

TWELVE O'CLOCK HIGH

CHANGING WINDS:

1948

L.C. CHILTON

FOREWORD

The changing winds of the year 1948 blow Joe, Harvey, and Sandy in many different places, and facing many different challenges, from injured bodies, injured hearts, and injured international relations. Joe barely survives an assassination attempt, and soon Harvey suffers one of his own. As for Joe, it is a lucky break of sorts as his wife Ceile returns from Australia to be with him and they set about mending their marriage, including the step of adopting Frank Savage Jr. Then the Berlin crisis sends Joe into the air again as a pilot for the Berlin Airlift. Harvey fights a different battle: as a JAG lawyer to obtain justice for servicemen, including two African-American soldiers. Sandy, completing his undergraduate degree at USC, is swept back and forth by romantic crises and by forces he hoped to have left behind: the henge, and the henge being in unfriendly hands. The spectre of UFOs lurks; mysterious events intervene in the lives of all, and all three men have their romantic ills and successes, including Sandy who finally meets the girl of his dreams. But the year ends on a disturbing note as Joe's memory, disrupted by his near assassination, returns. And Preston begins a remarkable adventure...

**The reader is graciously asked to now identify Joe's wife as Ceile O'Briean as well as other name changes of some of the characters. Ceile is pronounced "Sail" (or possibly Kayly) and means "Queen" in Gaelic.

Prologue: One Day Tells its Tale to Another...

Lt. Julie Lovelace waited in a small room at the Langham. The covered window reflected her face and reminded her of one of the mummy cases in the British Museum: frozen, wide eyes—serene. She was certainly not the latter.

The news had been shocking. Ninety minutes after she left General Gallagher in his office, three days earlier, on December 30, he had nearly been killed by a car—a lorry actually, or a truck. When she returned to her flat, after her three day leave, startled and delighted from certain events, a knock produced another General, a lieutenant general, whom she had met before in General Gallagher's company: David Creighton. He requested he go with her after first telling her what had happened. "Where have you been?" "I've just returned from Paris," she said, now startled and upset. She seized her purse and put her shoes back on. They went to the Langham; across the street, at St. George's, General Gallagher was in critical condition. Creighton firmly questioned her; a stenographer recorded her answers. She last saw General Gallagher at 5:15, Friday afternoon December 30. No, she did not know what his plans were for the evening. Her plans for the evening: at seven she boarded a train at Waterloo Station for a channel crossing. She had a three day leave and was expected in Paris. "A date sir," she said to Creighton's pause. She gave a name for him to confirm. She was glad he was not married. She was glad she had knocked a glass of wine on his trousers at the restaurant; the waiters were both kind and attentive, and clearly amused as the gauche American girl. They would remember that, if it came to having to prove anything... a reader of murder mysteries, Julie could concoct many different scenarios, including how she herself could be a suspect.

To Creighton's questions: She assumed the General was going home, to his flat on Goodge. Yes, he frequently walked, unless it were too unbearably cold. She was fairly familiar with the route between his flat and the Langham; she had sometimes walked it with him, veering off to take the Underground to her own quarters. No sir, she did not recognize the name of the street he had been struck on, Turnet Close. "I guess you're saying," she asserted between nervous sips of coffee, "that you suspect this not to be an accident." Creighton didn't answer. He looked up at two knocks on the door, and at his "Come," his aide opened the door to admit a woman.

Major Ceile O'Brien, Mrs. Joseph Gallagher...and from the look of her, she had just arrived from Australia. Her oversized jacket, draped around her shoulders, revealed summerweight flight fatigues.

Their eyes connected. "I want to see my husband," Major O'Brien said to Creighton, the tone of her voice making it clear she did not want to see HER.

"It's 0230 and seeing the general requires permission from two authorities. It's being arranged."

"Good. I need food, please, and coffee...sir." Creighton left, taking his aide, presumably to arrange for a meal. The major sat down on the couch, and pulled off her cap, scrutinizing the younger woman. Both their memories were hard and bright about Julie being at the Goodge flat, in the company of Joe Gallagher, whose wife had left just an hour before after certain things had been said.

"Joe wrote that you said I scare the hell out of you," she said.

Julie had grown stronger in the last year. "What else did he say about me?"

"It's what he didn't say about you that bothers me."

"This isn't the time," Julie said.

"When I see my husband, it's going to be without questions. Now I want to know... did Joe **not** write me about he and you having an affair?"

A blush invaded Julie's neck; no even wave of color, her blushes were great splotches of red that moved up to her right cheek and temple.

"You're not the first secretary to have an affair with the boss. And maybe try to kill him if he rejects you for carrying his child."

The blush ended with anger. Julie met her eye to eye, opinion to accusation.

"You're not the first wife to behave stupidly to a husband who loves you. If you've lost him, you deserve it."

“So, I’ve lost him to you--? When?”

Julie held her tongue, backtracked, but in kindness. “Mam, you haven’t. You are exhausted, and hungry, and—fearful.”

Creighton knocked and entered. He could smell the hatred. “Doctor wants to see you,” he told Ceile. She rose and fled out the door. “Me,” Ceile shot at Julie when she joined them in their hurried trek across the street. “If the doctor turns me away,” Julie shot back and then said, “Sir, what about the Major’s food..?” “

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Archbury ahead. Archbury below, two thousand feet, one thousand... “Colonel, you have to help me.”

He did.

“Colonel, don’t leave me alone up here...”

Never.

“If you can make it, I can make it...”

“Circle the field, full flaps...”

“Sir...”

“You’re doing fine...Sandy...”

Sandy looked at him and said, “Danzo...Danzo, oh darling, I’m here...”

His right eye jerked open. Light struck like a pick-axe.

“Goddam...”

Laughter. Nervous.

His eyelid was then opened... lowered.

“Go back to sleep, General. Go back...”

How far back. He walked back into the darkness, looking for his friend. Sandy, who needed help landing the plane. He could not find him. He guessed the plane had landed. He was safe, in bed. He went to sleep.

...Darling?

Grigariff found a cot for Ceile to sleep on. Now that Danzo had awakened, and responded and Grigariff was pleased, she could find the stomach to eat. She stared at the food and coffee she had asked for, and then sat down on the cot and dug into it.

“Wake up, wake up,” Grigariff said hours later, tapping her cheek. “Time for—re-velly.” He stumbled a bit on the word. She sat up. Daylight, at least what passed for it in London in January, showed through the window. Stupefied with exhaustion just slightly alleviated by several hours of sleep, she stared at Grigariff who gestured at a basin of water. She washed her face and found a comb in her bag. Hands long experienced at the task drew her hair away and pinned it up. She almost wished for lipstick. Then she really wished for it when Julie, bathed and refreshed, in a pressed uniform, came in. She met Ceile’s raddled look with an unashamed one.

The doctor then tapped Joe’s cheek. “General...comrade...wake up.”

Joe’s face quivered slightly, his mouth opened and Grigariff dropped some water on his tongue. “Uhhh...” Joe felt his eyes open and forced them to stay open. He looked at the three people flanking his bedside. “Julie,” he said. Then, Pavel...Doc...oh...Ceile...Ceile...my queen.”

“Danzo.” Ceile bent over and kissed his forehead, while seizing his hand. He pressed it, as hard as he could. She stood back, refusing to cry, and refusing to deliver a glance of triumph at Julie. If she had, she would have seen that Julie’s eyes were wet, but from relief. To the doctor’s simple friendly questions, Joe croaked, “Fine,” and “yes,” and something that sounded like “You gotta be kidding.” He looked at Ceile again...then Grigariff and Julie. Then around. “Where’s Sandy?”

“Not here,” Ceile said after a moment.

“Okay,” Joe said, and at Grigariff’s urging, settled back into drugged sleep. The two women left the doctor making routine checks on his patient, and a nurse replacing his IV bags. They went past the MP at the door and down the hallway.

“Sandy Komansky was his aide,” Ceile said.

“Yes, I know. Hard act to follow,” Julie said. “Is he supposed to be here?”

“No. I don’t think so.”

They both needed tea or coffee and found the canteen on the second floor. It seemed as good a time as any for some more confrontation, though this seemed different as it started out with apologies. "I'm sorry. I've been pretty awful."

Julie answered, "You had a long trip, and I'm sure it was pretty terrible with not knowing about how you would find the General."

Her answer was so primly understanding that Ceile blurted out something she wanted to save for later: "Are you in love with my husband?"

Expecting such a question, just perhaps not so soon, Julie had her answer ready but it came through clenched teeth. "Frankly, it's hard not to be in love in some way with General Gallagher."

"In this last nine months, have you been alone with him?"

"Yes, quite a bit. Truly alone...a few times."

"And that means what?" Ceile said.

"It means we have been truly alone a few times. Once on a cold lonely road en route to London from a meeting."

"His and your meeting?"

Julie sipped on black tea which was old and bitter but at least hot.

"Why are you silent?"

"Silence is silence. Put your own interpretation on it."

"How the hell I will." Ceile stared at the young woman, lovely, younger than she was, and who had been with her husband probably far more than she ever had... "Get your goddamned head out of your ass," she said to Julie. "And answer me."

"Not until you get your own goddamned head out of your own goddamned ass," Julie said in a deadly voice. "And that's where it's been since February of last year."

Ceile did not pull rank, she yanked. "Watch your mouth, *Lieutenant*."

“Watch yours—Major.”

They stared at each other...until Ceile went chicken. “You can have him then.”

Julie Lovelace merely took a sip of tea. “The General received a letter from you. The one with the ring. He hurled it to the floor. I picked it up.”

Ceile’s eyes instinctively went to Julie’s hands. A slender ring was on her third finger, left hand.

“My engagement ring is from is from Major George Dashett. He placed it on my finger in Paris.” She almost smiled, recalling that is when she knocked the glass of wine on his trousers.

Ceile felt shock, relief, and fury—Dash?—but relief was paramount.

“But I wouldn’t relax if I were you.”

“Oh?”

“General Gallagher has been a complete gentleman with me. Even at times when he could have pressed his advantage.” Julie then misted up at how kind and caring he was when they lodged in that shed, nearly naked and using each other for body warmth. Caring enough not to let his caring for her lead to something they would both regret. “But if you continue to act like an asshole—Major—someday he might turn to me. Fiance and all, Major—I might turn to him.”

“Excuse me,” Ceile said after a moment and left. Julie determinedly finished her tea and then found the woman’s toilet and threw up. She did not know that Ceile had beaten her to the location and to the action five minutes earlier.

She left, swallowing that awful after taste and blowing her burning nose...to see Maxwell Gallagher emerging from the lift. Rumpled, his trenchcoat still on, he glanced around and saw his daughter-in-law. Without words, they went into each other’s arms, in a strong, comforting embrace. Max finally gently pushed her back

and looked into her eyes. “I heard when I came in through the front doors. He’s going to be okay.”

Ceile nodded, and then gave into tears...over more than Joe’s being hurt, she knew, but did not tell Max. He guided her to a wooden bench that had seen better days. She was wiping the tears off her face, but they kept coming. Max waited his arm around her shoulders, and thought, oddly, she had never looked so beautiful. Oh, she was always beautiful in a strong, Celtic fashion—confidence gleaming from her lips, her eyes. But in her weariness and sorrow allayed by relief there was a deeper, almost tragic beauty there... “Have you seen Joe?” No, he had not. He was barely off an endless flight over the Atlantic. “Is Irene here?” she asked, linking her hands in his right elbow and taking him to find his son. No, Irene had a daughter-in-law and two grandchildren to care for...Pres, well, was on assignment. He was being sought out to give him the news, now the good news about Joe. Her parents were waiting as anxiously as his own parents on how things were. God, such good news...Max held onto his own tears until after he had seen his son, and felt Joe’s hands pressing on his when he asked if he could hear him. He brushed a kiss on Joe’s forehead, smiled at the Russian doctor and left. A day later Max returned to the United States. Too many things piled up on his Pentagon desk, including request/orders for him to head up an investigative unit on all the UFO sightings of the last two years. Oh God, he thought...

He made a special point of talking with Ceile before leaving the hospital. Is there anything she wanted to tell him...? She had no trouble blurting out the story of the last year, how miserable she had been, how miserable she had made Joe, and how her disappointment of losing their baby had almost run their marriage on the rocks. She didn’t mind saying this to Max...he understood, she knew, from the experiences of war, the military, and his own marriage, which he had kept going despite separation, and probably more than a few temptations. He had to go. She let him, and said words he seemed to understand: “Would you keep silent about well...San Antonio...and tell Irene that I love Joe very much.”

Max nodded, understanding her, although he wished she would talk with Irene directly. But he knew that Irene sort of awed Ceile...perhaps made her angry, too, with some kind of rivalry. In case, he knew that Ceile had never written Irene on her own.

UFO's, he thought, heading back on the plane. Why him? He'd take Taiwan and Chiang Kai-Shek over this.

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Ceile, bending over him, lips on his forehead, lips on his lips.

But he was covered with sheets and blankets and could not move. His eyes did...and prickles moved in secret places when their eyes met and focused and melted on each other.

Sometime later. "How...did I get to Australia?"

"You're in England. And so am I."

"Good. Good..."

More time. Ceile was helping him drink broth, half a spoonful at a time.

"Question?" she asked him. "You want to ask me a question."

"Where's Sandy?"

"Sandy?—why, he's in California."

"Oh." She told him a funny story about her long journey back from Australia. She went away and came back, and the prickles returned. They talked about this and that. Then, "Where's Sandy? How is he?"

"Joe, you know Sandy's in California. I'm sure he's fine."

"Oh. How did I get to Australia?"

In St. George's hospital, Ceile, still travel worn, anxiously waited for Dr. Grigariff's every three hour check on Joe, even at night. Prognosis had been grim, but eight days later, the last five in her presence, it verged on excellent. "And how are you?" the Russian doctor asked her as she stood by the half-frozen window. "You

need to sleep in a real bed, not just that cot," he added. When her tired face peered at him, he said, "Ask me what you wish?"

"Is he truly all right? Will he be all right?"

"You're a nurse. You must know when somebody's healing."

"Body yes...his mind, no. He's being rational, but he keeps asking me how he got all the way to Australia."

"His head got a helluva thump. He's recovering from surgery. He had a fever from infection. Strong drugs have their effect. Give him one more day if you're concerned. And, go home. I understand you came from Northolt here, five days ago and my dear young woman, you need a bath, not just touching up in the women's loo..."

The next day, Joe was sitting up, bolstered by pillows. There was color in his face. His eyes were reelingly focused on hers, but he truly knew her. Much improved, he answered her questions, and she answered his. After he finished a mug of coffee, nearly drop by drop, he saw her concern. "Yes?"

"You've been asking about Sandy."

"I have?"

"Yes, three times."

"Is he here—in London?"

"No, he's in California. But you've been asking about him. And do you understand Joe that you are not in Australia? I'm here with you, in London."

"Well...oh, Ceile, it's so...wonderful to see you."

"One thing at a time, Danzo. One thing now—I'm back. And back for good."

“That thing is all I need.” She and Lt. Lovelace had been questioned by Creighton and neither was sure if something were being made of their answers. Lt. Lovelace had reviewed Joe’s calendar, reported what she could about his visitors, his projects, and his work—which was largely devoted to preparing a Negro training unit for the ETO. Yes, the General had duties which she knew about in terms of how long he was going to be, and how to make contact with him. The training was going to commence in June of that year. About his personal life, she knew nothing. Well, nearly nothing. “We didn’t make ourselves at home around each other,” Julie finally snapped. She later understood that the neighbors on Goodge Street had been questioned over any female company coming or going...negative.

Two days later, Joe had made tremendous progress, but as Grigariff said, it was two inches of progress, not two miles. Still, his hazel eyes were increasingly focused; he talked with his parents on the phone, downplaying his injuries. He also asked for Lt. Lovelace to report on the progress of their work, the all-Negro training battalion.

Ceile finally tore herself away from St. George’s to return to the Goodge flat, to stock it with groceries, completely wash down body and hair in a tub, find fresh clothes, use the bed, check on the mail. In her finding fresh clothes, she found her ring wrapped in a handkerchief—and stowed among her panties... She did not touch it. When it went back on her finger, Joe would place it there. On January 18, she was chatting with Joe as he slowly ate breakfast. “You haven’t asked about Sandy,” she then ventured.

“What about Sandy?”

“Nothing. But you asked about him three times, as if he were expected.”

“My queen, I don’t remember that.”

“Then, what do you remember? I know you haven’t really been questioned yet by Creighton and company. They’re coming today. You know that. What are you going to tell them?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“My last memory was sometime that afternoon. Julie was typing like a madwoman trying to get my Washington correspondence finished before she took off a three-day leave to Paris. She had her bag packed and with her so she left for Waterloo right from the Langham. I guess I then walked home.”

“From the Langham? That’s three miles...”

“I enjoy walking...My butt feels like a manhole cover after sitting on it all day...and well, you weren’t home...”

Soon, Dave Creighton came into the room and started questioning him. “Was Turnet Close a familiar route to you?”

“I’ve walked that way, yes. Without trouble.”

Creighton’s aide showed him a drawing of the scene of his accident. It indicated recessed doorways and windows at a small T-intersection. Two lamps, one knocked over. X marked the spot where he was struck. Joe learned for the first time the noise brought people to their back windows, and out their back doors, to see and phone quickly for the police, for an ambulance. They could offer no other information. People heard the car that struck him, but it had gotten away, and of course, was being searched for.

“Did you see anybody, or talk with anybody?”

“I can’t recall. I was bound for home most likely. Though I may have planned to stop at a small pub at the end of the close, The Turtles, attached to the little hotel, the Jersey Lily. I’d been there before for a quick brandy to warm up for the rest of the walk.”

“We’ve investigated the place already. You were not there that night, but they did confirm you had been there more than once—having a drink.”

“Well...if I intended to meet somebody there...I don’t remember. Well, have I laid myself open?”

Creighton actually smiled a bit, but it was a grim one. “Your life seems an open one. Unless some higher-ups aren’t talking, Joe, putting it straight—this may have been an accident. And it may have been an assassination attempt.”

“I could identify some motivations...” Joe said, almost jokingly.

“We can too. Now, in our investigation of the days leading up to your almost being killed we uncovered no...alliances shall we say. Lt. Lovelace declares that you have received no threats, either by mail, or by voice. Of course, your recent work in assembling and equipping a Negro training battalion has brought great attention to you and some remarks, but we can’t so far find any suspect that would attempt to kill you for this. Yes, you have enemies in the Pentagon...but killing you seems pretty far-fetched. Frankly, we have been hoping that you could provide us with more.”

“Maybe something is locked up here,” Joe said, tapping his right temple.

“When and if it unlocks...we want to know. In the meantime, keep your eyes open and be careful.”

Ceile and Joe were reunited after lunch. Lt. Lovelace, after receiving permission from Grigariff, brought some paper work for Joe to review and sign. She and Ceile were perfectly civil. After Lt. Lovelace left, Ceile was suddenly struck by a terrible wave of exhaustion. She returned home, and as she twisted the old key in the old lock, she realized how much of a vortex she had been living in...she wanted a cup of tea, a bowl of soup, a strong brandy, a good night’s sleep.

The smell greeting her was a mixture of turpentine and human shit. When she fumbled for the light, the flat was undisturbed...except for NIGGER LOVER was painted on all four walls of the living room.

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The day Joe was released from St. George’s he and Ceile did not return to their flat. It had been swarmed over by investigators, and the landlord assuaged by promises that the rent would be paid despite the fact that the tenants would not be returning for some time. Perhaps never.

Rather, they were driven to the Langham—even though it was more or less across the street. And, at least the old heap had the charm of familiarity. They were moved into a large suite—and familiar too, as they realized...they had spent their honeymoon days and nights—which had blurred into a single passage of time—back in 1944.

The door closed finally closed on the waiter bringing an order of tea. Ceile poured and prepared a cup for Joe, who was already stretched out on the damask sofa. Ceile pushed away worry over his drawn face and he smiled when he accepted the tea and drank it down with relish. They talked...lightly, but about important things...and then, the inevitable knock at the door.

Ceile opened the door cautiously...and there stood Doud and Creighton. The elevator doors, about ten yards down the corridor slid open, revealing Eoghain St. John Keighley. With a sigh and a smile she let them in. After greetings, Joe said to them, straight, “My wife is not waiting in the weeds. She knows...at least all I know.”

“Including certain conversations in your office, Phil,” Ceile said. “And recall, I was also at that little shindig at Bryncote during which there were odd occurrences which led to even odder occurrences.”

“Fire me,” Joe offered. His tired face indicated complete honesty. He sat up and brought his feet on the floor. “Talk. I know you have things to talk about. Any solutions?”

“Nothing easy. It gets harder. But one thing we’ve learned, if it’s true—Vorodenko managed to contact us five days after your ‘accident’-- with an interesting story: he claims that the Borgia ring and the necklace with the chip in it, handing it off to Vivyan—was a set up for him—and the Bitterfeld calcium was some cooked up shit. You know what happened to the two pieces when they went missing for a time? They were actually handed back to Vorodenko who took them both back to Russia probably at the surprise of some bean counter in the Kremlin. After a time he then got them back into our hands again.”

Joe’s mind darted to the critical point: “The Bitterfeld stuff is shit?”

“Oh, yeah, it’s real enough, legitimate reports make that clear. But another kicker—this is CIA territory now. The Pentagon’s out of it.”

“Oh. Well...”

“Yes?”

“The impact diamonds...and Ken?”

“The diamonds got to Washington. And some analysts have pronounced them useless, but others say the jury’s still out on them.”

They talked some more, with Ceile inserting a few pointed questions. Joe’s memory still ragged in places, then came upon a name and a face, neither of which he liked. “That—MI6 agent—Giles, you know—“

“Yes?” Keighley notably shifted in his chair.

“He got anything to say about this?”

“Not a word. But he’s dead. On January 2.”

“How...?”

“Suicide, apparently. Although it’s not that much of a task to make a murder seem a suicide.”

“Did he leave a note?”

“A bit of a one. Word to the effect that he was tired and didn’t want to play ring around the rosy with the world anymore. In his handwriting. And don’t ask if he had any enemies; any MI6 would have a few—and to be plain, perhaps some questionable types came in via your wedding—that ‘kaleed.’ We tracked down everybody who crossed into that territory, even briefly—when we checked out the musicians one was missing—a Colin Eppey. The few friends he has said they haven’t seen him since April.”

Joe asked what he looked like. Keighley reported: tall fellow, taller than a lot of Englishmen. Dark hair, pomaded. Was in the war, but no marks from it. Joe thought back...some whisper of memory came to him a tall fellow—but where... Joe shook his head slightly, hating its fuzziness. Hating himself for getting so badly smashed up.

Julie Lovelace paid her usual afternoon visit to review the progress of his projects, get his signature on the never ending correspondence, and at times get his opinion on some issue. She was her usual efficient self, and made no effort to hide her engagement ring from him...but one afternoon, he finally asked her about the, who, of course, he knew... took a deep but happy breath. “We actually met two years ago in Texas and at the time, we were with others—he even had a fiancée at the time—not that we fell in love or anything, but we liked each other. They called it a day...and then we met again in your office...remember, I came in with apple bread? We started dating in September...nothing serious at the time... but we’ve both grown...closer.”

“Will you be requesting a transfer?”

“Yes sir. It would seem to be easier. The military can’t neatly square relationships.”

Joe nodded, sighing a bit.

“And sir, Joe—you will be just fine. And keep telling yourself that—well,” Julie said, with one of her violent blotching blushes, “that many people love you, and always will.”

Boise Flyer Maintains He Saw 'Em: Kenneth Arnold Sticks To Story of Seeing Nine Mysterious Objects Flying At Speed

--Aurora Richardson

Over 1200 Miles An Hour Over Mountains

Kenneth Arnold, a six-foot, 200-pound flying Boise, Ida., business man, was about the only [person today](#) who believed he saw nine mysterious objects -- as big as B-29s -- whizzing over western Washington at 1200 miles an hour. Army and civilian air experts either expressed polite incredulity or scoffed openly at Mr. Arnold's story, but Arnold clung to his story of shiny, flat objects racing over the Cascade Mountains with a peculiar weaving motion like the tail of a kite. A CAA inspector in Portland, quoted by the Associated Press, said: "I rather doubt that anything would be traveling that fast." A Washington, D.C., army spokesman was quoted as saying, "As far as we know, nothing flies that fast except a V-2 rocket, which travels at about 3500 miles an hour -- and that's too fast to be seen." Such reports are only one among other notable sightings of unrecognized craft around the world; some believe that Nazi technology is being tested, while others believe they are visitors from beyond this world. Certain sources report that Nazi technology both failed and successful is being re-created and tested, and not always officially...



Sandy: The Distance of Doubt - Los Angeles, Early Winter, 1948

Aurora Richardson planned to return to Los Angeles in early January, 1948, after spending the nativity season with her parents in Reading, Pennsylvania. She had taken the train from Washington DC where, on her own dime, she had been working on a story about post-war tensions. Good stuff for her masters project to be completed in the upcoming spring at USC. She had wanted to be with her parents for Christmas after two Christmases in California, and though disappointed, Sandy, in a phone call agreed.

