rank has its privileges. I've got new orders for you, here." She pulled a set of papers from the desk, and shoved them toward him. "They're 'proceed and report' so you can take the ten days as my Christmas present. Mother's carting you off to the Cape over Christmas, so I'm giving you the extra time to recuperate. . . . Skoal!"

"Skoal," he answered, commenting to himself on her precision of movement and her easy but definite manner of speech. "Am I looking at the future CNO?"

"No," she answered flatly. "I'm looking at the future CNO. You're looking at the future Mother Presiding. Henrietta's too fat. Obesity presupposes overindulgence. Overindulgence presupposes lack of self-discipline. She's setting the wrong moral tone for the country. Between you and me, Papa, I'm giving her sixteen years of office, then I'm moving into the civilian establishment. As old Merryweather Dippynose used to say, If your aim is power, you can't operate from a military base."

She sipped her drink reflectively. "Old Sug could fire off more ideas per minute than a rapid-fire machine gun."

"Sug was fanciful," Hansen said, "but he did have the good sense to make me Vice Admiral."

"Congratulations, Papa. Keep it, for what it's worth. By the way, they got all the girls off the ship and are towing it to Thule. I hope they don't melt the ice cap tonight."

"How long have you been in contact with Shiloh?"

"Almost from the day the Government in Exile landed."

"Sug never mentioned to me he was talking to you."

"He couldn't. He was violating Shiloh regulations by not going through channels."

"One thing intrigued us, up there, JP. What's happening to all the men in the country?"

"Oh, you can thank Mother Carey for that. You have to hand it to the slob, she knows her chemistry. She devised a diaphragm armed with a needle dipped in a compound of curare and cyanide. At least eighty percent of all males over fourteen have committed involuntary suicide."

"That's savagery!" Hansen exploded.

"Oh, no, Papa. All men must die, and how could a man die better?"

Her logic was so immaculate that his beginning indignation evaporated, but he was struck by a sudden fear. "Are the Greenland girls armed?"

"Of course not, Papa. Sug's too smart. He'd cause a blow-back in the firing chamber with a belaying pin, and after that there'd be no stopping him. This way, he'll delay for dalliance and I'll have time to stop the operation."

Obviously Joan Paula knew as much about Primrose's Plans and Operations as Hansen knew, and he said flatly, "Joan Paula, you're a double agent."

"No and yes, Papa. No, in that I don't intend to let myself be vaporized for the greater glory of the male. Yes, in that I, too, am a member of the Men's Preservation League, but never for the reasons Mother is. I'm sparing a few men for demonstration in anthropology classes and a few will be thrown to the PL's as a sop for their support. Some may be preserved for heavy menial tasks."

"What if the men object?" Hansen asked.

She flashed him a Helgalian smile. "Then I'll stick

'em in zoos . . . but back to military matters, Papa. We're turning the airports into used-car lots, so there'll be no landings by air, and I'm setting up a counteroperation to Meat Cleaver."

Hansen was dismayed by her war aims, but he was essentially a tactician and he felt the grand design for any military operation was a civilian responsibility. As a tactician, acutely aware that his advice might be that of the future CNO to his future Commander in Chief, he said, "You're aware, Commander, that the *Gluckstag* can be rendered seaworthy by early April and that landings could be effected on our coast by the Greenland insurrectionists."

He recalled, now, his wonderment at the map for Operation Meat Cleaver in Primrose's office. The amphibious landings had been predicated on the admiral's possession of the SS *Gluckstag*.

Joan Paula waved his advice aside. "I thought of that, Papa, before the *Gluckstag* left. That's why I installed Operation John Paul Jones to get you home. There are two phases to my counteroperation: Phase One is Operation Tethered Bull."

She got up and pulled down a wall map showing the area of Greenland. "With six destroyers, manned by crews you'll train, you'll set up a blockade screen, here." Her hand swung in an arc from Cape Parry to Cape York. "This should bottle up the *Gluckstag* until you are ready to commence Phase Two, in late spring.

"Phase Two will commence with the arrival of an attack transport, whose crew will also be trained by you, carrying two battalions of women Marines, now in training at Quantico. When the transport arrives on station, you will then commence Operation Jelly Roll. You land and attack."

"Me?"

"Yes. You will be Chief of Combined Operations, Afloat and Ashore. Now, this should brief you on the strategy. You can work out the details with Plans and Operations when you return from leave."

She snapped the map up, walked back to her desk, and stood behind it, very erect and so briskly military that she

exuded motion while standing still. "Now, as to our official relationship, Papa—I won't tolerate gold-bricking. I don't give a royal encapsulation for any excuse ever invented. When I give an order, I want you to hoist 'execute' promptly."

"Yes, ma'am."

She didn't smile at his reply. Instead, she placed her knuckles on the desk and leaned toward him. "To avoid the disruptive influence of an obvious male on my staff, and to give Mother vent to her tailoring talents, your uniform of the day will be a skirt. Keep aloof from your sister officers and the ratings, or you'll give Lesbianism a bad name."

She glanced at her watch, dropped her official manner, and smiled as she extended her hand for a farewell handshake. "Lieutenant, I know you're anxious to commence your leave, so welcome aboard and carry on."

"Thank you, Commander." Hansen rose, shook hands, and left.

He walked slowly down the passageway, unnerved but undaunted by his audience with the lieutenant commander. Although he didn't relish the task of rounding up his old comrades as museum pieces or wearing a jockstrap under undies, once the area in which he was to perform had been defined, he knew he could bring a greater professionalism to his job than any other officer in this woman's Navy.

Hansen walked into the cold and humid night, shoving behind him the thoughts which had invaded the area of his expertise and outraged his sense of order. In all fairness, he could not generalize about the ladies as long as one Helga, the ever-loyal, remained. Out yonder, waiting in the light of the sentry gate, he could see the family jalopy with its side door open, and his pace quickened.

Helga intended to drive. By pushing it, she could reach the cottage on Hatteras before dawn so they could stand, hand in hand, and watch the sunrise over the dunes and the gray Atlantic. He had not seen the sun for six weeks.

On Ocean Front Drive, in the town of Virginia Beach, stands a rectangular building which survives from the days

before the Women's Democratic Republic. In spring and summer, its lawn is kept neatly trimmed. Above the structure, during the daylight hours, is raised a blue flag with a triangular grouping of three white stars that signifies a Vice Admiral is aboard. Inside the building is a room reserved for exhibits—old sabers, a telegram yellowed with age, photographs, a black and white third-repeater pennant, and a faded Bonnie Blue ensign of the Confederate Navy. In a roped-off corner of the room stands the highlight of the exhibit, a tall, erect figure wearing the uniform of a Vice Admiral, USN, old style, with trousers. Beneath the figure is a plaque which reads:

IT SERVED US

Here stand the mortal remains of Benjamin Franklin Hansen, Vice Admiral, USN, last survivor of the male epoch, whose skills were instrumental in the rescue of 1,700 girls stranded on the Greenland Ice Cap after the successful completion of Operation Mousetrap.

Antiquarians have pointed out a flaw in the exhibit. On the specimen's hat, the eagle above the shield looks left. In actual fact, during the admiral's term of service the eagle looked right. In 1942, two years before the specimen's birth, the Navy eagle looked left, but it was altered to look to the right. The flaw in an exhibit otherwise regarded as a triumph of taxidermy was not considered significant enough to correct. In heraldry, the left-looking eagle denotes a bastard house.

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