She had broached another topic with him: she had sent a special gift. When she asked, a little too lightly, if it had arrived, and...if he liked it, he blurted, but happily, "It's too good for me!" She had found, in an expensive shop in Philadelphia, a leather satchel with metal clasps, and she paid more to have his initials stamped on it—in black, edged with gold: AJK. "On you, it will look wonderful," she assured him. "Thanks," he said quietly, and she was positive that he was embarrassed about not being able to afford an equally nice present...oh, crap, she thought, adopting one of his favorite words of exasperation. But their relationship had long been a little rocky—maybe very rocky at times—as she had

tried to fill in the vacuum left by Sandy's girlfriend and, as she understood, pretty much the woman he was going to marry before something happened. 'That woman' was in Greece, now. But Aurora kept finding bits and pieces of the woman all over the garage apartment they were pretty much sharing.

She was anxious enough about keeping him that she was a little worried about Barbara Corbusz...Sandy had recommended that she move in with Barbara, who had been roommates with Betty, his cousin. Betty had relocated to San Antonio...leaving Barbara—who was pretty, young, a nurse—and a wounded veteran. A Navy flight nurse, a crash in the Pacific had robbed her of her left leg, just above the knee. Like any other wounded veteran, she recovered in Honolulu and San Diego, and was fitted with her prosthesis and was discharged. She could see Sandy's admiration for Barbara, and at times it bothered her...as she could see that Barbara was kind of in love with Sandy...

"Can you join us?" Aurora asked Sandy, hopefully, holding off saying "I'll buy your ticket." He was proud in paying his own way, and she understood.

There was a long pause. "Fraid I can't. I got to work. But hurry home, okay, please?"

She heard the tension in his voice. She told him, "Back on January 7." As she hung up, she tried to avoid thinking that if he truly loved her, he would come...but he did have work and responsibilities.

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A few days before Christmas Boyer and Shari Richardson had joyfully greeted their daughter at the Reading train station. Two years in California—what was there in California except crazy movie people and palm trees?—but Boyer was only teasing her. As owner and editor of the *Reading Courier*, a small but influential newspaper, he been proud of his daughter who had cut her teeth on her high school newspaper, studied journalism at the University of Pennsylvania, became an unnamed reporter for her dad's newspaper but then had departed for USC to take a masters. He was actually proud she had ignored his kidding of studying something she was already good at...and understood how she wanted to break out of the home state and her father's paper and venue to seek work on her own, and become a journalist. She had complained that the war had ended

too soon for her to get there and write about it...for which she immediately said that was a horrible thing to think! Boyer refrained from saying that the homefront, which still existed in the rising tensions of a confused peace, had a rising war on its hands too, as the horrors of Nazi genocide threw stateside racial and other issues into strong relief.

By her own lips and her letters Boyer had learned Aurora was enjoying and learning “a lot!” in her graduate work at USC. He was glad for her “adventures,” and knew she wasn’t gadding about in La La Land writing about movie stars and their shenanigans. She was sincerely interested in the aeronautical developments out there—yet Boyer could not help but recall how fascinated she had been with the 1942 “ghost blimp,” that Navy blimp that had come to rest in Daly City, south of San Francisco minus its crew, but full of mystery. Lots of hoopla had been spilled over the story that was both sad and intriguing as all kind of motivations were assigned to the two vanished men, including them fighting over a woman. Aurora had not brought up the old story, so maybe she had gotten over it.

And...Boyer knew that he was not sure about this guy, this Alexander Komansky that she seemed to be in love with. He and his wife both knew from Aurora’s own admission, that she had kind of scooped the guy up after a girlfriend had apparently departed for good...Moreover, the guy’s name Komansky placed him squarely in the Polish sector of his experiences—which included some pretty rough customers from the mining and industrial districts. However, no kneejerk, Boyer had lived in a Polish neighborhood, and recalled the composers, artists, scientists and writers who had Polish names; a particularly wonderful kind of music was called a “polonaise”—and the guy’s service record was incredible. As for Shari, Aurora’s mother, she still believed in her heart that women should be at home, and working to help their husbands as she had, not exposing themselves to all sorts of doubtful situations, but supported her daughter in her life and preferences...for the most part.

Worry fled when Aurora swung off the train and dashed across the wet platform and into their arms. Worry was held off as they celebrated the Christmas season, so different from California with trees laden with snow, dank skies, mudrooms for boots, mufflers and scarves and immensely heavy coats. In the days with her family Aurora exclaimed happily over the enormous belly of her pregnant cousin;

baked traditional Christmas treats with her mother, and visited her dad in the old crammed offices of *Reading Courier*, and talked with him about policy and editorials. She was articulate and a seeker of justice as she approved her dad's editorials for racial equity, particularly since the Negro population had more than doubled in Pennsylvania in the last four years and there had been a helluva lot of grumbling. "So come back and help me," he said. "Come back after you get your piece of paper telling you that you can do what you have already been doing."

"And what about my guy? He has a future in the aeronautical industry out there—and God, Dad, what they're doing, it's incredible." And apparently secret—which she did not say aloud.

Boyer let the impasse be.

A few nights before Aurora was due to depart Boyer, tired from putting the newspaper "to bed" and thus into the hands of his printers and distributors, and looking forward to a shower and bed parked his pre-war sedan in his wooden garage after eleven o'clock pm. Since mid-1947, Boyer Richardson had been monitoring the growing crisis in Europe which been brought into focus by George C. Marshall when his Moscow conference with Stalin had gone nowhere, and the West needed to forget cooperation with its former ally. The USSR was determined not to let Germany industrially revive, and economists and political technicians had convinced a lot of people that that was the only way to get Europe back on its feet. Marshall, leaving Stalin and the USSR literally and figuratively, had come to terms with the fact that the Iron Curtain was for real. From this realization, Marshall drafted an economic recovery plan...that as of December 1947 was in committee; being developed; screamed at, criticized, eagerly anticipated by overseas nations; sneered at as dollar diplomacy, with the good old French doing everything they could to stop it, never wanting a strong Germany to the east again. Good ol' TASS solemnly, accusingly, enunciated that the Plan was nothing but a preparation for war... And that was just the tip of the iceberg. He let himself out of the garage. secured the door, started through the arbor to the house and saw a light in the dining area, and through a part in the curtains, saw his daughter seated at table, writing.

When he came in, she called out “Hi Dad!” He poured them shots of brandy and sat down beside her. He winced a bit at the dark circles under her lovely eyes. “No sleep again?” he asked.

“Dad, I told you...I haven’t been on a regular sleeping schedule for weeks.”

“When are you going to get back on one?”

“Maybe when you do,” she teased, fondly.

“That’s been my regular schedule. You—your sleep is like a piece of Swiss cheese—shot full of holes.”

“I’ll catch up someday.”

Boyer knew better than to argue. He read the title of her work. “Divorce?”

“I’m contributing to a *Redbook* series about the rising divorce rate. Just here in Reading divorce cases have tripled since 1945...there’s a lot of stuff about couples marrying too quickly because of the war, but there’s so many stories about—well, men who kind of...liked the war. Or the kind of life they could lead at war. Sort of endless Tom Sawyer days on the river island. Loved getting out of the Army but find they couldn’t go back to the paycheck and taking out the trash, mowing the lawn. And some start drinking, and what drinking can lead to--black eyes, and broken noses, crying kids...”

“I hear that’s pretty well going on with one of your mother’s cousin’s boys.”

She worked on a sentence. Then she looked up to see her father looking at her.

“Yes?”

“Are you all right?”

“Of course.” She lighted a cigarette and glanced at her father. “You know, you and Mama never said a thing when I started smoking.”

“Well, no, but I worry about you starting. Not a good habit, honey. Believe me, I know.”

She smiled.

“You miss this guy?”

“I’ll say I do.”

“What about him? does he miss you?”

She almost said, “Well, of course,” but hesitated. “He’d better,” she compromised. Then she recalled how more than once he had called her by the name of his former girlfriend.

“Well...for the first five years of our marriage, your mother and I hardly saw each other—she was working nights to put out the edition, and I was working days to scoop the competition.”

“But you bumped into each other in bed once in a while,” she said. “I’m the proof.”

“You want children?”

“We both do. Not immediately.”

“What’s his not immediately as opposed to your not immediately?”

“Getting a little Socratic aren’t we?” she joked, but her voice was a bit sharp. She got up, refreshed their glasses of brandy. She sat down again but looked at him, not the typewriter. “I’m sorry. But...well, I always figured that someday I would fall in love, marry and settle down. Well, I fell in love—pretty hard too, I saw him and said—well--I want to marry...but I don’t really want to settle down, not yet.”

“Did he give any ultimatums—‘after you return no more leaving’ or you’re going to be a housewife and nothing more?”

“No. He understands journalists.”

“Would you like an ultimatum from him?” he inquired, delicately.

“No...yes.” She let the brandy speak at last. “If he gave me one I might be more sure of him.”

“You told me that he got close to marrying another woman—“

“That’s over. He told me so.”

“You sure?”

She switched topics but it was a good switch. “Dad, I love him, but there’s something that he’s holding back—or holding him back. I think it’s fear.”

“Fear of what?”

“Life, perhaps. He’s had a tough one. It left a mark.” She kept herself from reaching for another cigarette. At first a manageable habit, she knew her smoking was getting the better of her.

“Is that why he didn’t marry this other woman?”

“I don’t know-- it ‘just didn’t work out.’” She never told her father *just how quickly* she had come to Sandy’s door, extending her friendship, when she learned he was alone, last summer. She first saw him in early 1947 when she was sent running to cover the wind tunnel bombing for the campus newspaper.

After a moment, “Would this leave its mark on you?”

“I’m not sure what you mean.”

“If a man is scared of life it’s hard on him. And it can’t be easy on his loved ones.”

“No...he’s not scared of life. Couldn’t be. But he’s scared of something.”

“Is he scared of love?” At her glance, Boyer explained himself. “A lot of young men are afraid of love—or marriage—”

“In vino veritas,” she interrupted.

“What was the truth discovered by wine?”

“One night we both had a little too much—to drink-- and he really opened up on some things, including he—well, as he put it, once he had been more scared of love and loving than he was scared of the Luftwaffe. You could shoot and kill them, get rid of them. But love was a helluva lot more complicated.” She paused. “But he also told me that by knowing others in love—he could tell that loving was strength, not weakness.”

“I like that.” He put down his empty glass. “You and Sandy...will make it through.”

“Through to what?”

“To whatever ending is best. But the ‘best’ might be realizing you’re not right for each other.”

“Would you like that?”

“I’d like to see you happy. And...I sure would like you home.”

“Dad, there are such exciting things out there—“

“Important things here. People still tell me how your feature article on returning Negro soldiers facing the same old murderous racial crud changed their thinking.”

“Well, I’m glad, but dammit, Dad, there are things going on in Los Angeles that just can’t compete here, and yes, there are racial issues out there, too—I read that the KKK even there is growing.”

“And competition. Honey, you’ll have to be tough to get to the top there.”

“I am tough.”

“No. You’re strong. Tough is shoe leather. And that’s what your conscience might turn into. To extend the image, you start stomping on people to get what you want. Nobody’s right but you. You turn into a bully.”

“That’s out of a movie.”

“A lot of movies are based on reality. I’m sure you’ve heard there’s been talk about Bea Wales dropping out of sight—one theory is she got too close to important things and two, somebody’d had enough of her...and...well, she was a bully. Maybe it was both.”

She found and erased an error and brushed the crumbs from the page. “There hasn’t been any word on her--?”

“No.” He rose, kissed her forehead and headed upstairs. After showering, he slid between the blankets and his wife nestled up against him. He lay awake for a while, not really worrying about his daughter—but if he saw her turning into another Bea Wales, warco deluxe, he’d lock her in her room. Well, not really, but—and, he wondered if there had been any word about Wales. She dropped out of sight at some point in Kansas City. God knew people had grudges against her, knowing her delight in destroying people who disagreed with her—or called her bluff--had she been killed? She sure had disappeared.

His daughter sat at the table and continued her work and while not believing her dad's words, nonetheless appreciated them. She was—well, crazy about Sandy, and did he feel the same or was he so lonely that he fell for her open and inviting arms? Oh, she should have spent the holidays with him rather than chasing to Washington on the trail of a big story that did not quite...measure up because people didn't want to talk about those flying saucers. Moreover, the developing European Recovery Plan was at the top of the agenda, and Truman was promoting it as a way to be re-elected.

She peered at her draft about climbing divorce rates and admitted it was more substantial than that phantom trail about crazy flying crafts and crashes in New Mexico. She should have gone to New Mexico, not Washington, but it was said people in Washington knew more than the slaveys on the ground... She did not learn much in Washington, except she did find a name of interest: an officer named Purdy—maybe--The name had been spoken to her, not written down. She knew enough not to make a stink trying to find him...yet. But the person she spoke with said that he had special duty about the recent rash of UFO sightings.

In the meantime, had Barbara moved in on Sandy? She was thinking too much of Barbara again. She then finished her draft but smoked a half dozen cigarettes before she went to bed.

Two days later, on January 7, Boyer and Sharon drove their daughter to Philadelphia airport, where, after a two hour delay for weather she finally boarded. "Say hi to that fellow of yours and do wonderful work!" Boyer shouted to his daughter as she scampered over the cold tarmac to the plane's steps. He then said to his wife, "You know, we need to ride in a plane again someday." The first time was when they were courting and Charles Lindbergh had flown them, five minutes for five dollars.

**

"Help you with your bags, lady?" the driver said to the beautiful young woman in his cab as he drew into the driveway of the Armers' bungalow.

Alternately travel weary and contemplative during the lengthy trip from the airport to Sandy's home on Catalina, Aurora was anticipating, wondering, slightly fearing her reunion with Sandy, after weeks—a month and a half...Should she

suggest they marry, immediately? Put it off? Why? She had pretty well declared for him when she finally refused to go back and forth between Barbara's and Sandy's respective apartments, though she kept Barbara's mailing address for her correspondence with her parents, and, the University. Her clothing had migrated to the single closet and took up half the bureau; her toiletries contested for space in the tiny bathroom. He seemed to enjoy having her around. But the subject was kind of danced around...

"...Lady?" repeated the driver.

"Thanks but no." She seized her small suitcase with one hand, paid him with a handsome tip with the other. Then clasping the handle of her larger suitcase which he hauled out of the trunk, she gracefully bolted from the back seat—saw his car—lighted windows--and scurried up the steps.

"Sandy, Sandy, I'm here!" she called. She flung open the door. "Sandy!—Hello?!" She heard a female voice calling, "Sandy, is that you?" and somebody came limping slightly out of the bedroom.

The two women faced each other: Aurora Richardson and Barbara Corbusz. And yes, both in love with the same guy, this Sandy Komansky.

After a moment, Barbara, clad in her nursing uniform, minus her cap, hugged Aurora though with a disappointed face. Though she could have lived off a government pension, she had resolutely taken up nursing duty again, although it was largely administrative in deference to her missing limb. "I'm glad you're here!—I have to leave in about five minutes—I knew you were scheduled to arrive, but I was hoping you were Sandy—I brought your mail—"

"Where is he?" Aurora said. She stood still, grasping her valise. "Obviously not here."

"Well, he's supposed to be here—that's what I understood."

"Where has he been?"

"London—um—didn't you get--?"-- The phone then rang. Barbara answered it with a tense "Hello?...oh, yes, yes she is." Then she handed it over — "It's your folks."

Aurora had given her parents Sandy's phone number—when she couldn't be found at her "home phone," which was Barbara's phone number. She calmly spoke into the receiver: "I just got to Sandy's apartment. Yes, that was Barbara—ah—I had a good flight....no you can't—Sandy's not here at the moment." She listened and then said, "Well, a big kiss to mom and to you!"

Barbara pinned on her nurse's cap which sat like a crown on her well-coiffed ash blond hair. She was pretty, but no knock-out, at least that is how Aurora regarded her. Barbara asked, directly, "You didn't receive a cable from Sandy?"

"Sounds like I should have." Composedly, Aurora began unbuttoning her jacket.

"Sandy called me from New York, telling me where he was going. He said he called you in Reading, but nobody was home—he said he would cable you when he arrived in London."

"What day did he call you on?"

"December 27 I think. He was due to arrive in London the next day."

The one day, Aurora thought, that she and her mother convinced her dad to take a full day off and for them to visit his mother, in her eighties and not well. "Did he say what this was about?—why he went?"

"He called it a family matter. He didn't go into any details."

"*How* did he get to London?—a trip like that isn't cheap."

"He said the tickets had been arranged."

"Passport?"

"I had the same question—he said he had one." Barbara didn't mention that Sandy had gotten the passport when he briefly considered going after his former girlfriend.

"When was he supposed to return?"

Barbara dreaded that question. "January 4."

Aurora fought a wave of fear. "Classes begin today," she remarked.

"Yes."

“Then there’s been no word—one way or another.” She recalled him speaking of how competitive the program was, and one misstep might ruinous. She tried to persuade him that was over the top, but he had asked her, “You ever meet Claud Walkert?”

Aurora realized she still had her jacket on. She removed it and then pulled back her thick brown hair, re-inserting the combs. Suddenly she blurted, “What are you doing here, anyway?”

Barbara took her semi-accusation in stride. “I wondered if you had received any messages.”

“No.”

“Well,” Barbara said. “Transatlantic travel has its problems.”

They looked at each other, reassuringly. It was all they could do. Outside, a horn honked. “Well, there’s my ride. Well, uh, well, say hi to Sandy for me when he gets home.” They both heard the optimistic ring in her voice. She left, clumping down the steps.

Aurora, after several minutes, calmly rose, took her suitcase into the bedroom, disrobed and showered. She found cans of soup in the closet-pantry, and she cranked the lid off a can of tomato, heated it, and made toast. She found a half empty bottle of Chianti, and poured herself a small glass. She should not have gone away for the holidays, but she had a good assignment in Washington, she had family, and he didn’t...would that be a problem in the future? Slowly and deliberately she got ready for bed, each notable sound outside bringing her to the window--she then thought hard about how a mere hour before she left home for the trip westward, a telegram had arrived, offering her a sudden second crack at her inconclusive investigation. Start immediately. She called and called until she got a voice of the man doing the offering, a friend of her father’s, a Tyler Peiser at the *Washington Observer*. Did her dad arrange this?--well, so be it. But rather than shouting “yes!” she said, “Thank you I will accept, but I can’t start until January...11th.” To her relief, it was agreed. Now what?

The next day, Sunday, found the anxious Aurora at the Los Angeles airport arranging for a ticket. It took forever, with the ticket agent behind the United Airlines counter on the phone two, three and then four times. “Well,” the ticket

agent finally announced. “You have a reservation for the 7:30 pm plane on January 10.”

She thanked him, thinking, two days. She had never felt so worried, so torn, so absolutely unsure of what was the best thing to do.

The only thing she was sure of is that she had no idea how to find him, contact him. Well, she could call the State Department, but might that kick off new problems?

There was no best thing. Perhaps she should just cancel everything—call Peiser and turn him down; no, she had said she would do this. Her thesis advisor admitted that her absence would pose some problems but it was a great opportunity; Washington, always a “company town” had really clamped down on stories and secrets and here she was, being offered a peek where peeks weren’t allowed.

She walked to a row of seats and sat down. She needed to eat but didn’t feel like it and the only thing she could sniff was a hot dog counter. She was wearily holding a hot dog in one hand, and a cup of orange juice with the other, when a stream of travel-rumpled passengers came walking towards her and she wished with all her heart Sandy was among them... “Sandy?”

His pale face looked around to find her.

“Sandy!—thank God!”

After hugging him and giving him a quick kiss she led him to a chair. She offered her hot dog and orange juice. “I’ve been sick,” he said.

“No kidding!—honey, take a bite. Take the bun. I haven’t put a thing on it...”

He tasted the bun, then took a cautious bite and chewed and swallowed while she tastelessly consumed the wiener. His eyes lighted up a bit. He ate the rest and then drained the orange juice. Some color came back into his face. “Let’s go home,” she said. “Let’s find your luggage--”

“Here,” he said, showing her the leather valise—her Christmas present to him, with his name stamped in gilt-edged black on the flap. “It’s all I had time to pack.”

As she drove them home he dozed most of the way. After a shower, and a bowl of soup which she served him in bed on a tray, he slept without disturbance until the next morning.

When he opened his eyes, he saw Aurora holding a cup of coffee in her hands. After a couple of swallows, he said, "I think I may live after all. You are the best medicine I could take."

"Good. Because I may kill you for all the worry you put me through." Then she laughed and leaned down to kiss him. "Helluva homecoming! Sweetie, what's been going on?—Barbara told me you went to London." She realized she needed to call Barbara. Later.

Rather than answering her question, he asked "What day is it?"

"January 9th, morning of."

"The semester started two days ago."

"How about if I go talk to all your professors? I could explain how sick you are or have been."

"I guess that's all we can do."

"Professors are understanding sorts--"

"Maybe yours are, but you don't know the kind of people I deal with," Sandy said, sharply. "My schedule's in the satchel." She opened it up and found some used clothing and his toilet kit that she removed. There were papers and other things in the bottom. She found his schedule but left the other items in there, including a late edition *London Times*, dated January 7—she gave it a glance and put it aside but was eager to read it; not every day in Los Angeles did a copy of the *Times* fall into her hands.

She prepared oatmeal while he showered.

When he came into the kitchen she said, "What are those?"

"What?" He looked down and saw his forearms from wrist to elbow covered with bruises, some of which were fading into yellow gray patches.

"And your legs too—sweetie, what the hell happened to you?"

“I’m not sure.”

“Why did you go to London?”

“Believe it or not, family.”

“Uh, well, get back into bed and I’ll bring your breakfast.”

In the bedroom, he heard the phone ring. “Barbara, hi! Yes, he’s here and safe. No...I don’t know.” He just caught a harsh edge in her voice “Yes, of course...Talk to you soon.”

She carried in a tray with a bowl of oatmeal and a cup of tea. He took a sip. “You have questions.”

“First, this.” She kissed him and said “Barbara asked for me to do that for her.” It was hard then to say, “Questions can wait—eat your breakfast—you’ll feel better. Home as soon as I can.” She hurried off to the university, pleasant and solid under the January mid-day sun. Finding Dr. Crusard was the hardest; she returned twice to his untidy office and was leaving again when he suddenly appeared around a corner of the noisy engineering labs. He greeted the young woman pleasantly and motioned her into his office, where it was not only private, but quiet. “I’m here about Sandy Komansky,” she said. She sat down uneasily on a chair, wanting to ask more questions as this man probably knew more about the wind tunnel bombing than he admitted to.

“What about him?” Crusard asked, calmly. She explained his absence as due to illness. “Well, I’m glad he’s just—sick,” Crusard said. “When he didn’t show up to the first day of lab, I was worried. I was going to call.” He was calm, but Aurora could see relief in his eyes...and the way he suddenly bent over...she recalled how she too could grow so frightened that her insides puckered...

Aurora accepted his offer of coffee and cookies. She had forgotten to eat breakfast. He fetched information for her, detailed how Sandy could catch up, and walked her to the front doors. Her appetite provoked by the coffee, she went to the student commons and ate, and set out in quest of his literature professor—and realized she did not have his book bag. “God in heaven,” she muttered, wondering how she could have forgotten this. She trotted back to the engineering buildings and found Crusard gone. Checking her watch, she hurried to the

humanities building and found Dr. Wardhill, an English professor, talked with him, left him politely but muttered “bastard” under her breath, returned to engineering and found Crusard—“Yes, yes,” he said, taking her back to his office and finding the satchel.

His office door then pushed open to reveal a spare man, well dressed, calm. Yet, as Aurora could see, he was on alert. “Hello Claud,” Crusard said after a pause.

“Good day,” Claud—Walkert—said to her. His voice was pleasant but hard. Crusard went on to say that she was a journalism grad student and Sandy Komansky’s fiancée. She didn’t correct him about that... Walkert seemed to become very interested in her at this time, though his interest was not welcomed; he did bring up that he understood that Mr. Komansky was now home, after a sudden trip... When she left, she better understood Sandy’s remarks on the guy.

She stopped at the bookstore and bought his books, which took some time. She lugged them six blocks back to Catalina. She climbed the steps to find Sandy in the kitchen, getting ready to scramble some eggs. “Well, you must be feeling better!” she said.

“Yeah, but take over please,” he said. “Food still doesn’t look very good.”

She fixed the eggs, toasted some bread and he insisted upon eating at the counter, not in bed. After she finished with the dishes, she reviewed information with him on the couch where first they kissed, though not very energetically. She avoided mentioning she had met Walkert. “Everybody was very nice except Dr. Wardhill—he’s covered the first book of *Paradise Lost* and wouldn’t review it just for you.”

“No big deal. Not with paradise found. Lord, am I happy to be home and with you.” She tensed and he felt it. After a moment he said, “So when do I lose paradise?”

“I got a call just before leaving Pennsylvania for an important assignment...”

“Oh?”

She exaggerated a bit. “It’s a follow up to my investigations over the holidays. And I’m uniquely qualified—I might be able to write my own ticket.”

“Ticket to what?”

“To Los Angeles—being a wire reporter for the chain my dad’s affiliated with.”

“Not for your dad?”

Instead, she said “You know, I got a taste of my own medicine in those two days I waited for you, not knowing where you were. Don’t think I haven’t thought about it, but being the one left wondering...can really make you think. I won’t leave this time. To hell with them.”

“That’s never a wise thing to say,” he said. When she did not speak-- “Well, come on, ask me.”

“Okay...but this is strictly personal. Sweetie, why the heck did you go to London?—particularly since you didn’t come with me to just little old boring and relatively nearby Pennsylvania. I know you said this was about family—“ She bit down on her accusatory voice.

“It was very important.”

She pointed to his bruises. “Was that part of it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, what *do* you know?”

“I got a sudden message from Mara Vellen to come to London.”

“Marivellin?” she said.

“*Mara Vellen*,” he said carefully. “I knew her in official capacity—duty. The dates seemed to work. A ticket had been arranged. So I went.”

“What about your work?”

“I got laid off at the wind tunnel day before Christmas. Had enough vacation saved up at the dairy though my boss threatened to kill me when I took off like that.”

“So why did she—this Mara Vellen ask you to come to London?”

“She said it had to do with my family.”

“You don’t have a family—except for, for—your cousin—and your Uncle Tym.”

“It was family-related and to me, that is important.”

She finally asked the question that had been on her mind since the day before yesterday. “Why didn’t you cable me?—Barbara told me you said you would cable me.”

“I was sick before we arrived in London, and going through passport control I began to feel really lousy. So I got in a taxi and went to my hotel and decided to send a cable from there. When I got to my room I decided to take a nap and maybe feel better. When I woke up hours later I was so sick I could barely phone for help.”

“Then?”

“‘Taken to hospital’ as they say on the 28th. Actually, the 29th in the wee hours. I spent about four days not knowing exactly what the hell was going on. Just plain sick. Then Mara Vellen showed up on the sixth day. I might have been released before then but I had nobody to take care of me. She got me released and took care of me until she could get my tickets reissued for January 7 and then a domestic flight on January 8.”

“Do you remember anything else?”

“Well...I had two dreams on the flight. One I was alone in a B-17 hell and gone over Germany and falling—“ He stopped, paused, and went on. “I had another dream of running in London—don’t know whether I was chasing somebody or being chased.” He didn’t tell her that the second dream was so vivid that he wondered if it were real—but how? “I think they—the people at the hospital restrained me—probably explains these bruises.”

“Can you tell me about this family stuff that Mara—brought you all the way to London for—is she part of your family?—I mean, what’s going on?”

“It’s time to find out.” She fetched the satchel. He pulled out all the documents he had left inside, including his airline ticket, his passport, and a copy of the London *Times*, which he figured Mara stuffed in his satchel. He laid it aside. He reached into a side pocket which, though not a secret pocket, functioned as one as it was hard to reach. He pulled out a new manila envelope, tore it open, and found

another envelope so old the paper felt powdery. “She gave this to me at the airport.” He squinted at the envelope. “I’ll be damned.”

“What?”

“The manila envelope is addressed to ‘To heir Commenes.’”

“Who?”

“Me, I guess.” He recalled Uncle Tym calling down to him, “We kings.” He scrambled up an answer. “I doubt it, but that’s the second time I’ve been told I was connected with the Commenes.”

“Who are the Commenes?”

“A dynasty at Byzantium. You know, the empire—uhhhh—Alexius Commenes was on the throne when the First Crusade came through in 1250...” He had done a little reading in *Encyclopedia Britannica*. He realized that she was staring at him.

“Sounds pretty crazy right?”

“I don’t get it.”

“Commenes...Commens...sky. Komansky. Though I don’t know how the hell a Byzantine something or other got to Poland...although there were amber trade routes and Poland is just a ways up north...”

Rather than yea or nay she said, “What’s in the envelope?”

Tearing it open, releasing an acrid odor, he shook out a paper.

“That looks like parchment,” she said. “And I think it’s Greek.”

“Can you read it?” Sandy asked.

“Heavens, no.”

“Oh.”

“But—it’s possible that a Greek Orthodox priest might be able to decipher it—Sandy, do you know anything else about the Commenes dynasty?” She tried to keep the excitement off her face.

He said no. She said she was going to knock up the Armers and ask if they had an encyclopedia—and “Don’t you move,” she ordered him.

He didn't but his memories did. Mara, her head covered with a scarf, and wearing horn rimmed spectacles, hustling him into and then out of a black London taxi and through the airport, getting him to his rescheduled flight, minutes before departure. In the few minutes before he boarded, she had placed some items in his bag, describing them as things given to her by relatives in Zagreb. Mother's family, which Yellich had turned to when he was driven into hiding. They had sent them to Mara. *Here, take them, that's why you came here...*

She helped him to the gate and told the steward to take care of him. Sandy just wanted to get to his seat, sleep, and get home. He turned to say thanks to her, but she had vanished.

Now he was home, and safe, and after a moment Aurora returned, saying their encyclopedia was of the junior variety, but she would find out more. As if reading his thoughts she asked, "Can you write her—this Mara Vellen?"

"I don't know where to send it."

This silenced her for a bit. "Sandy, could I take this message with me and get it translated? Washington DC has two Orthodox Greek Churches—"

"Take it with you?"

"Uh, yes." Calmly, as if telling him the time, she told him that she had to go to Washington.

"She went through a lot of trouble to get this to me. To give it up—"

"Could I copy it?"

"Oh, oh, of course." Thus ended an awkward moment. She carefully transcribed the ancient dim script, wondering if she were getting it right. He said, "Sweetie, I've got to get to bed."

"Yes, your majesty. Sounds like a wonderful idea. And I will not mention that woman's name." There was no more talk. They curled up together, slept, awoke to make love sometime in the wee hours...and then she awoke at his voice shouting "God!"

"What is it?" she demanded, pulling on her robe and coming into the kitchen. Still in his pajamas, and gripping a cup of coffee, Sandy was staring the three-day old

issue of the *Times* he had pulled from his satchel. He looked up at her—“there’s an article here saying that Joe Gallagher was almost killed—“

“Who?” The name was familiar. “Ah, that was your—CO?”

“Reports were just released that he was struck by a lorry—December 30—two days after I arrived— I didn’t know—“

“That’s quite a coincidence.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Well--a coincidence.”

“Damn, I gotta find out—the article reports that he was seriously hurt—“

“Take it easy, sweetie. By now, if he were—well—you would have heard something, right?—I mean, the death of an American general—well, I would have heard about it in the last two days in the American news, I would think.”

“God, if I had known I woulda told Mara to hell with--—I wouldn’t have got on that plane--“ He skimmed the story again and wondered if Mara was making sure he didn’t hear about the incident until he got home. He did not say this aloud.

“Find somebody to call,” she said. “I’ll learn what I can.”

For Sandy the day was a blur of trying to pick up pieces. And, Aurora was leaving that evening. He ran into Ian Crusard who seemed damned glad to see him and shook and shook his hand. He hurried home and Aurora had some important information she had learned from contacts at the *Los Angeles Times*: the hospital Joe was in—good old St. George’s!--and its phone number. When he paused:

“Well, aren’t you going to call?”

“I will, I swear I will.” She finished her little bit of packing. She drove them to the airport. They stoically waited; stoically kissed goodbye and there she went. He drove home.

Thursday morning, January 12: he was wearily striding away from his single two hour class that morning, and he had taken a double shift at the dairy-- “Hey there, warmonger!”

The energetic voice was good to hear. “Hi there Hurlbert!” he said.

“Man, you’ve been ridden hard and put away wet. Sit down,” he said, pulling him to a nearby bench. “What you been up to?” Blair wasn’t passing the time of day; clearly, he was curious at Sandy’s pallor.

“A lot, but how are you doing?” Blair, the attention placed on himself, began chatting, not boastfully, but happily about himself and his work. As Sandy listened, he admired Blair’s confidence and good luck while telling himself he was stalling from making that phone call. But all that silence—had he more than likely built it into a greater fear? But there was a helluva gap between loving departures at Hitchin and this moment when he knew that Joe Gallagher could be either recovering or dead and the fear of asking seemed to tear holes in his guts. He had put off a phone call, thinking he didn’t want to stick the Armers with a long distance call—oh, hell, he could reimburse them for that...then had toyed with the idea of writing Harvey or Melva, thinking it would be ten days, two weeks before he got a reply—he could live with hope for two weeks...“Hey, you listening?” Blair asked.

“Huh?”

“What do you think about the UFOs?”

“I don’t know...last year sure seemed like Buck Rogers lived.” The aeronautical engineering students were all agog over these incidents that shot around like the silver orb in a pinball game. In Washington state, a pilot of a private plane observed a vector of ships, and a seaman, also in Washington reported six strange flying objects, and reports out of New Mexico, in a place called Roswell, claimed a space ship had gone down. Everything was screened by official reports-- “But three incidents within about the same amount of months sure sounded strange. We wondered if shock waves from the atomic bombs hit planets out there and some of them came downstairs to investigate what the children were up to—I imagine the Pentagon, for all their soothing words are setting up some office of investigation—“

“What are you up to these days?—I know you’re getting close to graduation.”

“Hanging in there, if they let me continue after this little vacation.”

But Hurlbert saw something. “What’s eating you up?”

Sandy told him that his old CO, in London, had been hospitalized after being struck by a car. "Got a phone number?" Blair asked.

"Yeah."

"Then come home with me. You can call them in complete privacy. Won't charge you a penny."

"All the way to Arcadia?" Sandy asked.

"Nah, I got an apartment nearby. Come on."

"Is Arlene with you?"

"She's in Arcadia. We see each other on the weekends. Needed my privacy to finish my dissertation." Sandy thought it didn't sound good. Blair, talking away, took him to his 1947 Buick, and drove him to a new apartment building complete with a push button elevator. Sandy couldn't help but remark that he had certainly classed up from that dump he once lived in.

"That was my 'death to the capitalists phase.' Even with this place and the Arcadia hut these days I'm still paying out less than I was with that pack of locusts that descended on me every weekend." When Sandy was silent, he remarked, "You're gonna find I'm changeable."

After finding the door unlocked, they found Arlene washing dishes. "What are you doing here?"

"Making sure you're not living in a pig sty," she answered. "Hi Sandy!"

He greeted her with congratulations about her rounding form. "Due in May," she said. "Phone's in the bedroom," Blair said, putting his arm around his wife's shoulder. Sandy saw ice in her eyes.

IPO reached, Sandy thought, letting himself into the bedroom. The bed had been made...but there was a piece of female clothing draped over a chair. Not his affair, he thought, sat down, steadied himself...and started the laborious business of placing a transatlantic call, his heart pounding.

Outside, voices murmured, then raised—and to his deep embarrassment, Arlene stormed in, snatched the piece of clothing, slammed the door and then some

shouting started, ending with another door slamming, and soon a knock, and a female voice spoke.

An operator singingly answered, "St. George's HOS-pittal." He spoke his request, another period of waiting--a sharp voice, "Third floor nurse station." After a few minutes, he said thank you, and hung up, relieved even if all he had been told by the attending sister was that "The patient is resting comfortably."

Sandy hadn't done so since leaving the boys' home—he crossed himself in thanks.

And memories rose up—of running down a dark street; terrified, not knowing where the hell he was going but where he was going...in London—the smell, the dark dank chill of air... But that might have been a dream he sometimes had, which originated when he and Gallagher had been shot at on Prince's Street, taking refuge in the dead hotel, in the basement, for a whole endless night—and then they escaped with their lives but through the roof, down a ladder, and into a world of fog which they crawled through for a long time—waiting to be shot at again.

Outside, the voices continued. He still didn't want to walk out into that—so, what the hell, he would make another phone call, using a number given to him on a Christmas card that he had opened up the day before. The note inside told him that Harvey was now stationed in England, with JAG, and no longer at the Nuremberg Trials...and 3000 miles away, and then across the Atlantic, a phone went ring-ring, ring-ring...a familiar if sleepy voice answered, stating the phone number as was the habit. "Colonel Stovall?"

"Yes?"—spoken tensely.

The operator intervened and then they spoke.

"Remember that duty sergeant in Operations who sounded off a lot?"

Silence... "Oh, my God, Sandy!—Sandy, right--are you calling about Joe?"

"Ah, no, uh, yes—I just spoke with St. George's and I got he was resting comfortably."

"I've called too and received the same word."

"Can you see him?"

“Not yet. A lot of this is in the weeds right now.” After silence, Harvey said, “Did you read about this in the Los Angeles papers?”

“No, in the *Times*. I was in London—between December 29 and January 8.”

“Well, you scamp!—If I can be permitted such an antiquated term—how come you didn’t call or come to see us?—but wait, you might not have learned I transferred back to the USAFE—“

“Colonel—“

“Harvey to you—and why don’t you call the hospital in a couple of days?—right now, he’s—“

“I know, he’s resting comfortably. Can you tell me anything else?”

“It’s pretty vague. The driver got away—with the lorry or the truck. It’s under investigation. I can’t find out whether it was deliberate, or maybe the driver was drunk—Joe escaped by that proverbial hairs-breadth. Call him again when you can—“

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I guess I did something. I never heard from him and Ceile about the baby. I finally learned that she had lost it.”

Silence. Harvey was surprised...and then not really. “They were pretty torn up about it—maybe they didn’t want you to know. And Sandy, I didn’t call you about Joe because I didn’t want to worry you—if he had died, I would have contacted you.”

“Maybe, but I feel like—well, I’m on the outs with him—I think,” he said in a rush, “that Joe finally heard that I was kinda crazy over his wife, and that--”

“Hold on,” Harvey interrupted, firmly but kindly. “Joe pretty well knew all along that you were well, in love with Ceile. I have no doubt that Joe has other good reasons for seeming to drop contact with you. Well, tell me about this trip.”

“Harvey...it was a strange trip and it gets stranger the more I think about it.”

“It’s your nickel...talk to me.”

“Remember Mara Vellen—she was at the Congressional hearings there in London in July 1945?”

There was a pause. The line crackled softly. Sandy recalled Stovall’s pauses—the literal and the figurative ones. Pauses that sometimes saved a pilot’s reputation; held up an order until a better one was issued; held his tongue when Sandy knew he should have been lashed with it at times when he sounded off. Harvey had even “paused” Joe Gallagher when the infuriated colonel was on the brink of pummeling Ray Hollenbeck. “Yes, I know Mara Vellen. She’s been a recent, ah, issue.”

“Is she in trouble?”

“Relatively speaking. Because of my connection with Joe Gallagher I was recently contacted--“

“Who’s looking for her?”

“Crown immigration control.”

“She being deported--?”

“I was able to understand that she was expected to immigrate to the United States and failed to do so.”

“Is that against the law?”

“No...but people were expecting her—considering her connections, at least that I know of—maybe the State Department extended a special invitation she was not free to refuse.”

Sandy related the trip: Mara’s invitation to him, including tickets, then falling sick and being in a hospital for nearly six days, and then finally being found by Mara-- who gave her name as “Veronica Mellen” to the doctor, and she seemed hidden behind a scarf and glasses. She then hustled him into a plane late on January 7, without telling him what had happened to General Gallagher—God knew they had been through enough together for her to understand—well, uh...

Silence. “Sandy... you want to tell me anything else? I’m going to call the authorities about this. She needs to be found—for her own safety.”

Sandy recalled his Oakland “outlaw days”—he wasn’t proud of them but proud he never snitched—not that he much to snitch about. But he kept his mouth shut about a proposed robbery he was privy to. But that looming event finally propelled him away from Oakland that fateful morning in 1938 to undertake a journey that hadn’t ended yet. “She took a helluva chance inviting me to come to London.”

“Why did she take such a chance?—again, perhaps you don’t wish to say?”

Sandy told him how the point of his trip over there was to be personally given some very old documents in...Greek. He heard Harvey’s chuckle at his being described as heir to the Commenes, from the Empire of Byzantium—but he didn’t ridicule it.

“Very interesting, but do you have any idea what this is about?” Another pause. Harvey said, lightly, “Obviously, Mara didn’t trust the mails to get the document into your hands.”

“The parchment’s pretty delicate. It wouldn’t have survived a trip in a mailbag.”

“Do you know where she is?”

“No, I don’t.”

Harvey’s next question was delicately stated. “Can you find out?”

“No, I can’t. That’s the truth, Colonel, uh, Harvey.”

They conversed a bit more on happier topics, with Harvey telling him that Melva was well, and it was cold and soupy in January and that he was happy being with JAG. As Sandy listened, he wished Harvey and others could be together again. Though the war had been bred in hell and was hell, there had been some good times with good people and how he missed them— “You staying with the Air Force then?”

“As long as they’ll have me,” Harvey said. “And a lot needs to be done.” He did not go into some of the personal reasons for him staying in the ranks—the improving house, Melva’s pleasure in her work...and a feeling that if he were to leave England, he would be growing further and further away from Mike—which was ridiculous— “So,” he asked, “how you are doing in the civilian world?”

“Okay.”

“Just okay?”

“Yeah...sometimes, Col—Harvey—sometimes I wish I hadn’t left. Don’t get me wrong, I love the freedom, I’m doing okay...but sometimes I feel I’m flying all alone, without fighter escort...”

“Are you in any danger?”

“No.”

But Harvey picked up his hedging tone. “Before you separated, I knew there were some voices demanding you should stay—because of what you had seen, what you knew. Other voices said that you were absolutely trustworthy and that you deserved to do as you wished with your life. Which means you might—request your commission be reactivated. Some people would be happy.”

“Good to know,” Sandy said. “I’ll give it some thought.”

“Well, Sandy, I wouldn’t---“

“You were damned good to me...Harvey.” Sandy spoke in a rush. “When I had to come back to Archbury after Savage—I acted like a shit because I could see or maybe I thought I could see everybody hating me, and you, I remember you were the one guy who told me ‘I’m glad you made it back.’” All the way across the continent, and through the cable laid along the bed of the great gray Atlantic to England, Harvey heard Sandy take a shuddery breath, as though fighting back tears. In a breezy voice, Sandy then said, “Well, take care of yourself. When you get news about Joe—and his wife--tell me, write me. And, and, my love to Melva.”

“I will.” Then goodbyes, both lighthearted and heartfelt.

In California, Sandy hung up, his thoughts going about five different directions.

In England Harvey hung up, mulling what Sandy had told him—documents, again. Search for the papers, like those documents that poor Clare Schmitz got to him—and he handed off...yes, he wondered what they had contained. And whom should he tell—if he should tell about—and who was this Aurora? That boy needed to find the right woman and get married. He also needed to be wary, as

he already was. He, Harvey, should be too—were people listening to that conversation? He hated to be that suspicious. Harvey finally wrote a note to Sandy: “Gallagher may be protecting you by not being in contact with you. He has powerful enemies—in and out of uniform.”

Harvey knew the message was rather cryptic—and applied to him as well. The figure of Clare Schmitz still sat in his memories, and perhaps stained his record...what had she given him?—and how did it play into Dave McGraw’s disappearance—he had been investigated of course, and Merriwether had always replied to his questions, when he got hold of him. The answer was no developments... When he let his mind run on it, he felt like a chicken hanging in a poulterer’s shop.

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In California, after the phone call ended, Sandy recalled another incident.

In that dim cavern where Yellich and his motley band resided...Yellich wasn’t giving a damn about American airmen invading his cave fortress. He devoted himself to eating at a rough table as Captain Lowell was carried into an inner chamber, with Joe staying by his side. Sandy had waited impatiently for the eating man to ask, say something, and then he had, for some reason, planted his hands on the man’s table, and announced, “My name is Komansky.” Sandy thought it had been a stupid thing to say. This old guy could have cared less, obviously.

But.

Lighting one of the cigarettes that Sandy had scattered before him to further arouse his interest, Yellich studied him. “Polish?” she asked. “No, I’m American,” Sandy said. “My parents both came from Poland.” The war then came in again, and Sandy pushed the incident aside, but it stayed in his memory.

And some five years later, Yellich’s tragic daughter, victim of war and fate and a lot of misery had brought him to London to hand over curious documents to “Heir Commenes.” Had Yellich recognized his name? Ah, come on... but what else could it be. What else...yeah, what else. Thinking too much about a lot of things that had happened over the years...always went nowhere.

Harvey: Put Me to the Test - Archbury, 1948

May 18 1948: President Truman wipes out segregation in the Armed Forces. Special edition *Chicago Defender*. By executive order, segregation in the Armed Forces has ended, as President Truman signed a new era into being...



“No, madam, no,” said council member Adelbert Handleigh to the increasingly irritable woman who was bringing idiotic demands to the Archbury council. “The children in question—these brown babies as you call them-- need to be cared for by their families, rather than having the town morally responsible for the mother’s mistakes and the father’s carelessness.” Handleigh, full of the dignity that apothecaries sometimes took upon themselves, squared the papers in his hand, and watched himself doing it, to avoid the quietly blazing eyes of Melve Horan Stovall.

Seated in an uncomfortable chair in the chilly room, Melva pressed her lips together and counted to ten but only got to eight before she spoke to the three faces. “There’s no moral issue being presented here. It’s a community issue, and an issue of the future. These brown children came into the world with a double handicap—illegitimate and of mixed race, and through no fault of their own, they are made to suffer at times. They need to be cared for now, and cared for well,

not just made charges of the council and bounced from home to home.” She was speaking of the Cuthbert twins, three years old—their father was a black soldier who had been sent to Europe and had disappeared, deliberately perhaps because there was no record of his death and a letter to his last known address had been returned. The mother, maybe deliberately, had died of tuberculosis—which in itself was ridiculous, because an antibiotic had been discovered and marketed nearly two years earlier but at times British medicine, now socializing, dragged its feet about distribution of medicine and medical advice particularly if it came from overseas.

“Marie Cuthbert was not even a citizen of Archbury. She was living with a cousin when she passed on, and the cousin refuses to take care of them. They should go to Reed’s School in Watford—“

“With hundreds of other children. I’m sure Reed’s is a fine institution, but better, smaller homes for children is what is needed—I have figures that prove if children don’t feel cared for, they turn to alcohol—to crime—they need care if not from their families but in small homes that we could build and staff with the Council’s help—“

“That should be the affair for the Americans,” said Editha Spiner, the sole woman on the council.

“Mrs. Spiner, I have explained to you how difficult it would be to have unmarried mothers with children or unaccompanied children migrate to the United States. It’s hard enough for grown women, the war brides who are not even going there with children.”

“If they could take our women, they could take their bastards,” grunted Morton Chapin.

Melva didn’t give up, but knew when to quit the Scrooges, at least for the moment. Her sympathetic member of the council had moved to Penrith, near the Scottish border, to be with his ill mother, and she had to start all over with the appointed new man. Melva rose, straightened her skirt and felt a great wave of tiredness come over her—and she promised Molly Staller that she would stop to check on Jackie’s cold. Despite his grandparents’ lack of tolerance-- to put it nicely—Jackie was growing up happy so far, and was loved by his mother. Molly

had finally tracked the father down with the help of the State Department, but the father wrote and explained that he was married and had been when he and Molly had made the baby. But what might Jackie become if Molly could not get away from her parents, at least, her father.

When Melva climbed the steps of the council flat, Molly was on the stairs, weeping slightly, and holding onto Jackie, who helplessly patted her hair. "Pa's drinking again," she told Melva, who, in the weak light of the stairwell, checked Jackie for fever, and peered down his throat and into his ears with the lighted instruments Dr. Burnham provided her.

"Come stay with me," Melva suddenly offered Molly. "We need help—we could pay you."

"No, but thank you," she said. Melva's sympathy always gave her courage. "Your man is coming home. You two need to be together."

Melva was looking forward to finally having Harvey home—alone--after a long year in Nuremberg, but wanted so badly to help Molly--and she knew that her and Harvey's schedules were not going to coincide. The house being kept up and dinner ready would help them both, and she told Molly to come to her house the day after tomorrow. Melva left her on the landing, with Jackie on her lap, waiting for Dad to sleep and Mum to let them in. "Happy Christmas," she called down the dark stairwell.

**

During the week between Christmas and New Year's Harvey's transfer completed. Though he arrived home on December 28, Melva provided their first Christmas meal in their new home, the best one she could: a shred of roast beef, canned potatoes...Brussel sprouts...and an old fashioned plum pudding which she steamed on the hob, anointed with brandy (an early Christmas gift from Joe) and set aflame, with a spring of holly. Captain Mahoney and his wife joined them for coffee that evening, and Harvey told them how comforting it had been that they been had there for Melva. As winter commenced, their home seemed so isolated behind the lime trees and under a frigid sky which grudgingly permitted about five hours of sunlight once in a while. When Melva spoke of hiring help, Harvey was surprised, but then nodded when she explained how, with both of them working,

Molly could be of great help—to her and to Roxanne Mahoney who had told them she was pregnant—the baby was due in July.

“And there will be a child too,” she then said. “Molly has a son.”

When Harvey paused, Melva tensed. “We have room, in the attic—“

“They can stay in the study,” Harvey said, firmly. “It’s warmer there.”

On December 30 Harvey and Melva walked up to the Staller flat. Harvey did not walk up with Melva but waited in the damp vestibule below, ready...

Molly, clutching a straw valise and her son’s hand was for once shouting back at her father—good to see but frightening as the man was literally purple with rage. “Y’owes us, y’does, you damned slut,” he kept repeating as Melva took her away. Molly then paused on the landing and hurled back at her father: “I owes you, I know I does and you’ll get paid, every penny—but not a farthin’ to you, only Mum will get the money and you won’t lay y’hands on it—or her or I’ll get the constabulary on your filthy neck! Now shut your filthy gob!” With the strength of anger she picked up Jackie in one arm, seized her valise, and practically ran down the stairs and through the door Harvey held open for her. They walked to the cottage; they all took turns carrying Jackie who was both curious, and whimpering.

Melva escorted her to the study, furnished with a day bed and a low chest of drawers. The toilet, unfortunately, was found beneath the bed, but that was nothing new to them since her Dad had not allowed either of them to use the floor’s common toilet after ten o’clock. Throughout Molly was exclaiming with pleasure and then broke down crying. “Mama?” Jackie asked. Melva left them hugging each other.

She found Harvey taking off his overcoat and unwinding his muffler and then setting down with a huff into his chair. “Thank you my dear,” she said.

Harvey leaned his head back into the padded chair and then opened his arms. She sat in his lap and they were silent until the sobs in the study died down. Harvey’s eyes gleamed with tears. “My darling?”

“Nothing,” he said after a moment. “It will be nice having a child around here.”

“Maybe a bit wearing too—we have some adjustments to make.”

“Life is one big adjustment,” he said.

**

That was proven when, the next day, Harvey and Melva learned of Joe Gallagher being seriously injured, struck by a car. Whether the news was leaked or announced, Harvey never learned, but the story spread like wildfire via phone calls, with each voice saying, keep this quiet...

Thus began worry, anxious waiting, phone calls to St. George’s, the voice of which could only reassure Harvey that General Gallagher was “resting comfortably” — whatever the hell that meant.

Joe being deliberately struck by a lorry was not completely surprising considering the high circles Joe moved in, and his involvement with many critical affairs, promoting better racial relations in the armed forces to worrisome technology to the increasingly fraught and frigid relations with the Soviet Union. Many motives could exist among many people. Or perhaps it had been a plain old accident. Finally one evening, near the middle of the month, Ceile, whom they learned had flown all the way back to England to be with her husband, called them. Joe was going to be okay despite internal injuries and aggravated shoulder and leg pain. “Weeds, Harvey,” she said to his unspoken question.

But the news was better than any holiday. He and Melva visited Joe in London, and saw a good sight: Ceile, sitting next to Joe’s bed. She was joyful, but composed—and grave—and once more lived up her to Celtic name which meant “queen.” Orders had followed her to take up duty at the USAFE hospital system, and contribute her keen intelligence and experience to the USAF as the new branch of defense established its own medical corps, more important than ever as the US realized that the European Recovery Plan, though it had primarily an economic agenda, needed military presence as well. Of course, the USSR had sounded off about US arming against the peace-loving Soviets, without mentioning that the US Zone had 3000 US soldiers while the Soviet zone had over 100,000.

More of a pleasure than a readjustment was when the phone rang early in the morning of January 12. Harvey carefully left the empty bed and wrestling on his

thick robe, came downstairs and answered it, figuring that it would be for his wife—or worse, bad news about Joe--Rather, an overseas operator was speaking...Harvey tensed, wondering...and then, “Go ahead, sir.”

And Sandy Komansky had greeted him. Their conversation left Harvey feeling happy, curious, and alarmed. Harvey told Melva about the call, though he did not divulge all details. She didn't recall Sandy very clearly, being that he had been one of many guests at the crazy party at Bryncote to which she had arrived late. Harvey spoke with his customary restraint about him being a “young guy” who had been “kind of a handful” at times. But they got to know each other, and even became buddies as Sandy served out a period of punishment by putting in lots and lots of hours of being a duty sergeant and becoming Harvey's right hand man at Operations. Harvey soon learned Sandy's cold façade covered up an intelligent mind and street-smarts; and these led him to speak some brutal truths to Harvey when he needed it. He was hard working and devoted to Joe Gallagher. Gallagher had refused to take crap from the guy, demanded more from him, and got it—including the sergeant's devotion. There was a time when Harvey and Sandy were waiting to hear about Joe's fate after the B-17 he was catching a ride from Scotland went down in the North Sea. Harvey found Sandy, getting ready for the worst, straightening Joe's desktop...oh, so gently. His devotion was also fixed on bedrock, revealed when they were both in France, with Joe attempting one last time to evacuate holy sisters from convent Mont Ste. Marie high on a hill the Germans controlled to their advantage. The Eighth had to bomb it but everybody wanted to avoid another Monte Cassino. Sandy, serving as a radio liaison below, got caught in an attack on his post. Though wounded, he hauled himself up the slopes to the convent to give Joe the radio so he could order the approaching squadron to turn away and then return...giving Joe five extra minutes to convince the nuns to leave and they finally did.

“If you need proof of how a great officer can turn lives around, that's it,” Harvey said.

“Are you talking about Joe Gallagher only, or yourself?” she asked. “You influenced him too, I would imagine, and quite a few other men as well.”

“Probably,” Harvey said in his usual modest way. “But the work you're doing makes me remember how he had been orphaned and it left a mark on him. How

are these brown babies going to turn out?—with enough love, they'll be okay, but where is this love going to come from?" Not necessarily in Archbury he thought, with regret.

Sandy: The Distance of Doubt - Los Angeles, Spring Semester

Sandy walked into Ian Crusard's office the next morning, after two hours sleep, with a shower and coffee standing in for being awake.

After knocking and hearing "Come in," he stuck his head around the door, suddenly recalling how he always done the same with Joe Gallagher when he was expecting a dressing down. "Well, you said you'd make it as soon as you could," Crusard said, pouring coffee from a pot on the hot plate.

"Am I still in your good graces sir?"

"An aviator like you? Of course."

"Sir, I am not a pilot."

"You should learn how to fly. Take some private lessons. Then check out the California Air Guard."

Sandy was too anxious to think about it, then. Crusard then reviewed the information covered and the work expected. He thanked Crusard, saying distantly that if he could make up in anyway his absence, to please tell him so. "I owe you a big favor sir," he said. The next week he was walking home from his late afternoon class, and heard rapping on a window over his head. Looking up, he saw Crusard gesturing to him and he obliged. Crusard did not waste time or words. "You said you'd do anything to make up for your absence...well, I got the anything."

"Sir?"

"I need a lab assistant to help me with some experiments."

"So what would I be assisting with, sir?"

"Experiments with electro-magnetism."

"What kind of experiments?"

"Simple ones that will prove nothing new. I want to get more familiar with principles. Well?"

Crusard's face was relaxed but his eyes indicated something different. Sandy had more than a little experience with desperate people, recalling Tony Carmichael

letting his hatred and chagrin and drunkenness falter into stupid situations such as what happened in Archbury when he stumbled into the fog, and then slide into deadliness, as in Sweden. “Sir,” Sandy said, “why?”

“I saw you reading a book on electro-magnetism.”

Uh. “Well, I was reading it, but could not make heads or tails of it.” He didn’t add that he was reluctantly preparing himself to study at Cal Tech.

“Understanding electromagnetism can’t be picked up in 15 minutes.”

There was a sound in the hallway; like a distant door closing. Crusard’s eyes flinched.

“But why are you interested with electro-magnetism?”

“For aeronautical reasons.”

“It couldn’t possibly be used as a propellant for jets.”

“Jets are already old hat. Oh, they’ll improve, no doubt, but the basic principles have been established.”

“Rockets?”

“Also old hat or will be. I’m talking about craft for space travel.”

“Sir?”

“Not Buck Rodgers nonsense. We’re not talking next year—or five years—ten—fifteen, twenty—and maybe even then others will carry our principles into the future--”

“*Our* principles?” Sandy interrupted.

“If you’re interested. Bartonair Systems needs a brain like yours.”

“I’m an undergraduate,” Sandy protested.

“With the best brain I’ve seen in a long time. You know how I could tell? In the fall, you were working on the CC06 aileron and I was trying to get you to find the problem—I couldn’t--but you know, you saw another problem? And the problem was what was *lacking*. You could see what *wasn’t there and needed to be*. I was like that once. Maybe could be again. Together we can pull Bartonair Systems out

of the doldrums, make it great again.” Sandy stared at him with doubtful eyes. “Well?”

“Uh, well, sir...what about Dr. Walkert?”

“Don’t worry about him.” Crusard filled his pipe and lighted it. “I can work by myself, but that favor you promised me when I looked the other way for you missing the first five days of the semester.”

“A favor returned sir,” he said—hoping he could hear something else about Walkert. Crusard opened up a ragged calendar. They coordinated a schedule.

The work suited Sandy fine but Crusard’s secretiveness was unsettling. They re-created experiments drawn from old textbooks. Crusard recorded everything, calling upon Sandy to clarify all details. But the hours and the location were strange. They worked at random hours, in cramped rooms located in an outdated football stadium; the bleachers above roosted over three windowless concrete chambers lighted by dangling electric bulbs and filled with some strange equipment that Crusard found someplace. Finally Sandy had to cut back on his hours at the dairy garage...which was helped by him finding a ten and an occasional twenty dollar bill in his satchel, placed there by Dr. Crusard.

Beyond the time and money, he was paying attention. He remembered once saying, “electro-magnetism,” when Tib, back in the Black Forest, asked him what the henges were about. He was not sure why he had said that but it seemed as though he just knew.

All the while, Sandy waited for two things: news on Joe, and Aurora’s return. Of the two, Joe held his greatest concern. When he heard nothing—and kept hearing nothing—he could only assume that all was well. And he wondered...if Joe not being in contact with him was a way of protecting him—or if Gallagher had forgotten him. Well, he never would forget Joe. Never.

Harvey: Put Me to the Test - Archbury, Winter

All in all, it was a good homecoming for Harvey. After Joe's shocking assault, he was going to recover though his future—taking on the training command of Negro soldiers—seemed unsure. Sandy Komansky was okay too it seemed, though it seemed he was now with another young woman, also a journalist—what was it about him and journalists? That was not his business, Harvey decided—and neither was solving the mystery of Joe's attack. CIC was digging into it, but who, why—a lot of reasons existed for that, from pressing forward integration of the armed forces, to being involved in highly classified...things.

He and Melva seemed to be on the good way to happiness as well. The house, though still lacking, was coming along, with electricity strung all the way up into the attic. Melva was pleased with her new refrigerator, the first she ever had, but still waited on a water heater. But these were secondary concerns as England, as the United States, was experiencing the first wave of a baby boom, and Archbury was a busy participant. Burnham was planning on hiring another midwife and was already in contact with nursing midwives who were completing their training in London. Molly, though a bit clumsy at first, was a bright young woman and soon mastered the housework involved in a home, rather than a council flat, and she proved a good cook and an energetic laundress. Jackie, though mischievous as any two year old, was tractable—and crowed when Harvey came in the door.

Harvey unfortunately had little time to enjoy their improving home. JAG had all of 18 people in England, though more were promised. Their headquarters often shifted though finally settled into a couple of suites at Bushy Park. Added to this was that they were all generally in the process to form the nucleus of a JAG for the Air Force, demarcated from the Army as of the previous September, 1947. Harvey understood he was now a member of the Air Force Personnel Branch, and their CO was nominally Major General Reginald C. Harmon. All of this was pretty much in the background as his JAG unit was in the midst of reviewing a backlog of cases, including appeals, accruing pretty much since the first arrival of air and ground crews, 1942. He was busy but the memory of Clare Schmitz kept returning, as the days went on.

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Far more public was the feeling that war was expected any day, at times, almost any moment—with the Soviet Union this time. The divided capital of Berlin seemed a flashpoint as Harvey kept picking up over newswires how the Soviets were rumbling that President Roosevelt had “promised” Allied forces would depart Europe after a few years. There was no promise in writing, which the Soviets exploited and if it had been, they would have exploited that as well, somehow. In China Chiang Kai-shek’s National Army was being pushed back by Mao Zedong the leader of the Communists, and violence was erupting in Korea, and the Soviets—and the Allies—all had their fingers in the various pies. Harvey hoped that Joe and Vorodenko were still buddies; a connection like that could prove pivotal at certain moments as the two behemoths increasingly squared off, trailing propaganda.

Harvey found the time to keep Sandy apprised of Joe’s movements. He was out of the hospital and home with his wife. He was working half days at his office, assisted by his aide; remember Lt. Lovelace? Ceile had been assigned duty as a nurse for the USAFE. He also took the time to address some of Sandy’s questions about his strange trip to London. Dressed in his uniform, but armed with a warm smile and sweet patience, Harvey visited the Garrick Hotel in Bayswater and learned that Mr. Komansky had lodged there for the night but in the morning was “taken to hospital,” St. Mary’s in Paddington—curiously, about five blocks from where Joe had been struck. At the sprawling red-brick hospital Harvey tracked down Dr. Cartwell, who confirmed that the young American, who had suffered from some virus, had been visited by a woman, memorable for her accent, and her beauty though it was mocked by scars and exhausted eyes. Why yes, the physician confirmed, she did identify herself as Veronica Mellen and this was confirmed when he located the sign out papers; she had co-signed Sandy’s release with that name. Then a check with BOAC, which took a good deal of time, informed Harvey that more than a few passengers had complained of falling sick during or just after the Atlantic flight Sandy had taken to London. This he wrote up in a letter to Sandy, who wrote back thanking him...and thus began a warm correspondence between the two men. According to his letters, he was pursuing fascinating engineering projects, and was preparing to apply for advanced degrees. Harvey kept him updated about Joe and Ceile.

But that was a fragment of his business. After several 15-hour days reviewing cases, Harvey reported directly, in London, on January 20, 1948 to Colonel Deitwiler, recently sent to England. Harvey was to learn that Deitwiler communicated with General Joseph T. McNarney, Commanding General, U.S. Forces, European Theatre. McNarney had recently told the War Department he needed about 7500 men for transport and communication—in other words, air men, not ground forces or combat units. The decimated ranks of American soldiers, particularly airmen, required augmenting. This need for manpower was defining a growing issue not only in the armed forces but in the United States—an issue that needed addressing and could be solved by better use of black manpower.

“Don’t think I am being blasé when I ask you how the Trials are ‘going,’” Deitwiler said, gesturing for Harvey to sit in an upholstered chair.

“Well enough, sir.” Until the trials concluded, in 1949, Harvey would seek out news coming from the tribunal and he kept up a sporadic correspondence with Boleslawski, who decided to stick it out to the end. “Don’t think I am being a pessimist when I say I wish they were going better.” At Deitwiler’s calm urging, Harvey spoke, if carefully, about the issues plaguing the trials, the worst of which was plain doubt that they were securing justice. Seeking it, yes, securing it another question. “Anybody with a brain had their concerns, their doubts.”

“So, do you give up?” Deitwiler leaned back, folded his hands behind his neck, and peered at Harvey.

“No sir,” Harvey said. He sat even straighter, wondering what was coming.

“Your records say you are from Rhode Island.”

“Providence, sir.”

“So how did you feel about the Pork Chops?”

Harvey stared Deitwiler in the eye. “In my neighborhood...we called them ‘Manny.’ It seemed nicer way to refer to the Portuguese than pork chops, or pork and cheese.” Manny derived from the popular Portuguese name, Manuel.

“So you would still call them Manny?”

“No sir, not any more. I would call them Portuguese...or Americans.”

Deitwiler smiled. “Phil Doud said you were the right guy.”

“The right guy for what?”

“To read this report, not call it a bunch of bleeding heart shit, and take the high way--”

“What is this high way sir?”

“First, the low way...being outraged at what was done to the Jews...and not believing that similar crap is going on in the United States—and in the armed forces.” Deitwiler withdrew a manila folder from a drawer in his desk, extracted a thick report, and pushed it to Harvey.

Harvey leaned forward and took the report in both hands. “Integration of the Armed Forces,” he read. “I heard about this and the Gillem report. Created quite a stir.”

“Created at the order of George C. Marshall, who did so at the order of the Secretary of War, Robert Patterson--he appointed a board of inquiry to study what needed to be done—in case of a national emergency, how black manpower could be used. For good reason—between the end of the war and this month of January 1948 the armed forces should not be described as demobilized as much as just plain disintegrated. We could field only a few battalions and more than a few of the guys in ‘em green as rabbit vomit. During the war a soldier was trained about fourteen-seventeen weeks, and these guys are being shipped out after eight with only the basic knowledge of what to do—in a variety of situations. If they have a good officer they’re in better conditions to do okay, but a lot of the good officers went home.”

“Thanks to the bomb,” Harvey said, understanding that a lot of policymakers, so convinced that atomic weaponry was all that was needed, continued to slash funding for personnel and equipment. And, why would a young man, who had spent some good years of his young life in harm’s way, and who could get a university education thanks to the GI Bill, probably find good pay, and create a family, want to stay in the armed forces? Particularly since the Cold War seemed to be heating up.

“A lot of black soldiers are among those who stayed.”

“I didn’t know that,” Harvey said. Although when he had a holiday in Paris with his wife, back in 1946, he did observe many black American soldiers, who enjoyed the city’s more liberal acceptance of their race. He had seen a picture of American soldiers marching in Paris, demanding to be sent home—and the accompanying picture featured only white faces.

“Well, less combat time—plus, according to the study, some of them found Army life, even segregated preferable to what they might have to deal with, or knew that with their education—or lack of it, the Army gave them opportunities—limited as they are at times--they might not find outside. It sounds like a good situation—“

“But it stinks at times,” Harvey said.

“And these guys are being treated like stink.” He then produced another sheaf of papers: a response by Truman Gibson, the civilian aide of Negro Affairs to the Secretary of War, and by John McCloy, assistant secretary of war. Harvey recognized McCloy, who campaigned tirelessly for fair treatment of black soldiers, who were under-utilized, trained and never used. Harvey also knew of backlash: perfectly sincere politicians declared Negroes lacked leadership abilities, and the like and when they had the gall to protest such treatment, particularly since they had contributed to defense of democracy--white mouths said they were being stirred up by the Negro presses, who were the real troublemakers, demanding improvement, not the status quo that cooperative Negroes were satisfied with...

“Read it,” Deitwiler said.

“Yes sir,” Harvey said. “May I ask though, in complete respect sir, why me?”

“Dedicated lawyers are needed to defend black soldiers. And to let many know we are putting up resources. We want to be sure of your dedication.”

Deitwiler then invited to drive Harvey to Archbury. The staff car took them down the wet roads and Deitwiler pumped him about things to see—and that didn’t mean girls; Deitwiler had majored in history and revered England. Harvey told him about the remains of a Norman keep found—nearby--and some twenty miles to the south there were the remains of a Roman villa. Visitors had to ask the farmer

whose farm the ruins were located on for permission to enter, walk a half mile, bearing a key they made a deposit on to open a ground cover to get a peek at a floor mosaic. They also went with warnings to beware an irritable ram! Dietwiler wanted to see Pinetree too and they drove up to the old country mansion and climbed out. They were able to go inside because Pinetree still had a skeleton staff working in a few ground floor offices; it suggested that war could be imminent. Harvey described what the place had been like during the war—clack of typewriters; teletypes whirring, personnel striding down the corridors; sometimes running; midnight conferences...Harvey recalled but did not say how he once got General Britt out of bed to listen to his demand to be a pilot in the Eighth.

They left through the great central doors of Pinetree, and then saw a plane, an RAF Blenheim, lift over naked trees to disappear into the clouds.

They both watched it; Harvey got a sudden lump in his throat. "You know," Deitwiler said, "maybe someday there will be museums about the war, here."

Harvey was dropped off in Archbury. As he had planned to, he purchased a second-hand bicycle, a Raleigh, paid for it in cash, and pedaled home after getting some dinner at the Star and Bottle.

He then gasped at some tearing pains in his chest.

He stopped, climbed off and caught his breath. They went away, as though never existing. Probably indigestion, Harvey thought, but struggled with fear. His father had died of a heart attack when Harvey was only 25. Suddenly, one afternoon, and Harvey's hurried trip home could only comfort his mother. He, Harvey, was only...47. His dad had been younger than Harvey by only a year.

He pedaled on, avoiding patches of frozen mud, and then dismounted and pushed his new bike down the path to Troyroys, pulled it into the covered doorway, and cleaned his feet on the scraper. He unlocked the door that Melva had painted a soft green, and found it so good to be home, particularly when a switch filled the room with light. The light fell on the beautiful Turkish rug that Percy Vivyan had sent, in thanks for the necklace they had returned. Molly had the night off, and she was visiting friends, and then going to the cinema with

them and Jackie, but had left a kettle of soup on the stove. He wondered where Melva was—on rounds of course, but where?

He climbed the steps into their ice-cold bedroom, swiftly changed into corduroys, a turtleneck, wool socks, leather slippers and a thick sweater. In the living room, he ignited a few coals, poured and sniffed at a glass of brandy, settled down in an easy chair upholstered with floral prints. The phone rang, and Melva, on the other end, told him that she was calling from the Cup and Vine, and there was a baby on its way in the nearby village. “Take it easy, sweetheart,” he said.

There was silence. “It’s so nice to have you home,” she said softly...and then rang off.

Harvey hated her out there in the cold and dark, but she was familiar with every lane, every path, every road—the Cup and Vine?—some bad memories there, but he was glad it had reopened. He determinedly resettled himself to peruse the report and Truman Gibson’s assessment. Statistics indicated that black soldiers were arrested and court martialed more frequently, their numbers all out of proportion to their white cohorts. Particularly notable: in 1946, when 9.35 per cent of the Army was black, 25.9 per cent of soldiers confined in military stockades were black. Moreover, black soldiers committed 49.6 per cent of offenses against senior officers...17.4 of desertions, 13.4 of rapes. 33.1 of robberies, 46.3 of acts of manslaughter, 29 per cent of burglaries, and 49 per cent of assaults. In Europe, blacks had a court martial rate of 2.48 per thousand as opposed to 1.14 for whites. The rate of VD among black troops was far higher.

However, the attached Gillem report argued that the data, while not questioned for its accuracy, required contextualizing and reinterpreting. These soldiers’ commanders, usually white, framed the charges, which were directed by racial prejudice. While a white soldier might be charged with a lesser offense, the black soldier would be charged with a greater. Thus, more black soldiers were sent up for court martial, imprisoned in stockades, hung on the gallows. As for venereal disease, the high rates among black soldiers could not be denied. But, the report observed, black soldiers were often posted in port cities or in transport companies, always on the move, without close supervision; more than a few supervisors, when present, simply decided that blacks were more “sexually uninhibited” and shrugged off what might happen, and many times did. Another

part of the report, written by black journalists touring Army facilities, described how black soldiers were given the worst accommodations, frequently dealt with hostile superiors, and were less trained than many white soldiers. Many young black men enlisting or already enlisted had attended inferior schools; separate but equal was a lie, or a fantasy for white school boards and other local leaders pretending that all was well. Literacy training programs were eagerly attended by Negro soldiers, who then went onto higher posts. Even if more and better educated black men enlisted, and attained officer status, their white superiors would still ignore, condemn, and when the black soldier became defiant, angry, depressed, that was chalked up to his color. And so on and so on.

One rather bright addendum: education, re-location and improved supervision had reduced VD rates among black soldiers between 1946 and mid-1947.

Moreover, many black soldiers wanted to serve their country—quotes proved it. But: their service should be repaid in kind.

He finally finished reading the report in bed, scrooched under the electric blanket sent overseas by his request from his cousin; getting it rewired for the British electrical system had been a chore. The report kept him occupied and somewhat unworried as the clock kept indicating how late Melva was, but there may have been an emergency at a home without a phone. If the weather were bad enough, she might spend the night with the new parents. She had before. Finally, he heard her bicycle grate on the gravel walk and hurried down the stairs to usher her into the almost-warm parlor. He hastened to get her a cup of tea; she had ice on her eyelashes. “Brandy first,” she said and he obliged. The Campbell family, now extended by a brand new spanking boy, had fed her a mutton chop and potatoes so she did not need dinner. He boiled a pan of water on the new gas range; she scrubbed herself and hastened upstairs to nearly skid into bed, right between the sheets and the blanket Harvey held up for her. She thought the electric blanket was some more American luxury—but she had come to appreciate how nice it was to sleep under one blanket, rather than being trapped under three or four and sometimes still being cold.

“And what is this?” she said, looking at the heavy document in Harvey’s lap.

“Something that has got to change,” Harvey said.

“Are you going to change it?” Melva asked, spiritedly.

“I’m going to try,” Harvey said.

She read the title and a few paragraphs. “And how will this affect the brown babies?”

“It can’t hurt,” Harvey said. He hoped that would prove true.

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“I think Truman is hedging his bets. What do you think?”

Harvey knew he was being politely baited by Lt. Guy Adsley, fellow JAG that he had been partnered with but for a good cause. They had known each other three days when they found themselves driving to the former 918th to meet with Colonel Frank Bailey commanding the American contingent on the base. Their Jeep was directing heat off the engine; they were gloved and coated and muffled but still cold as January sleet spewed on the windshield. Harvey didn’t know that much of Truman beyond the fact that the guy had landed behind the world’s most powerful desk and despite some mistakes was holding his own against Stalin, no little feat---though voices complained that Roosevelt hadn’t gotten the guy up and prepared for continuing the good relationship that FDR had forged with the “boss,” a relationship now headed down the toilet. But Stalin was behaving badly or perhaps desperately as the USSR sought to settle and confine their satellite states while holding at arm’s length Communist leaders from Greece to Korea. Stalin had his sights on all of Berlin, not just the eastern half. Truman, after first expressing admiration of Stalin, grew wary, but tried to deal with the man. After the Moscow conference, at which George C. Marshall, Secretary of State got nowhere, he grimly told Truman that Yalta and Potsdam agreements were hung out to dry and new measures had to be taken.

Harvey also had read that President Truman raged over a report he had received of a black soldier, who had served honorably in the war, was hauled off a bus in South Carolina and beaten—“When a mayor and a city marshal can take a Negro soldier off a bus, beat him up and put out one of his eyes, and nothing is done by the state authorities, something is radically wrong with the system.” Strong words from a president in the victorious and damned near all powerful United States—which acknowledged that racial tauntings by the USSR and the American Communist Party had a degree of truth. Of course, there was the inevitable

backlash; pundits claimed that Truman, whose prospects for re-election weren't looking good, was cultivating the Negro vote.

"I think the President is moving with the times," Harvey told Adsley. "Moving away from old times and into new times. Fascism, if we let it, can hold up a mirror to our own failings, which the Communists are having a heyday with." Harvey had read in copies of Negro press newspapers, supplied at his request, that Truman, despite growing up in Missouri, which had strong southern sympathies, had a good record of supporting anti-lynching laws, and other attempts at racial justice.

"Well, that's the pot calling the kettle—uh...well." There were rumors that Stalin was up to his old purging ways again, and this time Jews were placed on the platter.

Adsley and Harvey were beginning preparations for a case that was intended to be a show trial—but one in the best sense of show: a public tackling of a case involving sex, race, and justice. A married Archbury woman, an Alyce Siddons, accused a Sgt. Roger Willamette of rape, on November 5 1947. Roger Willamette was 20 years old. Enlisting in June 1945, he was sent to England in December 1946, assigned to Archbury and was Negro and worked in the quartermaster's office.

He could hang—at Shepton Malley prison, Somersetshire, in an annex prepared for American GIs marked for execution. And the numbers showed that far more black GI necks had swung than white ones. What of it?—some would ask.

**

Harvey felt nostalgic when he climbed out of the Jeep to see the plain, homely Operations, grayer than usual under sodden January skies. One thing that struck him—it was so quiet. Figures hurried about in the distance and only one young man swished by on a bicycle. Adsley had no such memories and somewhat impatiently waited for his superior officer to precede into Ops. Harvey entered into another rush of memories created by odors—the old smell of the building, damp wool uniforms, burning coke in potbelly stoves, overlaid and infused by coffee and cigarette smoke as well as tension, sorrow, fear. They announced their business to Sgt. Amelia Minchin who occupied the desk where Sandy, when on duty, had sat.

Sgt. Minchin was thin and all business. She toggled the intercom. "Sir, Colonel Stovall, sir."

The inner door opened. "Well, Harvey, good to see you," said Colonel Frank Bailey, with an enormous grin, and an outstretched hand, which Harvey took in a strong grasp. "Come on in--man-- I thought having this office was some pretty hot stuff until I found out it was pretty cold stuff." He sat them down, and offered them coffee immediately, dealing a pot off Joe's old hotplate. He then stirred up the coals in the stove. While they chatted, and Lt. Adsley, wise enough to let the two old friends (and superior officers) catch up with each other, Harvey noted how Bailey, despite some gray hairs curling into his brown, was still devilishly handsome. His age and rank—and having some strong acts to follow—had led him into mature professionalism. His arrogance had made him a damn good pilot and squadron leader but also had prevented Britt from choosing him as the CO of the 918th in those dark days after Savage's death. He was older, calmer, and, as Harvey had learned was soon to become a father. When he gave Bailey and Phyllis—by extension--his congratulations, Bailey's face beamed with impending daddyhood. Harvey thought their child would be a real looker.

"Well, let's get down to Willamette," he then said. "I was TDY up north and my deputy CO was running things. Didn't take one second to get any kind of facts on the case; took the woman's story at complete face value and dumped this kid in the stockade."

Harvey asked who the deputy was. "Lt. Col. Patrick Paul...*White*," he said with a grim chuckle. "From Missouri, like the President though I don't know where exactly. You know, Harv, when I questioned him about this, he was so absolutely sure he was right. Could not see that he was...somewhat prejudiced."

"Is he making any trouble for you?"

"There's been some talk but I don't think anybody's taking it seriously. I mean, I don't want any of the Negro guys on this base taking shit because of what I told White." Bailey took a swig of coffee and a deep pull on his cigarette. "Get Willamette off. The accusers are a couple of grifters. But that hasn't stopped guys like him from being railroaded before—and this guy could go right to the gallows."

At Bailey's request, Sgt. Minchin, blue-eyed, nervous—she oddly resembled Komansky, Harvey thought--delivered a pile of folders. Together, they reviewed Willamette's record at the base. Nothing outstanding, but a good solid record of a young man who liked his work, did it well, and seemed to be liked by others. He had been commended by his staff superior, who noted how he had shown initiative by maintaining excellent contacts with other quartermasters to expedite shortage of materiel. Willamette's reporting officer, Captain Ethan Wirth, came in. A middle aged Negro, he seemed a bit surprised at their cordial greetings. Sgt. Minchin brought in another mug for the man to have coffee. "Here," she said, giving him a cup.

When Bailey looked at her, she then said, "Sir."

"Thank you Sergeant," said Captain Wirth, pleasantly. She backed out to get her stenog pad. Harvey sighed, internally. They all had a long way to go.

Two hours later, Harvey and Adsley left Frank making phone calls and were climbing into their Jeep. A bicycle sped up and nearly skidded on the sheets of water..."Harv!" shouted Glen.

Harvey climbed out and shook Glen's hand, and both grinned. "Come on, let me buy a drink or lunch at the Officer's Club, least what's left of it," King said. Adsley agreed and they drove the half mile to the building, half brick and half Quonset hut, and eerily quiet, outside and in. But light, however gray, was coming in through curtainless windows. "Yo!" Glen shouted after they walked in. "Anybody here!"

"Half a mo'," came a voice from somewhere.

Adsley sat down gingerly at one of the few tables left and glanced around. He had never been in an Officers Club at an airfield, and he studied the bombing sites stencilled on the curving walls: the greatest raids of the 918th. He admired them, but privately was glad he had never been a pilot—not the balls, he thought. He had recently read a novel about the war, set in the Eighth Air Force. It had been brutal.

Harvey and King, whom Stovall introduced as a damnfine deputy of the 918th, when he was left in charge—another story, he said—chatted as they heated coffee on the still working stove and found brandy among the remaining bottles.

“Good kid,” King was saying about Willamette as they sat down with steaming cups. “I am glad he’s got you as a lawyer, Harvey, you’ll do right by him. Well, how does the place look?”

“Quiet, which is damned good.” Harvey held off a battery of memories, the most of which was him sitting at the bar—the chair was still there—and slamming down whiskey after whiskey, after a certain telegram had been given to him, right at the tower, as a decimated bombing group came home. The single waiter said nothing was hot, but he could make some sandwiches. Harvey, still sifting through some memories, asked, “What happened to the Toby?”

“After May 8th somebody took it for sentimental reasons, we figure, because it wasn’t worth that much as a pawn.” Glen gazed at the empty spot, and recalled seeing Harvey gently, purposefully, and turn it around....mission tomorrow. The roars and slurping and clinking ended and the men went into the night, including him. “You know, Harvey, you deserved to take it home.”

“Perhaps.”

The sandwiches arrives, and after a pleasant hour, they broke up. King was being reassigned—“It’s time to get out of this ghost town,” but rather than heading home, he was transferring to Northolt to be trained to fly Superfortresses. His future changed, suddenly, in May.

**

Back at Operations, they reviewed Willamette’s records, the filed report, his deposition. An Archbury woman, married, an Alyce Siddons, made the accusation. The alleged rape happened in her home, a small flat, number seven, Edgton Lane. Date: November 27. Her husband was gone that night, and when she heard a knock on the door, she answered it. The sergeant then raped her. An hour later he left with a threat to keep her mouth shut. Harvey had noted some easy anomalies, such as why she took two weeks to report. And Willamette was there an hour, which sounded like an allotted time.

Her answer: she was embarrassed and didn’t want her husband to know she was defiled.

“Merely embarrassed,” Harvey remarked.

Sgt. Willamette was brought in. He entered with an air that Harvey immediately detected: determinedly breezy, just edging on disrespect. But nervousness lurked in his eyes. He saluted, Harvey returned it, and they all sat down. Harvey, though he did not smoke, offered him a cigarette. "Thank you sir," said the young man, crisply, succinctly, while accepting one and then accepting Harvey's match. He then regarded Colonel Stovall and Adsley. "Well—are you going to tell me that it's good I'm no coal-black nigger with thick lips and a stink?" he grinned. "And that I don't speak like Stepin Fetchit?—sirs?"

Minchin paused, wondering if she should record this; Bailey barely shook his head, no.

Adsley did not flinch, and Harvey did not prevaricate. "No, but thank you for bringing certain unavoidable issues out into the open immediately, so we get over them."

"Yes sir."

"Don't bring them up again," Adsley warned.

"No sir." The vague disrespect in the young man's eyes hardened to obstinacy and then receded.

Harvey consulted his notes. "You claim it was no rape. Alyce Siddons solicited you at the intersection of Edgton Lane and Thrall Street. Her flat was nearby. Her original price of one pound was then raised to two at the conclusion. You refused and two weeks later, she accused you of rape."

Minchin's pencil flew across the pad.

"Exactly, sir. One thing I've learned is to get things in writing first. And don't pay for sex. It isn't worth it. Do what you have to do, but don't pay for sex."

"You seem to be taking this well," Harvey remarked, removing his glasses.

"Hell, sir, if I were in Mississippi, or Chicago--or a lot of other places back home, I might be hanging from a tree or a lamp post right now, rather than talking to a lawyer—sir."

"You know of course that the punishment for rape is hanging. They've hung over a dozen men in Shepton Malley for rape."

“Yes sir.” Willamette rubbed his right thumbnail on his left eyebrow, looking down.

Harvey’s next question to Willamette was given with a firm voice and a firmer look: why did he think Alyce Siddons would exhibit her occupation by her accusation--for the sake of a mere extra pound?

“Beats me sir,” Willamette said.

There was some kind of racket outside. The young man jumped.

Harvey went to the window and saw that some supplies were being unloaded. “It’s nothing.” He sat down and peered at the young man. “Really, Corporal, it’s nothing. But Mrs. Siddons acting very strangely does not mean we will win your case.”

Years later, Willamette, himself an attorney, said Harvey’s eyes, blue and steady, ignited a flame of trust in him. “Sir, meaning no disrespect—are you willing to listen to me?”

The two white men nodded.

“Those two might be married, but her husband’s her pimp.”

“You didn’t say that before,” Adsley said.

Willamette accepted and lighted another cigarette. “It’s embarrassing to use a set up like that.”

“Then why did you?” Adsley said.

“A guy’s got urges, you know. She was known to accept guys like me—like us. And I got threats about datin’ the white girls around here. And she was clean by report. No germs.”

“Well, that’s very interesting Corporal but it still doesn’t explain why she fussed over a mere pound—accused you of rape to authorities—which brought her profession out into the open,” Adsley said.

“Ask her husband. Richard Siddons.”

“Ask him what?”

“About what they call petrol.” He muttered this.

“Ah.” Bailey went out and returned in a few minutes with a folder. “The fifty-three missing gallons were detected by Captain Wirth, this boy’s—ah—Corporal Willamette, he reports to Captain Wirth. Wirth reported the missing gallons of gas up the chain of command to me.”

“You knew, sir?”—and not waiting for the answer, he started talking. Siddons’ husband came in on him and Alyce forty five minutes after the session commenced and told Willamette his time was up. He took the pound note from the embarrassed Willamette who had to hop into his GI undershorts and into the rest of his clothing while the guy egged him on. Three days later, while cycling through Archbury, Willamette was stopped by the husband, who said he would be accused of rape if he did not leave out two gallons of petrol, taken from the base’s fuel reservoir, every night, for ten days. And that he was to recommend his wife’s services to the other boys.

“You refused.”

“Damned right, I did...sir. Siddons then found me and said they’d have the last laugh.”

“Why didn’t you report on this?”

The young man was reasonably defiant. “You don’t go around admitting to your superiors you’re being shaken down by a pimp. I didn’t think they’d be so stupid to make charges...but I guess they figured a black boy would only be in the wrong with his white superiors, so they hollered rape. Didn’t seem to be much point.” He lashed out: “Goshallmighty, when you’re my color even the gals for pay lies to ya!”

They remained silent. Harvey heard Sgt. Minchin give a small sigh.

Willamette got hold of himself. The MP, at Bailey’s request, came in for the corporal. By now, Willamette was composed and left the room with dignity, after first saluting the three officers with more vigor than Harvey felt worthy of—as a white man, part of the power structure that brought such misery to people who had once resided in Africa.

“What do you think?” Adsley asked, directly.

“It’s in the bag,” Harvey said, squaring his papers. “But let’s give this case all we got.”

They did.

Preparing the case of Roger Willamette got Harvey thinking about growing up in northern Rhode Island, on a substantial farm outside the industrial town of Woonsocket, in the teens. His parents were good people, but one day news came out of Woonsocket that Negro factory workers demanded the same wage as their white counterparts—and Harvey had agreed, and he said so to his parents, over dinner one evening. His mother turned on him—“Don’t you think of marrying some little colored gal!” she spouted—and Harvey was stunned and then enraged at her kneejerk reaction... Just because he defended the Negro’s right to an equal wage it got tied up with marriage, sex...a longtime devotee of Abraham Lincoln, Harvey knew that Lincoln was chronically accused of wanting to bed down with a black woman...because he defended a people who should gain reward for the work done by the sweat of their brows.

He also recalled his fellow residents in Rhode Island reading about another lynching of a Negro in the South, and congratulated themselves as more civilized than Southerners. He felt the same, but he also wondered if Providencers could—might—change their stripes, if the situation was right. In his law office, Pottle and Johnson, where he was junior partner, he conversed with a colored janitress deep in the night when he cleaned up a case for the next day’s presentation and she cleaned up the offices. He could not remember how they got to that stage of the conversation, but he always remembered her observation: “You folks got us outnumbered—so you’re not scared of us. But in some places in the south, we got ‘em outnumbered. You hate who scares you.”

You hate who scares you. The next day, during his lunch hour, he found a bookstore that sold copies of W.E.B. DuBois’ *The Soul of Black Folks*, and after reading it, felt a good deal more enlightened—mainly in how his parents—and many of his friends and associates—and himself—simply, not malevolently, believed that white people were just “naturally superior”—which echoed the creed that Hitler promoted as cultural empire. His hardworking parents, kind to their neighbors, sincere churchgoers, concerned about his education, proud of his

becoming a lawyer...would they, if they had lived in Germany, succumb to Hitler's "final solution" as the right thing?

On January 28th the court martial took place in London, at the Langham. Harvey sat next to Sgt. Roger Willamette, neat in his Dress As. Mrs. Siddons and her husband, who looked like a thin gray cat, attended. Willamette was nervous, but Harvey was complimented by his trust in his two white attorneys. The court martial was quite short. The evidence and testimony from two other black soldiers revealed that he was not the only victim of the couple's trick. Moreover, Harvey and Guy stressed, Willamette refused to give into their threats; refused to set out petrol in exchange of no rape charges being made. The Judge Advocate was by turns irritable and amused about how quickly the case was disposed of.

The married couple seemed surprised at the verdict: Roger Willamette was cleared. They left, noisily.

Willamette sincerely thanked Colonel Stovall. He also thanked Lt. Adsley, but his warmth was directed to the older man. "You know, I never thought about going to college, but you make me want to be a lawyer myself." He left, a free man, but there were some MPs to escort him safely to base. He was soon transferred back to the States.

Harvey took the train to Archbury, but climbed off at Sudstree, the stop before. Knowing a path through the fields, he walked under clouds that pressed down like cold wet cotton. He had walked this route during the war, and more than once encountered a shaken pilot or other airmen seeking solace in the serene green beauty of the English countryside. Now, in 1948, wrapped in a GI raincoat, non-GI galoshes on his feet, he was chilled but felt damned good about things; he had been that confident of the court martial running like clockwork but was relieved it had. Hopefully, a corner had been turned; a small corner, but a corner nonetheless. He regained the road about a quarter mile from Archbury, and a sedan, a recent British model, barely off the assembly line, came up from behind him. The car passed to his left, stopped, and the window went down. "They don't know their place, do they?"

Harvey saw a female face, netted over with a veil, peering at him from the right side of a car. He did not recognize her but knew the sound of the voice—

demanding, inquiring, throwing him off his guard so maybe he would speak in anger, and say stupid things.

A newspaper reporter. A lot good, some bad, others plain rotten...

“They can’t control themselves, you know. And you’re tarred with the same brush, getting him off. Think about that when you get passed over for promotion.”

“Madam,” Harvey said, not voicing the words in his head—that he didn’t give a shit about her or any more promotions in his future. Her remarks about Negro soldiers, which at once time would have simply bothered him, now angered him. He then said again, “Mam,” and then suddenly swerved down a footpath that led to Ramsgate Lane, extending his walk about two more miles. The path was foul with soaked dead grass and fallen branches, but at least she could not follow him, unless she climbed out of her car and took a chance with her more than likely expensive shoes...she didn’t. He then passed the site where the corpse of George Trethels had been found, two years ago.

The pains pressed in his chest and he rubbed them, telling himself again that he should see a doctor. He had been too busy, too unsure, and he always felt fine after the pains subsided.

Coward, Harvey thought.

At five o’clock Harvey relaxed in the Star and Bottle, enjoying the simmering coal fire, sipped on a scotch and tonic and waited for his wife, while many figures, rank on shoulders, rank on sleeves, tired, merry, scared, bluff, bunched up at the bar, singing, drowning in smoke of Camels and Chesterfields and Woodbines...passed through his mind. The fight that busted the place up—its charm restored and there was nothing more charming than an English pub on a cold night. Their house was going to be finished, odds be damned. He had friends here. People greeted him by name in the cobblestoned streets. He could be happy here in England.

He studied the beautiful hand-carved bar, particularly the frame of the central mirror. The mirror had been thankfully spared during the fight, but it had suffered a casualty when a portion of its right frame had been clobbered. The frame’s carvings fancifully presented iconic English images, from St. George and the

Dragon to the Spanish Armada. Rearing unicorns were carved on both sides, horns of purity twisted like wax candles. James Eckstone, the owner, awaited a busy woodworker to restore the missing portion—it was going to be a surprise, he told people who asked what was going to be carved there.

But, dammit, Harvey thought, he had a home back...*home*...and you, Harvey, are ducking going back.

Every time the door opened on the wet street he glanced up to see if it were Melva...and the sixth time, he looked up to see the woman who called to him this afternoon, folding her dripping umbrella.

Her quarry was obviously him. For once, Harvey did not rise when this woman approached his table. Though both were polite, neither minced words. She went on the attack, but this time her target was him, not Corporal Willamette.

“Colonel, your work in the Army may be over, soon. Forces are being reduced.”

“That is scarcely your lookout,” he told her.

“Would you like to stay? You have a nice home here in England.”

“That is...” Harvey controlled his voice. “Really of no interest to you.”

She shifted her strategy. “I could make your staying...worthwhile.”

Harvey later admitted that he felt stumped at her words and at the look in her face—challenging, sly—and heading into fear. “Miss—who—are you?”

“Erika Bridgestone. Special reporter.” Her gloved hands extracted and tapped a cigarette in a way that seemed to say, “I’m in charge.” She then lighted it badly. She then declared that “You, Colonel Stovall, could be on the rack for just saying boo. I can help if you cooperate.”

“Cooperate with what?”

“What happened to your son was negligent. It was a disaster from the start.”

Harvey felt like somebody had struck him on the head and in the heart and his body had collapsed in dozens of pieces, each piece with a different question, a different response, which ranged from pleading for details, sickening fear, hope—

and thorough distrust. “You know nothing about my son or what happened to him.”

“I could find out...more.”

He did not ask how. He simply said, “I doubt that.”

“If you cooperate.”

Harvey, not for the first time in his life, but never so thoroughly, peered down the deep, exotic hole of temptation, dug by an absolute stranger. “You’re bluffing.” They were the hardest syllables that Harvey had ever uttered. “Miss Bridgestone, I don’t know what you want. Then—you tempt me with—with—*things that break my heart*...what the hell do you want?—from me, from my son?”

“I want information about General David McGraw.”

“Why?”

“Finding out what happened to him—might answer a lot of questions.”

“I thought that was Bea Wales’s lookout—“

“She’s dead.”

“Ah?” After a few moments said, “I last saw General McGraw at the pub at the Palace of Justice in 1947. Period. Why do you think I know where General McGraw is?”

“You are involved in affairs that involved him. There is a connection--”

“There is not, and Bea Wales saying so—“

They both looked up at as the door opened—and a young couple came in, deeply in love, and ready for some fun.

Harvey then looked at the young woman. Her face no longer seemed confident... She replaced the gloves she had drawn off when speaking with him, rose, and left, but not before murmuring, “You will hear more from me.”

“What about?” Harvey baited her.

She hesitated, it seemed. “He could order your death.”

“I doubt that,” Harvey said. “Whoever the hell ‘he’ is. Siddons, by any chance?”

She flinched without moving a muscle. She then left him with a meaningful look--then spoiled it when she tripped slightly over the uneven threshold.

Find out about Mike.

Without a muscle moving in his face, without a twitch in his shoulders, Harvey melted in grief and raged with curiosity—and recalled his dream from the summer before that told him that Mike was dead—but could be found—at least his death could be found out...that was something.

Something.

The jukebox, stoked with shillings from the young couple, then filled the pub with Frank Sinatra singing “We’ll Be Together Again.”

“Hello, my darling,” called Melva, wrestling out of her coat.

“Let me help you,” Harvey said, taking the coat and hanging it on one of the great brass hooks near the fire. “Well, successful day?” He knew his voice was too loud and boisterous.

She was bubbling with news—which filled him with pleasure because he knew how disappointed—angry—she had been with the Council. “After my rounds, I stopped in Dr. Burnham’s office; I found a note to call Lady Sydney, or Mrs. Sydney Archer, or Sydney--has gotten her local Women’s Institute involved in the case of the brown babies--I suppose that being the sister of a Viscount helps, but it’s okay, we have people interested—and those ladies, they’ve made some history too. I always thought of them as a bunch of knitters and let’s celebrate the king’s birthday by serving scones under little striped tents on the village green.” She ordered fish and chips from the barmaid, with a gin and tonic. “But it’s not a guarantee of them getting involved--Harvey, we need some newspapers getting involved in this—you know some journalists, right?”

“Yes.” She didn’t hear the tension in his voice.

“If that branch of the Women’s Institute is interested, it might inspire others, like our local ladies. Also, the local historical society also dropped a note in our postbox, saying they were interested in further exploring that thing underneath

the coop. It makes me feel guilty about that necklace, but it so clearly matched that necklace at Bryncote...I don't see how we could have held onto it..."

Harvey withdrew into his puzzlement again as she identified another strange thread of—what did Bridgestone call it...connections.

Melva then turned to Molly Staller. "Oh Harvey, these poor girls, they don't know anything. Or what they know or have been told. Molly once admitted to me that she heard from a girlfriend that after you had sex, if you drank cold water and jumped up and down for twenty minutes, you wouldn't get pregnant...when I asked if her baby's father wore a condom, he told her they were dangerous." Harvey gladly listened, enjoying the distraction, but was hearing the Gillem report unroll in his head--that Negro soldiers, as were a lot of white soldiers, not properly educated about sexual practices. Harvey, though growing up on a farm, had still heard some pretty strange stories... A wise biology teacher in high school had actually called his boy students around his desk one Friday afternoon and gave them the facts of life, without evasion, without embarrassment—and showed them a condom.

Melva became distracted by her fish and chips; bicycling for miles made her extremely hungry. Harvey then saw a face in the mirror behind the bar: Alyce Siddons. Seated at the bar, she was smoking and drinking. As he watched, she spoke with the barkeep; Harvey saw her pointing at him, laughing a bit.

"Who's the blond lady?" Melva asked Harvey.

"Nobody to be bothered with," he said, and ordered another drink for himself.

The young couple obviously loved Sinatra for they had chosen "We'll Be Together Again"—again.

When the song ended, Harvey was glad to see that Alyce Siddons was gone.

"Darling?"

"Yes?"

"How did the court martial go?"

Harvey gladly switched to good news but he did not boast. When they finally bundled up and left for home, Harvey quietly checked the streets and recessed doorways for the two women, wondering if they were working together.

For what?

**

In the middle of the frozen night, in the quiet of their cottage, Harvey woke up after four full hours of exhausted sleep. *He could order your death.*

Who the hell was “he”?

He carefully rolled over on his side, knowing his sleep was disturbed. No use fighting it.

Wales, dead. A force of her own nature, she had always made her way, had her way, rolling over anybody who stood in her way. But Harvey would swear she cared for McGraw, there in Nuremberg. If he cared for her, maybe he let some things slip in pillow talk. It was possible that McGraw had gotten on the trail of something incredible... like the treasure at Kronberg Castle that those three idiots stole and thought they could get away with it? Wales wanted to find him, for whatever reason, love or money. Then something had happened to her and that damned...snip...was following her trail, which led to him Harvey...and then some “he” who could order his death. And was Wales really dead? Those were this Bridgestone’s words.

The double-paned bedroom window thickly popped in the cold. Melva murmured, and moved slightly.

He forced his thoughts to happier areas—but no less worrisome. He had been happier in the last two years than he thought possible; she had filled in so many empty places in his heart that had gaped open when the war finished, and work eased up, and the prospect of going home was not...welcomed. But happiness, Harvey knew, could be damned fragile; sometimes a delusion. What he had with Melva was no delusion, felt solid...but snakes were all around. Snakes included Erika Bridgestone. Snakes of unanswered questions. Snakes of temptation. Snakes of fear.

Bluffing. She was bluffing, with her death threats. Yet somebody had tried to kill Joe...was that the same "he" whom Bridgestone had threatened him with?

Should he talk to—to—Merriwether? If he did, would any hope of finding Mike slip away? Oh, hell, Bridgestone was bluffing.

Maybe she wasn't.

The next morning, Harvey sipped on warm, comforting coffee while sleeting snow knocked at the windows, making the sight of Melva tending to oatmeal a pleasant sight. Typically, they stayed close to the stove. "Eugh, winter," she sighed and poured her own cup of coffee—made from coffee sent from the States and she understood why Americans preferred it to tea. "What is winter like in Providence?"

"Little better. But we have real honest to God summers than the thing here that once in a while passes for it. And it's a beautiful place...we're called the Sea State for good reason." He described the sights of Providence, the bridges crossing the inlet winding into the heart of the port city, the seafood, the museums, the State House...and his house, with its central furnace...until he could see she had grown uncomfortable, and thus identified a problem: they had never really discussed their future beyond...a few months. The house had focused their attention; he had assigned duty, and she liked her work—and was being driven to find justice for the brown babies left behind by their dads, either willingly, or sadly. But he could not stay in England forever—or could he? Should he? After last night...maybe he should.

Nevertheless, later that morning, in his chilly office in London, Harvey disposed of immediate business, and then turned to making phone calls to begin Melva's immigration, guaranteed under the 1945 War Brides Act. The speaker on the other end, a friendly soul, deemed her a "war bride" though they had married after the war had concluded. Harvey reluctantly requested documents to be sent to his office. He then dialed Merriwether to ask about Bea Wales. A few days later, he was told she had disappeared...apparently in Topeka, Kansas

Sandy: The Distance of Doubt - Los Angeles, winter

In mid-February Aurora returned...in the middle of the night.

Wary for good reasons, Sandy came awake at the sound of a key opening the door. He lay perfectly still and finally heard, "Mind a surprise?"

"Oh my god, An--Aurora..."

"In absolute person..." she breathed in his ear, coming alongside him. "Darling, I'm so tired..."

"Sleep sweetie," he said. She did, but he couldn't. He showered, shaved...made coffee...and when the Big Ben alarm clock riled off at 3:00, she awoke, and opened her arms...after a precious half hour, he took off for the dairy garage.

She was serenely drinking coffee when he returned to clean up and get to class.

"I'm here to stay," she said.

"Really?" Those words had been said to him before.

"I'm gonna be the best west coast stringer AP service ever had."

He knew a stringer was not what she hoped to be—but he also knew she was happy to see him, and he was happy to see her and that was all that mattered at the moment.

He never asked about her unnamed assignment in Washington. She never spoke about it either. However, many years later...

After Sandy left for classes, Aurora phoned Vincent Hunt Jacobsen at the Los Angeles Times. She didn't like him particularly, but he was the guy to go to when asking for work, and she needed something in a hurry. He was okay enough to ask her only for a drink and then some fumbles under the table...which she would not tell Sandy about, although he was realistic about press people. She was too, and she had heard that when Jacobsen fobbed "the ghost blimp" on you, you were dead, or willing to make some major compromises. Now that was ironic, because she loved the ghost blimp story.

That afternoon, at the Figueroa bar, which she had sighingly prepared for, Jacobsen toasted her with a bourbon and soda and said, "I got a good story for you."

"Yes?"

"Airline stewardesses."

The stewardess profession was expanding as more Americans forsook train travel for the air. Aurora was to learn what they thought of marriage, how they kept their boyfriends, what happened when a passenger got fresh. She considered it shit work, knowing how Army and Navy flight nurses had been stewardesses prior to the war and had gone back to the work. Did passengers realize that in the event of the plane developing a problem, the stewardesses, many of whom were tested war veterans, were the people taking the first care of them?

Well, she would make that clear! "I'll do it," she announced to Jacobsen. She might turn this into her thesis work. She had to. The Washington story was stillborn for both good and bad reasons.

.....
And scary reasons.

"Really?" he demanded, tipping his hand that the assignment was some kind of test.

That evening she and Sandy celebrated by dining at a little Mexican food cafe they liked. Over chicken mole, he asked about the Greek message she had taken with her. She contacted a certain priest at St. Sophia's in Washington. He scanned it and remarked, "I don't quite recognize the Greek," but said he would work on it. A few days later she tried contacting him again and the voice on the other end of the phone said he had been transferred. Suddenly. A day later, she received a post card from him, with a message that must have been his translation: "Find house at the white field. Andauntonia." She didn't tell him that the priest's handwriting was wildly scrawled, suggesting haste. That she felt she was followed. That she felt the priest had not transferred, but that was her feeling, not fact.

"We need your brains and hands at Bartonair," Crusard told Sandy again one afternoon as they were cleaning up in the dingy men's room under the bleachers. "Full time. Skip the masters and get to work."

.....

Sandy took these compliments in stride. He always felt that Crusard was overdoing it a bit to keep his services in their secretive work with electromagnetism and to make up for the lack of pay. But he too wondered about dumping the advanced degree and going right into work and talked about it with Aurora. But what might happen, Aurora asked, if Bartonair foundered—got sold? To some group or person who decided that its engineers needed advanced degrees? The day of the shadetree mechanic and the out of nowhere genius was fading as aeronautics advanced in principles and practices, and education was key. He agreed because it made sense and remarked she was doing her homework about the aeronautical industry.

“I could guarantee ten thousand a year at the beginning,” Crusard told him.

“Dr. Walkert doesn’t like me.” Sandy knew it sounded like a whine.

“He doesn’t like a lotta people...including me much of the time.”

“I’ll think about it,” Sandy hedged.

A few days later at work... and once more, the sound of a distant door closing, brought Crusard’s eyes up. Crusard then went out to get a drink of water from the grimy porcelain fountain and Sandy knew he was checking for visitors. He came back, his eyes calm, but his face was pinched, and his hands were shaky. They finished and left the building and when Crusard asked him to escort him to his office. He didn’t like it, but agreed. Crusard sat down on his cot with a grunt, and asked him to open a can of soup and heat it on the hotplate. Sandy did so, wishing to get away, but he sensed that Crusard wanted to talk. When he didn’t, Sandy finally opened up. “Sir, who is this Claud Walkert anyway?”

“The devil people make a deal with and come to regret it.” Sandy was silent. After a few moments, Crusard said, “Okay, that was an exaggeration. But, well—it’s like climbing into bed with diseased prostitute. You get what you want, but then, consequences.” Crusard seemed to want to talk now. Sandy turned off the hotplate, poured the soup into a bowl, and served it to him while he talked. “For twelve years I worked like the proverbial stinking demon—inventions, demonstrations, lectures at home and overseas—setting up the institute, teaching, partnering to create Barton Aircraft, flying—and in 1936, my doctor told me that I had to take time off. I decided on three months.” He grunted. “That

turned into three years. Barely kept up with my classes. I was living the life of a bad movie. I owned a string of polo ponies and got some starlet between the sheets and bought a mansion to get her to see me more—I spent nearly all my money that wasn't marked for the Institute.”

“What happened then?” Sandy urged while Crusard blew on a spoonful of soup.

“September 1939. Wally Barton had to plant his foot in my ass to make me realize that we were behind the curve in everything...by the time I got myself and what money remained and Barton back on track again it was 1942 and Wally was sick with TB and the other plants were well ahead of us. Lockheed had US senators working for it, to get contracts, but in all honesty, Lockheed was up to date. After some misfires, we were damned lucky to get contracts for piece work. I worked like hell to get familiar with jets and swept-wings, proposed designs, wrote some papers, gave lectures, and by 1945, the *annus mirabilis*, the government decided I knew what I was talking about and sent me to Europe to find and assess German aircraft. I did a damned good job too. Never made a bad call on what was superior technology or what was just fabulous shit. But still Barton Aircraft was pretty much surviving on the money I got from selling my 23-room Beverly Hills mansion.”

Sandy glanced about the office.

“Damn right, I do live here,” Crusard said. “And, to finish the story—I met Walkert ‘somewhere in Germany’—and he told me about some Nazi technology that was, well, incredible. So was a whole bunch of cash. So it began with me getting him into the US.”

“How can I help you sir,” Sandy finally said. He was not sure what else to say. He was sure he had not heard the full story and wondered about telling the authorities. But were any laws broken?

“By keeping quiet about what I have just said. But you know the truth now.”

“Keep quiet with who—whom,” he said, remembering his English lessons. “And sir, if there is danger to the United States government--“

“There is no danger. I swear to that. It may prove our best defense against all enemies.”

Harvey: Put Me to the Test - Archbury, Early Spring

In March, Harvey and Melva found themselves hosting a dinner party.

Joe called to say they had been invited to a weekend affair at Bryncote—a duck shoot, the first one in nearly ten years—and planned to stop in on them for a delayed visit, and by luck, on the night of a dinner party. “My, ain’t we grand,” Harvey joked. “And we can offer you a grand time—Nik and Irina Vorodenko are coming to dinner!” Nikolai Vorodenko, on an unexplained trip to England, ran into Harvey at the Langham where he and Guy Adsley were conferring with JAG officers. Their meeting blossomed into an invitation to dinner.

Harvey had been overjoyed about Joe’s call. Joe and Ceile had dropped out of sight for a while, presumably for repair—Joe’s body and their marriage. He also figured that Joe and Ceile wanted to be together—alone—after a long year of separation so Harvey placed no phone calls to the Goodge flat—though he heard of it being vandalized...

But something perhaps more important had to be faced--! To tell Melva about his invitation. When he did, with apologies--she then laughed and went to the attic to dive into unopened boxes. On the kitchen table appeared beautiful Staffordshire china, antique silver, ivory candleholders—an Irish lace tablecloth, matching place settings and napkins. “Gifts for the first marriage and my dowry.”

“Those need to be placed on a proper table,” Harvey said. “With chairs.”

She looked aghast. “Good Lord!” The kitchen table was all they had.

Harvey thought about pointing out that the visitors had taken meals from messkits to even worse, but also knew that Melva, as mistress of the house, was eager to entertain her guests well—and he did too. They searched used goods shops and found a table that was not a Chippendale but looked like one, with four chairs, and had the set, delivered along with another two chairs. By now, Melva was a bit sorry she had started such complex preparations, but soldiered on, consulting cookbooks, the local markets and finally planned a menu of lamb rubbed with garlic and lavender, parsley potatoes, and of course, Brussell sprouts. For the sweet, a gooseberry preserve pie with cream, and coffee. As the day of the dinner party commenced and continued, Melva was calm, but finally said, “I think I’m more nervous over this than I was when I delivered my first baby.”

“Well,” Harvey said, giving the silver an extra bit of polish, “these are friends coming to visit, not superiors you need to impress.” He related to her how once a year the junior partners of the Law Firm of Pottle and Johnson were “expected” to entertain the boss at their homes. “I doubt if my job depended on how neatly the napkins were folded, but we folded ‘em. And you know, I often thought the boss found coming to our homes for dinner a chore as well.”

Melva laughed a bit. “There was some silly cinema I saw where this grand lady was complaining to her housekeeper about ‘giving one more wretched dinner party—my nerves can’t stand it!’ I rather understand now, though her staff was doing all the work. Did your wife—did Rachel do it all herself?”

“Almost all of it,” Harvey said, and picked up a serving fork. “She didn’t like it particularly, and neither did I—but it was part of the game you played for advancement—good opinion--good cases.”

“If there were ever a man who didn’t seem to play games that would be you, Harvey Stovall.”

“Perhaps strategizing would be a better word, but still, it was playing a game—which now seems of little value.” Harvey realized more than ever he didn’t want to return to Pottle and Johnson. Maybe stay in service as long as he could. Stay in England—a dreary rumble of rain then fell on the house. He had known rain in Rhode Island, but never like this...

She didn’t hear the rain, but she knew that Harvey deep in thought; the lowered brow and the tense eyes. She moved on to the potatoes, but she was thinking of their future, though not planning. She had naturally assumed her first husband and she would finish the war and go on to conventional married life, but that ended. You can’t put faith in plans. She could adapt to whatever; as she always had.

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That evening, taxi car doors slammed and a penetrating voice shouted “Harvey—Melva? We are here!” Harvey opened the light green door to the sight of Nik Vorodenko and Irina—both in civilian duds. Nik’s black suit was not particularly well cut, though Irina was exquisite as ever in an amber wool suit. “Sto-vall! Friend of my friend, and my friend too!” Entering, he engulfed Harvey in a bear

hug, and then knew better to greet Melva by extending his hand, palm upward, to signify he wished to kiss her hand. Melva complied. Outside, a sleek Bentley pulled up.

“Hey, Harv!” Joe Gallagher’s voice was sharp, loud and happy. His old friend stood straight and tall and healthy—thank God—and his wife stood at his side, her beautiful face glowing. Harvey and Melva dashed out. “You two look wonderful,” he said, after shaking hands turned into hugging and kissing. “And we’re both back in the air,” Joe said. “We flew the Little Lily down here, landing on the Preserve. Pat came out to meet us, and I took the liberty of inviting her—I can dash into town for extra food--”

“We are glad to have her!” Melva cried and shook the hand of the lovely woman who graciously hosted her and Harvey’s wedding. Pat smiled and moved away as Nikolai Borisovich Vorodenko, wiping tears from his eyes as he slowly advanced toward Joe and Ceile. He first hugged and kissed Ceile, gently, and then wrapped Joe in a bear hug. He then turned to Ceile and Irina, who had quietly hugged, and exchanged happy faces though over-ridden with concern about the remarkable men they loved. They had come to understand not to ask about Nik and Irina in terms of marriage. When you were married, Stalin had an instant potential hostage or victim.

Harvey, recalling some happy moments, asked about Redline, the mutt. As base personnel were withdrawn, Redline seemed to take matters in stride...but one day disappeared. Harvey was overjoyed when he visited the Preserve to take care of some business as the base withdrew from the lands, and Redline trotted out to greet him, joyfully.

“Well, we gave him to Sydney Archer,” Pat said. “She has all those children who need a mutt to love.” Implied was that her father in law didn’t want some dirty Yank mutt making himself at home.

After they all retuned into the house, Molly awkwardly swanned in with a tray full of sherry. They all took one. Nik drank his glass in a gulp and without embarrassment, held out his glass, politely, for more. He then gestured for Irina to take from her bag a bottle of vodka and give to their hostess. There was a great deal of toasting with the new liquid and happy talk. Nik’s English had improved as had Irina’s, suggesting Vorodenko was working closely with the Allies. Soon Pat

and Joe and Ceile were talking with each other animatedly and after toasts and more well wishes, the dinner unfolded.

No questions about Joe's injuries. No questions about what the Vorodenkos were doing in England.

Melva helped Molly conduct dinner to the neatly laid table. Molly was flushed but pleased as the result of her cooking brought forth happy exclamations. Nik ate with gusto, asking for thirds. During dinner, talk flowed about recent work, adventures, and housing situations.

"I would love to have a home like this, right in the middle of my little place," Pat said. "Kitchen and all. I may die from museum legs walking hither and yon all over that mansion, with three floors to boot."

Irina laughed merrily, her English highly improved. "I would be happy with a place in which the plaster stayed on the ceiling, and not falling on our plates!"

Melva said to Pat, "Despite being a guest there—at Harvey's and my wedding—I never could quite figure out how you lived in such an enormous place!"

"Well, my husband and I occupy a suite of rooms on the third floor," Pat explained, notably, at least to Joe, avoiding any mention of her father-in-law, and his wife, Elizabeth Woodruff. "And since living there I've become intrigued with the many tapestries there, some of which are going to pieces. I had to keep my father in law from selling all of them including the Persephone Suite to some character who offered a fortune for them. My husband finally told his father that the offer the fellow made was piffle; the tapestries could all go at three times what was being offered for them."

"Say Harv, what was this about you finding buried treasure?" Ceile asked.

"Under the chicken coop, and yes, there was a piece of treasure," said Harvey.

"You do understand, my dear host and hostess," Nik said, "That we wish to see it."

"Oh yes," said Ceile, eagerly. "Joe talked about it like a kid."

"It felt like Treasure Island," Joe said.

“Who—are--the three kings your lovely home was named after?” Nik asked as they rose and headed for and through the kitchen door to the so-called “treasure trove.”

“Perhaps the three Edwards,” Melva said—“Edward one through third—reigned in the Middle Ages. Edward III—or was it Edward VI-- brother of Richard, uncle to the two little princes, murdered in the tower, at his order.”

“Hm? I would like to know more of that. A good Soviet likes to hear good scandals against royalty.”

“It’s juicy,” Melva remarked.

“How did you find it?” Irina asked as Harvey opened up the chicken coop, built like a small fortress to keep the curious from breaking in.

“Quite by accident,” Melva said. “When...well, the ground just crumbled.” Though they had not spoken of it before, the incident dealt with the “other woman” who accompanied Joe that weekend.

Armed with three flashlights, they grouped around the hole, which had been covered with a wooden lid. Harvey shot the bolt and raised it, and they all poked beams into the darkness. “You can see cut stone there.” Harvey then spoke about the moldy box found and the treasure within. “It’s now in the hands of our mutual friend, the Viscount of Bryncote. The necklace belonged to his family as indicated by records. It was carried to safety there during the Civil Wars.”

“They surely could have found a more accessible place,” Pat remarked.

“A great coincidence,” Nik said, stealing the words out of Ceile’s head. Joe had thought them too.

They returned to the parlor to find that Molly had efficiently perked another carafe of coffee and plated slices of gooseberry pie with dollops of sweet cream. They distributed themselves around the parlor, and Harvey and Melva beamed as good friends dosed their coffee with brandy and talked and laughed and thought out loud. “Your discovery makes me want to tackle some big projects at the Preserve,” Pat said. “But Royston’s father...” she did not finish the sentence and Joe assumed she did not care to talk any more about my Lord Beckworth-Smythe, her father-in-law. And Joe wondered about some of the things he heard about the

man's business deals...which were rumors. But it was no rumor the man had bought his manorial title, and since the previous line had run out, inherited things he liked to show off, but had no feeling for.

Molly quietly removed the dishes and silverware from the table. Melva then realized too late that Ceile was thumbing through a photo album...and came up a little short.

Melva knew which picture: Joe and his aide, soaked, tousled and grinning like kids after their wallpaper paste fight and resulting fight with the hose. "Take a picture Harve," Joe instructed his former adjutant and Harvey did, but was glad Joe never asked for a copy.

By midnight, the party reluctantly broke up and Melva and Harvey said their good nights to their five guests. "Having company is wonderful, and it is also wonderful when they leave," she said, gathering up the coffee cups, saucers, and stray plates. Molly had already gone to bed to comfort her restless son so they washed up the few remaining items and then wearily went to bed. With a huff, Harvey climbed between the blankets. He was mulling over his relief that the party was over, and even greater relief that it seemed for partying, nothing more. Yet, Vorodenko coming to dinner, and Joe and Ceile joining in seemed unlikely, though why not? Though he wondered if sometime during the evening, secrets were exchanged, notes passed, something clandestine...and maybe not.

Melva, still a little overwrought by the successful party, took her time with her sponge bath and then did what she rarely did: unpinned her soft red hair and then brushed it out slowly. Harvey dozed a bit and when he opened his eyes, she was braiding it. "Harvey," she said when she saw him in the mirror, "am I house proud?—a woman wants to show her house off."

"You struck me as wanting to entertain our guests pleasantly and well."

"I did...but it came to me that I seemed to be the only one with a real home."

Harvey was wise enough to get out of bed and sit next to his wife. "What brought this idea on?"

"Well... Irina was laughing about plaster staying on the ceiling as if that were something most special. Joe...their flat vandalized, hideously, with 'nigger lover'

slapped over the fireplace. Pat Bates feels she is living in a museum. It just seemed that I am the best fixed right now.”

“Why are you concerned?”

“Well, I remember you once saying, shortly after we moved in here and all hell seemed to breaking loose, and I was—embarrassed about buying the place-- that ‘it’s not where you are, it’s whom you’re with.’ That seems true of Nik and Irina— Pat and her husband...Joe and his wife.”

“So?”

“Could we have been happy at that flat on Waterloo Lane?”

“Of course.” He saw that Melva did not want half-answers. “Melvy, I don’t know. I wasn’t there very much. But I suppose--if we had continued living there I would have soon said that it would be nice to have our own toilet.” When she just looked at herself in the mirror, he said, “If we had been st—well, stuck there, we would have been happy, I’ve no doubt.”

“Are you happy here?”

“Of course I am. But it sounds like you are—well, questioning our happiness.”

“I don’t want a house to be the source of our happiness.”

“Let’s not get into speculation like this. It was a wonderful evening. Let’s leave it at that.”

Her contrariety was rising, but with herself. “I shouldn’t have bought this place without asking you first. And then you were stuck with it.”

“Who was stuck? It’s been interesting...and have you forgotten our own private treasure pit?—and what was found there? Actually, I think you buying this house and—well, it was destiny.”

“Perhaps so.” He stood up, and standing behind her, put his arms around her naked shoulders in a hug. She enjoyed and then her eyes spotted that odd mark on his left inner arm. “Is that a tattoo? That little triangular mark?”

“No, it just something I noticed one day...it must be some skin discoloration from high altitude flying.”

After a moment Melva turned to another question. "How do you think Ceile will be...since Irina's pregnant?" Nik and Irina had simply brought that into the conversation, and Ceile had led the congratulations.

"Ceile and Joe are stronger for the last year." And need to grow even stronger to stay steady in the midst of the unknown, the unspoken, the avoided, the just plain mysterious.

As was, Harvey thought, the mark on his skin. He had seen a similar mark on Joe's inner arm as well.

Joe and Ceile: Firm in Uncertainty – Bryncote

The next day Joe and Ceile flew to Hitchin. They were artificially merry as they climbed into the little plane parked for the night at the Preserve, and Joe gave Ceile the go ahead for take-off. After the plane leveled off, and Ceile brought the plane around, they chatted...about Australia, the chief topic of a great deal of their conversation. It was a safe topic...and Joe honestly enjoyed hearing about her experiences, the wonderful and remarkable people she met, the terrible beauty of the outback...the rather prim cities...the enormous lack of people. Never once did the bitterness which hacked deeply into their parting, and pursued their separation, brief reunion, and then second separation...enter into their talk.

Then they viewed the lands below, glimpsed through quilt-like clouds. Joe was recalling, with some guilt, a conversation he had with Harvey the night before when he had gone into the den to put on his coat, left there on Molly's bed with the other wraps. He asked Harvey if he had heard from Sandy... Yes, the older man said to him, and a little sternly added "I did tell him about you and Ceile losing the baby. He wondered why you hadn't told him about it." Joe told Harvey the truth...that Ceile had refused him telling Sandy. "For two reasons...she didn't want to spoil his excitement about starting college and second, she was ashamed...and worse, embarrassed."

"Embarrassed?" Harvey asked as he helped Joe on with his heavy coat. "And shame...has no part in this."

"I think so," Joe said. "Never...tell her I said that."

"Of course not."

In the air over Cambridgeshire they were both waiting, both sensed, for something else to be said...without saying a word, both were questioning this remarkable dinner between the Gallaghers, the Stovalls...and the Vorodenkos. But, apparently, it was just a dinner. Neither Nik nor Joe had drawn each other aside.

Joe diverted himself from this silence to another area of silence. To break it. And it was not hard to do..."You want to ask about the picture of Julie being wet and laughing by my side."

“That’s your business,” Ceile said, coolly. She was aware, of course, of Julie’s engagement and her speaking about requesting transfer as her fiancée was...engaged to her old friend and pilot.

Joe sighed. Though their reunion had been happy, without any demands or pleas for forgiveness, there were still barriers between them. They hadn’t yet made love, partly due to Joe’s injuries and also, admittedly, to how the emotions—the sense of freedom and intimacy--that made love-making right were not quite there. Joe told himself that husband and wife shouldn’t be couplings on a sexual train. “It’s your business too,” Joe told her, with an edge in his voice.

Both had put their dukes up...good, they both thought. It’s time.

“How so?—so you can ask me if I had any—relations—during last year?”

“That was a bad year for both of us. Do you have doubt in me?—or my love for you?” The plane buzzed on for several minutes... while Joe found himself sweating in his leather jacket...

“No doubts Joe,” Ceile said. “But doubts in me, yes.”

“My doubts or yours?”

“Mine.” She relinquished the yoke to him.

He took it, checked on the ground below, noted the direction, checked on the fuel line. Speaking the truth over a growling motor was not the ideal way to unburden souls and hearts, but in the case of Joe and Ceile, with both their lives largely defined by flying, it seemed appropriate. He waited—as he had been waiting since he was finally aware that his wife was by his bed at St. George’s, smiling, loving, but curious, as she had a right to be. But her curiosity had not extended to Lovelace. At least that he knew of. Julie, when he returned to his office for a series of half-days, had never brought up Ceile’s return, nor the tense moments between her and his wife...until later. As was appropriate. His business. But still--

“Ceile, I should have asked if you wanted to return to Bryncote. I accepted for us both, because I would enjoy seeing Percy—and Frank Savage’s little boy. But the last time we were there—“

She cut to the chase. “Joe, you’re over our daughter.” Then, “And I am too.”

“That doesn’t make me happy or sad...but to know that you can...” Maybe he’d better shut up.

“Deal with it. I finally dealt with it during that endless flight from Australia. Yes. But what I can’t deal with now is how I acted, and treated you—“

“About what?” Joe demanded, his bitterness breaking out. “You know that we meet months after Ilka and I—and thinking that I—having sex—with my aide moments after you left...”

Ceile recoiled at memories of how she and Joe had fought during that year and was weary...with herself. They were silent for a long time, each accusing—themselves, the other, themselves again...

“Danzo, I was so hopeless with my failure—losing a baby—how could I, the great Ceile—admired on three continents, bosom full of medals, married to the charming General Gallagher—lose a baby?” She jerked off her glasses and wiped her eyes with her sleeve of her flight jacket. “When I lost the baby after a while I was blaming you--it had to be your fault—it could not have been me--Oh, Joe, I’ve been horrible. What I decided and said and did when Lt. Lovelace answered the phone... And I am so...SORRY!”

“Hey,” Joe said gently, remembering how he had figured out some of these things during their year apart. “We’ve both been through a gauntlet. We learn a lot in our--failures. I did.” They listened to the plane drone... “And I never did tell you about how—near—I came to failing as pilot there at the 918th. Oh, I didn’t fly off thinking I was invincible—not much—but I was the golden kid with a string of successes in my past and who the hell was Hitler to me? After my first run—for the first time Jeff’s death at Clark really hit me, hard. I knew I could end up as he did and worst, I would end up a failure. Scared the crap out of me. If it hadn’t been for Savage—“ his own memory recoiled at the not entirely undeserved dressing down Savage gave him, while he shaved—and after Savage left the scalded Captain Gallagher, holding his razor...

“More than one pilot there at the 918th told me that you never caved in, but you understood.”

“You’re the first person to deserve understanding. And if you don’t wish to go to Bryncote—“

“I know by Harvey you visited our daughter’s resting place. I need to as well.”

“All right.”

After a moment she blurted “I treated her death as if it were the end of everything. I can better see that our child’s loss was something that happened along the way.”

“It was no ‘some thing’—but losing—babies does happen.”

Both were glad the other didn’t say “next time, soon.” This aspect of their future was willfully held a blank to be filled in when it was time.

After a moment, she laid her arm over his shoulder, and squeezed. Their eyes met and a long upsetting time was over. The plane jostled as if in warning. There were going to be bumps in the future. There were still things silenced over by mutual consent, and by the silence of not knowing. Neither doubted that.

When they looked at each other again her eyes were damp but they also had desire in them.

Their landing was made rough by sudden wind gusts, causing Joe to circle again, and this time they floated over Bryncote’s grounds, spread out in pale-grassed marches and clusters of trees. In the March morning light, Joe spotted an open field in which three soft mounds rose up, and he wondered if those were the strange hills that Percival had once spoken out—mainly to request/order that the commando rehearsal there in late 1943 avoid disturbing them. Joe and Ceile then landed at the Hitchin air field, literally a field that the town leased from a farmer. They rolled to a stop. Following directions, they walked, hand in hand, carrying their B-4 bags, from the pasture to Little Houses road which took them to Hitchin. They found the Hitchin Arms where they had arranged to wait...and were given a note at the desk asking their forgiveness if they were not picked up until around four. Since it was only shortly past ten, Joe requested a room with a bath—yes, but there was an extra charge...Snug in their room, they undressed, filled the old chipped and claw-footed tub full of the hottest water they could, and after reveling in the closeness of each other found their way to the bed and made love...for the first time in nearly fourteen months.

This was now the right moment. It was a relaxed, happy, reuniting love; absent was the striving reach for a passion or power that might produce another baby that made their last few months together back in 1947 so wretched, more so when they learned that Betty Gallagher was pregnant, again. And rather than Irina's baby being a reproach to her, Ceile was truly happy, though wishing she could claim the same condition...but thoughts and disappointments about a baby...drifted to the back of their thoughts as their intimacy became true intimacy. Then they talked... with Joe's leg thrown over her legs. Lt. Lovelace was the first topic. "My queen, you could have arrived at any hour of the day or night and not found a speck of her or any other woman..." They talked about Joe's future...although he continued to prepare for the training battalion, there were physical doubts of his abilities. He still tired easily.

And Sandy came up. "I think I finally figured out why I was asking for him." She listened tensely. He told her how twice his life seemed to be slipping away, and Sandy was with him. First when Sandy landed the Piccadilly Lily, and second, when Sandy hauled his injured body into the raft off the Azores...both times he could only put his life into Sandy's hands, but was expecting, he joked, to hear harp music, but awoke in a hospital, just as he did back in January. "I guess I figured he'd be there."

They both slept. Joe awoke after one o'clock, and murmured to Ceile about food, tea? She murmured sleepily that she was warm and happy and he loved seeing her that way. He dressed, and whistling, found a tearoom for a cup, then a pub for a pint, and then, on a whim, strode out along Little Houses road to the cow pasture-airfield and struck off into the wooded glade to see if he could find those mounds he spotted from the air. He had other objectives too...long range ones that were brought to his attention in these last three weeks when he finally returned to his office and took up his work.

Simply, Joe belonged in Washington. At the Pentagon. Working with the chiefs of staff, no less. Not at his request. A lengthy memo from Joseph T. McNarney, sent to George C. Marshall before the latter became Secretary of State, noted that Joseph Anson Gallagher possessed a quality not every general had: the ability to see the larger picture, and to see into the future. This ability came, McNarney wrote, from Gallagher's particularly strong experiences in war-time shuttle

missions, which extended from North Africa, to Africa, and to some point, Italy. McNarney had made a point of reviewing his reports, noting his understanding of how missions originating from North Africa and from Italy increased pressure on the Luftwaffe, spreading them more thinly. He also appreciated Joe's decisive analysis of the Poltava mission, both successful and unsuccessful, was good on some points, but Stalin would surely exploit it to his benefit. When reporting on shrinking American presence in Europe Joe had predicted some consequences which proved true. When making recommendations, Joe had advised that the military presence needed strengthening, but without the infrastructure of a nearly shattered Europe sunk deep with American money, citizens might turn to Communism as some kind of remedy, and this previewed Marshall's plan. He even talked with McNarney about a growing issue in the Far East: Korea. He and his father had conversed about issues in that hardly known country, shadowed by China and conquered by Japan and liberated by Russia. Its division at the 38th parallel, a sort of arbitrary American move, might soon produce trouble... Joe, being human, was pleased with McNarney's memo, so strongly in his favor, but what did it portend?

What about that training command he had sweated over, working weekends, late into the night? If he lost that, due to Washington machinations, he would...well...

And Joe, in his heart of hearts, wanted jet training... He'd let those jet engines knock the pen out of his hand, the chair in the Pentagon out from under him, and disappoint certain generals...his shoulders sloped, as if feeling the weight of that damned star. It was not about him, it was not about pleasing generals, it was helping to find or create peace and security in a world that still did not seem interested in them. It was also about integrating the armed forces, assuring the black soldier who fought for his country would be served and respected... and he should be trying to cram himself into some cockpit, reliving his youth at the speed of sound... But oh, how he missed flying...if he could be judged flightworthy anymore. Lots of injuries—a plate in his shoulder—eyesight slipping a little...

He then stopped at the edge of a broad field, recently turned for planting...and there were the three burrows. There was a large one, flanked by two smaller ones, and an even smaller one some distance away. Joe also saw another figure, with his back to him, writing on a pad of paper.

“Percy!” Joe shouted.

“Joe!—fancy meeting you here, old chap...! Oh, let’s forgo the dinner announcement—Joe, I and my darling Adelaide are to become parents.”

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“I thought we were being picked up,” commented Ceile as she and Joe waited for a taxi at the curb. An ancient black taxi, which had seen better days, ground up and they climbed in. “Bryncote,” he told the driver. “Phone call asked me to arrange for transportation,” he then explained to his wife. They were silent during the trip.

“Joe, let’s go to our child immediately,” Ceile then said as the car approached the great house. “Of course,” Joe said, and asked the driver to stop halfway up the drive, paid him, and asked him to drop their bags off at the main door.

In the fading March light, they walked up together...to the small grave guarded by the ancient stones of the old Celtic site under an enormous oak tree. They didn’t speak. Neither dared. But neither cried.

They held onto each other, gently.

“Let’s go,” Ceile then said. She was smiling—but sadly, which he understood. With their arms around each other’s trench coats, they walked down the hill, gained the drive and hurried on as clouds gathered and hung low. Rain was beginning to fall when Joe pulled the bell cord.

Rather than the old reliable butler opening the door, Adelaide did. Ceile knew of Percival’s unorthodox marriage to a commoner—and a foreign one—so the sight of the elegantly dressed former girl of all work didn’t surprise her and pleased her immensely. She was a lovely lady, taking on massive new responsibilities. They were ushered in.

But she immediately saw alarm on the woman’s face, which continued even when she said, “Percy has been called away. He will not be dining with us tonight.”

Before Joe could say a word, “Hallo,” announced a voice behind them. It belonged to a tall, distinguished looking fellow, grasping a valise.

“Kim, well, hello,” Joe said.

Adelaide, Viscountess Bryncote, seeming the soul of calm, welcomed, uh, "Mr---?" "Hillborough," he told her. "Your husband invited me last minute, don't you know. I'm sorry if you are surprised."

"Not at all," she murmured. "Excuse me please." She left, presumably to announce that another room needed preparing for the new guest.

"Well, Joe, old fellow," said the newcomer, changing his valise from right left and grasped Joe's hand. "I understood you would be here, and looked forward to seeing you again."

Joe turned to Ceile. "This is Harold Hillborough. We met last October." No more details; perhaps a warning not to ask for details...which included his being in MI6.

"Mr. Hillborough," Ceile said, extending her hand.

"Call me Kim, please."

"Kim?"

"Grew up in the Raj, don't you know. My dad named me after the Rudyard Kipling character. Well, well...I thought you were in Australia."

"May I ask how you knew I was in Australia?"

"I heard, through channels... I felt sorry for Joe that you were so far away on duty."

"Oh, please, please come into the library," said Adelaide, returning. The hall was as cold and dark as ever and the library beckoned with a fire at the enormous fireplace. Joe and Ceile divested themselves of their trench coats, which were taken by a middle aged woman servant. Adelaide followed her.

They entered the library. "Well, I have come at a bad time," said Hillborough. "What has happened?"

Joe said that Percival Vivyan had been called away. Hillborough pulled out a pipe and filled it. They chatted after being served sherry. "Shame," Hillborough finally said, as the level of discomfort rose and seem to crackle. "Never been here before and I seem to have come at a difficult time."

Dinner somehow went forward with a tense Adelaide hosting a lovely table that presented a far finer dinner than was served in April 1946. A maid served the roast beef, Yorkshire pudding and just cooked enough Brussel sprouts efficiently, bringing in a cart with covered dishes so that food arrived hot at the table, breaking with tradition of plates being brought in on open trays, to assure all was cold by the time they reached the guests. Sydney then joined them; her husband, Chaplain Ethan Archer, was away on duties. To Joe's questions, and Ceile's interest, they learned that their twice-officiant was happy remaining in England, dividing his time between several American bases; sometimes he was away for two weeks at a time. Sydney, later in a private moment, telephoned around to find her husband and ask if he could possibly come home as there was something wrong.

Back at the table, "How is your school coming along?" Ceile asked. Sydney, despite concern for her brother, launched into her work, including successes and failures. The school was growing and Percy was taking an interest in educational issues among British youth. "And Joe," she said, "Master Francis Savage is most eager to see you—in the morning; we just got them into bed."

"I'm eager to see him," Joe said, grinning. "How is he?"

"Blossoming," Sydney assured him, telling him that with unconditional love and attention, Francis, or Frankie as he one day announced as his name, was coming along well. But, he was shy; some of the more boisterous children could not get him to play with them. He was never rude or nasty about not wanting to play, but he preferred to watch.

"A fine project," Kim said. His accent was plummy without being overbearing, and his clothing was fine but not dapper. But Ceile finally caught something that did not seem right—he had the slightest of lisps, which caused him at times to pause before venturing on a word ending with an ess sound. "Children need great care. My own father could have been a pillar of salt, for all the care he showed me. I don't know why it is a man could have children and though feeding and clothing them adequately... seems annoyed at their existence."

Ceile put her glass of wine down with some surprise. English were rarely so forthcoming with strangers. Early in the war, American openness and British reserve had clashed as Yanks wondered why the hell the limeys treated them like

“drop dead,” while the limeys wondered why the hell the Yanks wanted to be mates with strangers immediately. There had been a pamphlet produced for both sides, explaining, rather nicely, that Americans saw themselves as just as good as anybody, while the British tended to believe that you don’t talk with strangers beyond giving directions.

“Do you and your wife have children Mr. Hillborough?” Sydney asked.

“Please, Kim.” Mrs. Hillborough was home ill, and they had three children and a fourth might be on the way. “Lovely things,” he said, and spoke with pride of his oldest boy, seven years old and already in line to attend Harrow. Joe recognized as one of the premier boys boarding schools in London.

“How do you know my husband?” Adelaide then asked.

“We were at Cambridge together. Saw each other the first time late last year and when I met him in London a few days ago, he invited me for this shoot.” He pronounced the word “just” as “juzt.”

Adelaide wanted to ask more questions, Ceile could see, but decided not to.

Hillborough focused his interest on Ceile when he learned she was the scion of an aeronautical firm in the States. She was at first polite, then interested as his interest grew, and then a bit put off when he began drilling her on company policy toward employees...and nodded with seeming approval when she said, snappishly, that employees had medical and educational rights, which reflected the ideals of the FDR. “Remarkable man,” he said. “Even Stalin admired him—thought Churchill was a tired old colonialist crank--Stalin admired for how Roosevelt had born to the purple, yet remembered the little men.” True, Ceile agreed, but she didn’t admire his admiration for some reason. Deciding to be a forward American, she asked, “What do you for a living, Kim?”

“Journalizzm,” he said briefly, and said no more. Joe said nothing, but later told her about his work with MI6. And he could be a journalist, as that was a perfect cover for a man gathering information.

There was coffee and brandy in the drawing room—where, Joe and Ceile noticed, the portrait of the infamous and tragic Lady Beryl was missing. A smoky outline showed where the portrait once hung. They said nothing. Adelaide was gracious

but was grateful when the guests withdrew for the night, and shown their rooms, not by the venerable butler but by a polite maid. They asked her about the butler who was so calm during the wedding tempest in 1946. A few months earlier he had packed his ancient bags and said his sister in Birmingham needed him. There were tears in everybody's eyes when he departed. He too had then died.

"Something's wrong," Ceile said to Joe, in their room. It was ice cold, but considering the tensions afoot they decided not to call for a fire.

"Perhaps not," Joe said, seated on the bed, and removing his shoes. "Percival has contacts in the government and it could be that he was called away suddenly." It could be true, he thought to himself...Percy had told him, over cups of Thermos-poured tea, that he might be called away, suddenly. Official business. He had asked Joe not to speak about their meeting, there in the fields. During the duck shoot, they would have a chance to talk.

"Would Adelaide be ignorant of such reasons?" Ceile asked.

"Perhaps," Joe hedged. "You know...how husbands with important posts can't tell loved ones what is going on." But he wondered. Wondered if he should tell Adelaide of his last meeting with her husband, just hours earlier. He had said nothing about Hillborough coming, but he was interested in the burrows. He resisted glancing at Ceile, knowing he could not tell her, either. He also knew that she knew...that he was not speaking his full mind to her. And he struck Joe as a phony back at their first meeting, and he now he really did...

But she spoke hers to him. "I feel like I have met this Kim somewhere before. And I know you have."

She was right. He had met Kim in Percy's company, in early December, 1947.

Weeds. They got higher and nastier every year it seemed.

But they leisurely removed the rest of each other's clothing and made love in the antique bed...each wondering if they made love for a kind of distraction...but the distraction was sweet and close.

The duck hunt, thanks to some civilized god, would not start until after the sun made its appearance. Breakfast was held in the dining room; they found an array of eggs, ham, kippers, and toast on the buffet table, and they helped themselves.

Joe, Ceile and the welcomed Lady Sydney laughed about that delightful crazy weekend some years before when they helped serve up the breakfast; kilts; a band arriving; all hands employed with cole slaw and beans; a football game with an old soccer ball—and then a baby arrived! Hillborough listened and chuckled appreciatively. And then the wedding...Joe steered away from memories of their joyful announcement...Adelaide was not there; the maid said that Madam had a headache, and that the guests were to proceed with the duck shoot. By now, two neighbors arrived; a Gaylord Wickham and a Mortimer Tree, two dashedly English chaps with drawling accents—and losses in their families as they both revealed later. Two of Tree's sons both perished in Burma and Wickham's oldest son, confined in a POW camp for over three years, was still recovering.

Sydney then invited Joe and Ceile to the classroom where her eight charges waited. Too young for formal schooling, the children pored over picture books and played games. Joe was pleased when Francis Jr. hurled himself into his arms. Redline, who had been apparently sent to school himself, jumped happily at Joe; but Redline, Joe recalled, jumped at anybody. Redline was looking older and a bit gray, but he was beloved of the children.

Frankie seemed young and vulnerable but when Joe gently held him back to look at him, his eyes saluted Joe's memories of Frank Savage. His too were gray-blue with a touch of ice, but there was no chill there as the boy fumbled for Joe's wings from his pocket. "This is Michelle," he said, as a little girl sidled up, gray eyes ever so slightly jealous of Ceile, who stood on, smiling. "How do you do," Joe said, pecking her cheek.

"Fine sir, and how do you do," she said perfectly in her child's voice. Joe squatted down and took them both on his knees and chatted with them. Joe then said, "Frankie, this is my wife, and her name is Ceile. She knows you from about two years ago." Frankie solemnly shook her extended hand. She peered into his blue gray eyes and fought against losing her heart... Joe left when Sydney returned; he would rather stay with the kids, but he had agreed to the shoot.

**

Joe joined his fellow huntsmen though shooting ducks did not appeal to him—too much like those godawful years of war, when he was the duck...and the rifles being pointed at him were the MK 303 Flak artillery pieces. He wound a muffler

around his throat and stuffed gloves in the pocket of his mackinaw. But Percival had extended the invitation in a way that indicated he wanted Joe at Bryncote, and was using the duck shoot as a cover—for the kind of high-level confidential meetings they had shared with Kim, who was actually a member of MI-6, as was Percy Vivyan. Their December 1947 meeting had been held over breakfast in a private dining room in a once-grand hotel. Hillborough, whom Joe had just met, methodically searched for listening devices and then delivered his news: he had uncovered a spy ring operating right under everybody's noses, and it had been responsible for ground agents, dropped into Balkan territories, caught and destroyed. "The agents were broadcast an all clear by operatives, who were members of the local constabulary," he blandly reported.

When Joe asked, "Why was he being told about this?" Hillborough told him that James Jesus Angleton, the head of the CIA—which had a rough birth out of the OSS—wanted to know more about Vorodenko, and Joe was the man to tell him about his possible espionage activities. "If he were a spy, don't you think he would be a great deal more, uh, quiet--?"

"Perhaps he's using his volubility as a blind," Hillborough said.

After a moment, Joe said, point blank, "Am I suspected of assisting him in any way?—even as a dupe?"

"Certainly not. But perhaps you being friends gives him a certain cachet with others."

**

Back in the moment at Bryncote, Otis Micklesod, a neighbor, then joined them. He was what could be considered "common," with a London accent redolent of the seamier areas, but he was unabashedly open about his making a fortune in chain manufacture, and his love for his country estate—"Not arf as good as this 'un but a breath of fresh air to these tired old London lungs," he laughed. Ceile, who had come to say her goodbyes, immediately took to him as he showed her pictures of the "grand nippers."

Ceile followed them into the rimy morning. She hadn't planned on shooting anyway, though she was skillful with a hunting rifle, as taught by her father and

she had competed with her brother at a shooting range. "Our hostess needs some help," she said to Joe.

"I know she's worried."

"And pregnant," Joe added, suddenly.

"For sure?" Ceile nodded and then dropped her eyes as he put his hands around her shoulders. She then looked at him, strong and sure, though he could see the wistfulness in her eyes and two women she knew were pregnant. Irina had told them about her "condition" the night before.

Joe, with the hunting party, was first driven about a mile away and left to track over the marches and vales to the lake to wait for ducks to wake up and do something so they could shoot at them. As they walked along, Hillborough, prompted by talk among the men, dissertated about the former colonies of England and France were either breaking off or starting to with the expected confusion. Rhetoric for freedom from the master countries was fine but didn't prevent birth agonies that could go seriously awry, such as the division between the Hindus and the Muslims in India, and the sub-continent bled as two populations struggled.... British possessions in Africa were rising up and French Algiers was stirring. And then there was the USSR, and in China Mao Zedong had recently forced the Kuomanting to Formosa, and strange things were going on in Korea.

"Well, come on, this is a hunt," Hillborough said. "And a good reminder of what it once meant to gain your food by the sweat of your brow, in the fields, rather than bent over some endless conveyor belt stuffing salmon into cans..." They proceeded into the mud and brush, and by the end of the morning, Micklesod had sausages cooking over an open fire. "Well done, chaps," Hillborough said, hunkering down with a pipe. "Put up a fight, did they?"

"Here," Joe said, extending his flask. "Family vintage."

"Zuperb," he announced, his tones even plummier. Joe realized that Hillborough was a little drunk, which perhaps had brought up his competitive spirit. Three men of the commoner sort had made their shots, and he and Joe had nothing to show. Such was fine to Joe, but Hillborough suddenly said, "Let's try a different look out, Joseph my lad." He lunged up, rifle slung on his elbow, and somewhat

staggered away. Joe had no desire to follow as he knew Hillborough was isolating them for some critical conversation—but maybe he would learn about Percy.

Hillborough was striding away, muttering, toward a jungle of reeds and bullrushes a half mile away. Joe didn't follow in his wake, but walked behind him, shuddering as a cold March wind bore down and rain clouds drifted down from the north. Joe's bad shoulder was aching from the cold and from the heavy rifle hanging from his arm as they crossed boggy ground. Hillborough paused and let Joe catch up with him. He came aside the taller man with a look in his face of "...yeah?"

"Vorodenko? You had dinner with him last night, with your former adjutant, Harvey Stovall."

"Yes, dinner," Joe said, not surprised at his knowledge. "Old friends, happy to see each other."

"What...is your take on him, this Vorodenko?"

Joe knew better than to say what he once told his father: "hates Stalin, loves his country." Instead, he parried the question: "In what sense?"

A rifle shell ripped over their heads. They slammed down on wet earth. "Idiots!" barked Hillborough as he rolled over and then cringed as another rifle shell split the air.

This was no hunting mistake; shooting ducks meant aiming into the air. Wildly, Joe glanced around to where the ground rolled under thick copses of bramble bushes. "Over there!" But they didn't get up and run; they squirmed along the ground, dragging their rifles; they might have to use them. They slithered into a shallow draw and lay panting; hot and dirty despite the cold. "Well," Hillborough said after getting his breath. "Maybe the Toombys will come in again for some comic relief."

A shout was shredded by the wind—Joe imagined he heard rifles being cocked, prepared—and then a plane droned over and in his state of mind, Joe wondered if they were to be bombed....The plane circled and dropped down... "Lily!" Joe shouted through the wet grass in his mouth. "Who?" Hillborough demanded.

The plane cut its motor and started to drift down to make a daring landing in the field. Joe watched, remembering poor old impulsive heroic Harley Wilson

who saved his skin when he, Joe, had to bail out of his P-51 “somewhere over Europe”—and terrified, swung down on his parachute, but here came a P-51 making an impossible landing. Canopy pushed back, feckless Harley Wilson shouting at him—great strides, a mighty heave into the tiny cockpit—and Joe Gallagher had been plucked from death, imprisonment...

The Lily bumpily landed and rolled between them and the line of fire. Ceile threw open the cabin door and screamed “Get in! Get in!”

Rising like damp rag dolls, they dashed, rifles and all, to the Little Lily, which was moving before they hurled themselves in.

“God, my warrior queen, what timing,” Joe said. “How the hell did you know--?”

“I didn’t know a damned thing till I saw rifle fire from the woods—I came out looking for you, there’s some bad business at Bryncote—”

“Like what?” Hillborough demanded.

“Percy sent a message that he was leaving—oh, I don’t know what the hell is going on—Adelaide and Sydney begged for me to find you. The Lily seemed the fastest way—was somebody trying to kill you?”

“One crisis at a time,” Joe said.

**

They disembarked at the farmer’s pasture, and Ceile motioned them into the car. She drove them swiftly down the macadam roads to Bryncote, which rose high and mighty in the chilly March twilight. Nobody greeted them, and they hurried to mount the alpine heights of the grand stairway. Adelaide and Sydney were seated together in the gray evening light coming through the diamond shaped panes of the windows. When they arrived, Sydney got up and came toward Joe and Ceile. “This arrived about two hours ago.”

“With your permission,” he asked Adelaide. She nodded, her tearless face looking, Ceile thought, like the Sphinx, which she had seen from the air, back in 1943.

He read it and looked at Sydney. “I don’t believe it,” he said. Ceile, reading it, also shook her head.

Adelaide looked at them all. "My husband is ashamed of me—his foreign and common wife—our baby was not his; I had taken a lover. That he has left me."

Ceile immediately took charge. She called for the maid to help the Viscountess to her room and told the maid to call the local physician. She gave Adelaide two aspirins, telling her they were sedatives. She made Adelaide as comfortable as possible. Joe retreated to the library and started the laid fire.

In the meantime, the three other members of the original shooting party returned, notably merry and full of sausage and bottled ale. They quickly sobered when Joe greeted and told them what had happened. Micklesod and Tree looked shocked; Wickham was sober as he announced "As a barrister, I suggest we all wait and speak to the law when it arrives."

Constable Eugene Marrow arrived within the hour. "Sir, we heard of strange goings-on," said the man. A young man, his military experience was clear as he nearly saluted Joe, after being identified by the maid as "General Gallagher." "You heard right," Joe said. "We will answer your questions as best as I can."

"Where are the others?" was the first.

The question was partially answered when Hillborough came in. The two men quietly answered questions as best as they could, but kept them short. Joe knew that the violence this afternoon was tied to other things. Big things. Major things.

"Who was the pilot who fetched you away?" Marrow then asked.

Joe excused himself, found Ceile and brought her down. "Keep this simple," Joe said. "There is something really rotten going on here." Ceile nodded as they descended. Joe felt a surge of love and pride for his wife and for their union: they were partners.

"Madam—Major," Marrow said, "please tell us why and how you rescued your husband and Mr. Hillborough here." Ceile answered: the Viscountess had received a letter from her husband with shocking news—and asked that she, Ceile, find Joe. "She wished to ask Joe, well, if he knew anything."

"What was this shocking news?"

"That he was leaving her and going far away."

“Did he say why?”

“That she was carrying another man’s child.”

Micklesod, Wickham and Tree raised eyebrows, shuffled their feet, lighted cigarettes, glanced at Gallagher and Hillborough.

Marrow looked at the two men—Joe knew he immediately suspected them both being the lover and the father and that is why they were being shot at by Percy. God, Joe swore to himself, it was as if he had blundered into a radio soap opera. The phone rang distantly. A maid came to the door. “Constable, a call for you, sir.” He looked at the two men with a “May I?” The associate went with him.

They both came back, and the young man had a stern look on his face—but was utterly respectful to Mr. Hillborough. “Sir, we have been asked to return to our place of work,” said Marrow.

“By whom?”

“That will be made clear to us,” the young Constable said. “Sirs,” he said, tried to say something else, thought again, and merely nodded to them, but respectfully.

After they observed the two officers leaving, they both sat down in the library for brandy.

A maid called them to dinner, and they could do nothing but eat it. After they said their good nights, with Hillborough heading back to Hitchin, Joe and Ceile returned to their room and he then quietly told her what he could. “I suppose I will be under investigation for being the baby’s father.”

“Along with many others,” Ceile said. “And I don’t believe—“

“Me neither,” Joe said.

“You told me that you met up with him—and he was so happy—“

“Things can change in three hours, you know that.”

Ceile paused before rushing in, the way she once did. “Oh, Joe—why always...us? I know, this is between Percy and Adelaide, but why, how should this happen when we’re visiting them—“

“I have enemies,” Joe said. “We have enemies.” Joe’s words matched Ceile’s thoughts: was there a connection between this shooting business, Percy disappearing for whatever reason, and Joe being struck by a car, almost killed?

They both felt the weight of secrets and mysteries—theirs and others—bristle between them. “Well, here’s no secret,” Ceile said. “We’ll get through this. I won’t run away this time.”

“You didn’t run away,” Joe protested. “You were under orders.”

“Emotionally, I ran,” she said. “That won’t happen again.” They slept in each other’s arms.

But Joe was unsettled over Hillborough’s last words—would Vorodenko betray his country? Was Vorodenko already in danger?—well, as things went in the USSR, more danger. When Joe dared contacting him a few days later, he learned the Soviet general and his wife had returned to the USSR by way of East Berlin. He waited for a message, and none came.

**

Joe and Ceile returned home on Monday morning, after an uneventful flight to their little airfield and then a taxi home. They came in, still smelling the fresh paint that US maintenance workers had covered their vandalized walls with.

“Tired?” Joe asked Ceile over tea. “Tired enough for what?”

Joe smiled back. “Uh...too tired to take a walk?”

“Where?”

“How about...to the Trimbles?”

“I’ve been thinking about them too,” she said. “Visiting Bryncote brings back a lot of memories.”

They finished their tea, put their coats and galoshes, grabbed their still wet umbrella and strolled out onto the gleaming slate pavements. Joe began whistling “Singing in the Rain,” she Ceile joined in with her own whistle. They descended into the Underground and then climbed out at the station where memory guided them. Their honeymoon, with two days of freedom--they found the shop tucked into its little court and bought the remarkable rings, with their own history of

destiny. Inside, some lights gleamed on the counter and shelves full of all kind of things. They entered, shaking the umbrella and stowing it in a corner for such purposes and looked about. Joe apologetically tapped the brass bell on the counter. The curtain separating the shop from their living quarters whisked open, and a fortyish man came out. "May I assist you?" he asked.

"We're looking for Mr. and Mrs. Toombys," Joe said.

"I'm their son," he said. "Well, stepson to Thomas. Maire was my mother."

"Was?"

"Yes, sir, she passed on suddenly just under two years ago. Dad moved to Thorntonbunk in Cambridgeshire."

"Ah," Joe said, and to please the fortyish man, who seemed a bit impatient, he and Ceile examined the merchandise in the counters, soiled with fingerprints, so unlike the clean gleaming glass of...five years ago. Ceile finally pointed out a locket, and Joe paid for it, thinking that Ceile was not the locket type, exactly...and then he recalled the locket with a strand of Anson's hair. He also recalled that just about two years ago...was the wedding at Bryncote. The Toombys came...and helped spirit away Casimir Posnan. They were both dead. He had been nearly killed, twice.

Sandy: The Distance of Doubt - Los Angeles, Spring

Feeling as though he were barefoot on a greased tightrope, Sandy kept at his studies and stealthily worked with Crusard at the secret lab though the experiments remained quite mundane. To his credit, Crusard was quiet too, and seemingly calmer than he had been in a while. Sandy felt calmer too, after a few weeks, but one evening he realized how tense he still was when he started up the steps to his apartment and a dog's sharp bark practically sent him out of his skin.

He found Aurora reading and correcting typescript as she stirred a stew. "The article on stewardesses," she said to his question. Then, "Sweetie, you're getting absent minded. You left your satchel behind—one of your friends returned it."

"Cripes," he muttered and searched it. The twenty dollar bill he kept stuffed in a side pocket was still there. He was standing there with the bill in his fingers, looking relieved, and she said, "Sandy, you're hanging onto that twenty like it's the only thing that keeps the wolf away from the door—I have to remind you, I make money too."

"Well, a guy likes to think he can support his loved ones. But you really like living here?"

"I love it—because you're here." She kissed him and he responded. "But sweetie, let's eat first," she said. "I'm starving." It was a delicious meal, and they had a hard time getting through the dishes. After they had made love, he lay awake for a while, pondering their future. She had more things on her mind than some perfect little cottage or some big house. She wasn't flighty, not really because her leave taking was for her work—but she did seem to enjoy the freedom to come and go and was never fishing for a marriage proposal...maybe because she knew he was wary of extending one, particularly after the way the last one went. Oh, cut it out Komansky, he thought and fell asleep, anticipating the 3:00 alarm.

As for Aurora, who also lay awake for a while, she was pleased...that her masters advisor had told her he would accept her article on stewardesses for her masters project. It was focused and on-target. It was interesting, well written and best of all, meaningful in telling readers that many stewardesses should be considered heroes of the war, and could do far more than serve coffee and distribute magazines.

But at times she wondered about her discoveries or search for discoveries in Washington. She received a frightening note in the mail in the boarding house she lived in. Leave this alone, said the words.

Her work was published, and two days later, Aurora took a phone call from “Hollywood” about flight nurses. Aurora told the agent to speak with Barbara and he did. She learned later that Barbara told the interested party that Lilian Kinkela was the Army flight nurse who deserved silver screen treatment. She sure as hell didn’t...

There was a new issue on Sandy’s horizon, but it was refreshingly academic. The students in the Aerial Institute had to complete a senior project in a real aircraft plant, not just in the lab. The seniors had to find their own opportunities, not be handed them. Armer told Sandy that Lockheed in El Segundo had just contracted with an airline company in Anchorage to solve a problem involving fuel flow and manifold pressure fluctuation that prevented their cargo carriers flying safely at low temperatures.

He dutifully called Lockheed; drove out and talked to their plant and research supervisor. A few days later he received a phone call: he could undertake the project. Almost immediately, Aurora came in excited—due to the success of her “stewardess story,” she had asked for an assigned feature. “I want to investigate why that other aeronautical plant, that ‘Obregon’ plant hasn’t opened yet.”

“The way I figure it, Obregon has good reasons for not opening the plant.”

“Like what?” This was no friendly response, this was a journalist speaking. “Can you ask? Is there anybody there to talk with? The place couldn’t be completely empty.”

“It is.” He then added, “Nothing’s there. Meaning, it’s not open.”

“Well, let’s go out there anyway...and turn it into a picnic!”

“If I get a substitute at the dairy, I could get a full three hours free on Sunday afternoon...let’s do it.”

Two days later, with a picnic lunch packed, they drove to the beach, and then drove to El Segundo, and turned on the recently renamed “Falcon Lane.”

Sandy turned into the empty parking lot. He was surprised they could get that close; he had been expecting a chain link fence to surround the plant. Aurora got out of the passenger side and surveyed the enormous building—quiet, gray, but handsome. OBREGON appeared on the mighty locked glass entrance doors. The grounds were being maintained. Twin palms flanked enormous front doors that were approached by a swept brick walkway. Beyond were enormous sheet-metal hangars.

Aurora struggled not to probe Sandy further. Her dad had warned her how the reporter instinct could sink into you like the claws of a monster—an ambitious monster...don't let it. Then you only serve yourself, not the true aims of journalism. Her sharp eyes then picked up movement in one of the dark upper windows. "Did you see that?--There—at that top window."

"What did you see?"

"I'm not sure—but they must have a skeleton security force here to protect the plant from vandalism."

"They're probably looking at us." There was a flicker of movement in the low privet hedge bordering the walkway. A small black and white dog peeked at them.

"Oh, you cutie," she called after it. "It must be lost this far away from everything." The dog scooted off—and then stopped and looked at them, its bulging eyes alarmed. "There's potato chips," Sandy said in a low voice. "Get them," she said, and continued to talk to it, in a musical voice. "Come on, baby, come on...not gonna hurt you..." Sandy moved quietly to the car, got a handful of chips. Aurora sweetly, patiently held them out...and the dog took off when Sandy sneezed. They walked after it, turned a corner and found the dog sitting and shaking.

"Come on, lovey," she crooned. Slowly, she came up to the little dog, laid the food down and waited. The dog finally stirred and gobbled it, daintily. Aurora picked up its solid sleek body in her arms. By now, Sandy had gone back to the car and returned, bearing a cup of milk from the Thermos and the dog lapped it, holding its head over Aurora's elbow.

She let it down...and it ran...and they quietly walked after it. They found the little dog sitting on its hip, panting. Sandy looped his belt around its neck and gently led it back to Aurora who petted and crooned over it, and when they finally got back

in the car and drove away, it conked out in her lap. She stroked it all the way home, remarking that it was a Boston bull terrier, and a little girl.

When they got home they were not sure what to do next: were pets allowed? Mrs. Armer came bursting out the front door—“Felicity!” she cried. “Why it is! How did you find her?—she was--”

“Uh, out on the Falcon frontage road in Segundo,” Sandy said, avoiding telling her that it was actually in the parking lot of the Obregon plant.

The way the dog wriggled and kissed her face revealed “Felicity” belonged to her.

“How’d she get all the way out there?” Aurora asked as Mrs. Armer escorted Felicity to the lawn so she could have a good poop. Mrs. Armer used a trowel to scoot her refuse into a patch of roses and said, “We were worried about leaving her alone in the house for several hours—we just got her—and Gene volunteered to take her to Bartonair with him. Well, she got away and he’s out there right now, trying to find her—he was as upset as I was.” She invited them to have a drink, which they accepted, and they sat on the front porch waiting for Gene Armer to get home. They chatted about things in the pleasant spring evening, while Sandy still thought about the dog being in the parking lot. Obregon was close—but over two miles away...long way for a dog to go, but not impossible, he guessed. Didn’t Lassie get all the way home from or to Scotland? Yeah, but that was a movie.

“Thank you both,” Gene Armer said when he got home. He had melted with relief when he beheld Felicity, all wriggling forgiveness in his arms. “I was gonna have to sleep in her house tonight if I didn’t find her.” He hugged the dog.

“Forget it, forget my tears,” said Mrs. Armer. “I’m just glad to have you both back.” She kissed him, and then she kissed the dog on her shiny furrowed forehead. Her ears perked up to form what almost seemed to be a top hat. “I see why they call them ‘the American gentleman’,” Armer said.

Pleased with the outcome of their little adventure, Sandy and Aurora joined the Armers for dinner and then he had to get to the dairy garage for an earlier shift. When Sandy returned Aurora was reading, and he also pulled out a book for some review. They both sat up in bed together and he felt they were already a married couple. He said, “You know, you sure looked sweet with that dog in your arms.”

“I love dogs...what about you?”

Memories of that enormous lovely St. Bernard who had befriended him on a farm he lived on for a few weeks when he was nine or ten came to mind. Also, the barking dog near Wiesbaden... “They’re nice.”

After a few moments, she said, “You thinking about babies?”

“Yeah...but not ours.”

“What?”

“If we got married tomorrow I wouldn’t be demanding a baby. I’ve got to finish things, get settled.”

“Well, I’ve been awarded my Master’s, that’s a kind of settling—and a lot of ex-GIs and their brides are having babies well before things are settled.”

“Hm?”

“I’m tired,” she said, kissed him and snuggled down amidst the blankets and sheets. “Coward,” she thought to herself but knowing that something should be decided soon. And she would have to make the decision, she thought. But she made the first decision already, back in 1947, when she had rushed across the campus in the wake of the wind tunnel explosion, saw Sandy and wanted him. She then recalled that when she first saw him in the midst of the chaos, he was being semi-carried out of the mess, a cloth over his face, and then kind of dumped on the grass by two guys—dressed in black; it was an odd sight to see anybody dressed in black in Southern California. They saw her seeing them.

Abandoned, he had thrown up and was coughing when she came up to him and held his hand until more help came. He did, though days later, when she sought him out for an interview, which he warily gave her—he did not remember her. Not even her hand. The next fall he was alone when she came knocking and asking him for a date, and he accepted. The young woman he was dating—and whose picture was still lurking about then seemed to disappear, and one evening, he asked if she would like to spend the night...? Oh yes, she did. They had breakfast together, a good sign. When she really got down to it—did she love him for him or was it the mystery, that fragrance of danger that lurked about him?

And here they were, dangling. Why didn't he say something, make the decision? But, did she want him to? Of course she did. But how about she "saying something?" Oh, lord, she thought. But one thing she didn't question...the warmth of the little dog in her arms. Something to love and cherish and protect. Even Sandy took Felicity in his lap and stroked her when they sat on the porch; the clownish little face panted and then turned around and licked him smack on the face and after he grunted, he smiled.

But... what was that dog doing two miles away from Bartonair?

**

"Still want to work on that Alaskan problem at Lockheed?" Crusard asked when Sandy came to their lab at the usual idiotic hour.

"Of course—why?"

"Bartonair has it now. We, uh, made a better offer-- Alaska Air Cargo accepted it."

"Oh."

"Walkert would be your supervisor." Crusard's voice invited a response.

He got one. "Oh, crap."

"You impressed him recently. He actually requested to be your supervisor."

"How?—I mean, how did I impress him?"

"You detected that measurement problem in an aileron for a swept wing craft—the original person whether in ignorance, or weariness, had measured in metrics, but reported it in inches. You pointed it out and bingo, things were solved."

"It wasn't that much—"

"But enough. I'll watch out for you. I mean—at any time—you ask."

"Ask for what?" Sandy asked.

"You'll know, I will bet. And another thing...you need to learn to fly."

"Flying lessons cost money."

"Ask around the campus. You could probably get a good deal."

Joe and Ceile: Firm in Uncertainty - London, Spring

Two weeks after the sad events at Bryncote, Brigadier General Joseph Gallagher, in immaculate Air Force Dress As, was officially announced and ushered into the office of General Eoghain St. John Keighley. He was as handsome and leonine as ever, but worry rode on his elegant forehead as he met Joe, coming around the desk. He had tea ready, and he lifted the cozy off the kettle. "Tea helps everything," Joe remarked. He needed to get his words said, questions asked, but at least they did not concern Vorodenko. Joe then asked...was this conversation critical enough not to go over the phone lines? Eoghain nodded, and mentioned the room had been swept for bugs. "First, the news in review, No sign of the Viscount on these or on foreign shores."

"Is Percy...suspected of anything?"

He took up a paper on his desk and read it out to Joe. Found had been a hunting rifle registered to Viscount Percy Vivyan in the copse of trees that shell fire had burst from. Fingerprints on the rifle...yes, Vivyan's. "Of course it all seems to look as though he were shooting at a man suspected of being the baby's father. But finding the rifle abandoned would make a three year old uneasy. Too neat."

"Neat or not, is this going to the crown?" Joe asked.

"Not likely. MI-6 will see to that."

"Are Percy and Hillborough allied—meaning, I know that Percy worked with MI-6 with that Posnan business, back in 1946."

"Yes, but Hillborough was not involved with that."

"So—who is considered the target of the shooting?—whether the shooter was Percy or not."

"You both are. Based on recent history you seem the more likely target. Though an MI-6 man is often likened to a secret agent, they spend most of their time studying intelligence reports from field operatives—although that doesn't preclude assassination attempts."

Joe bravely walked into the weeds to start hacking them down. "I have a few things to say—mainly in defense of Percy. I ran into him unexpectedly at the

barrows on his property. He was curious if perhaps it was another Sutton Hoo, and since I had time and the desire, I walked out there and—happened to run into him. He was waiting to meet a professor from Cambridge who was interested in conducting a dig—he was late, so Percy said he probably was lost or not coming. We talked. He had just learned about the baby—he and his wife were going to announce the happy event at dinner. He was excited—and a man that happy could not be suspecting his wife of unfaithfulness.”

“Have you told this to anybody?”

“There’s more. Percy said that he wanted to tell me something. For some reason, he put it off until we would be on the shoot.”

“Something? Any hints?”

“Nothing. And I haven’t told this to anybody. And that includes my wife.”

“Keep that state of affairs.”

“What do you do with I have told you?”

“Pass it on but only to certain ears.”

“Okay, elephant in the room time. I told you things. Has there been a connection made between this and me being almost turned into a grease spot in January?”

“Not officially.”

“One more question: do you trust this Hillborough?”

Eoghain smiled. “Yes, though I can’t say I care for him particularly either...despite his charm. He drinks too much but seems to deal with it. His wife seems a strange one too. Has been hospitalized for a variety of ills. What’s your take on him?”

“Two sided. He seems to damn capitalism and plans to send his son to Harrow.”

“That sounds like Kim. He’s his own man. He’s a good operative though. He made outstanding connections with your CIA in Washington, and united two services that are being called to new heights of duty in these chilly times.”

That didn’t satisfy Joe...and he remained unsatisfied. Though not fully buying into it, he did believe what people had told him—he had a good sense about people. Didn’t always read them correctly, but he understood how certain pilots had

more in them than they thought; that a hero could be little more than a lucky son of a bitch; that a superior officer who had fucked up and tried to fuck others up could be truly repentant and deserved a drink that he, Joe, happily bought him. He refused to idolize Savage who didn't want it. He had drawn a perfect bead on Sandy when just about everybody else was ready to write him off or string him up.

Was he right about Hillborough or did he just take a dislike to the man's drawling attitude? Well, it didn't matter. Percy Vivyan's disappearance did. But would further probing would reveal Vivyan as a traitor?—who disappeared into Russia? No, and no, Joe thought, scolding himself for thinking such thoughts but in these days, how could they be avoided? And the man could be dead, like three others.

After more talk, he and Eoghain shook hands, wished each other well, and parted company.

**

Despite invitations for better accommodations, including one in no less than Mayfair, Joe had clung to "their" flat during that terrible period of separation and clung to it harder now that it was full of love again, as well as the paint that still smelled a bit. Ceile's voice floated from the bedroom—"Coffee's perked so have some—but we have only an hour to make our train." They had decided, on the basis of a flyer that Ceile had picked up, to make a quick trip to Cornwall, to see Tintagel. Their recent pleasure jaunt to Bryncote had been anything but, so they justified this three day trip as needed.

"We'll make it," Joe said, coming in and grabbing his wife as she packed his B-4 bag. She laughed and shook with delight and turned around and kissed him, brushing his cheek still polished from his most recent shave. "Yes," she whispered, "we'll make it."

They almost missed the train because packing gave way to love-making. Eschewing baths, they sponged each other clean, tousled themselves with towels, jumped into their clothing, grabbed their luggage and hand in hand trotted down the slate sidewalks until a taxi caught their summons and hastened the couple to Paddington Station. When they settled into their seats of the Great Western railway coach, one hour out of the sack and perfectly sober, they held hands as

passengers came and went, babies cried; a tea cart dispensed beverages and sandwiches; kids grew bored and complained, and on the wheels clicked diddly bump diddly bump diddly bump, and they dozed against each other.

Ceile woke up first, and checked on their progress. Two more hours until the train reached Penzance. They would find a hotel...perhaps light a fire...the brandy was waiting.

Joe was still sleeping, and she was glad; his life was hard and tense, and the events at Bryncote were just one more...thing. He deserved to go home, grow a beard and wear loafers and teach as he once wistfully spoke about, but Joe Gallagher had so many irons in the fire, and these irons were important – critical—in these critical days. Tears welled up in her eyes as she recalled how she had once fled Joe, sick and angry—and stupid—but she could not deny her pain with herself was so sharp that it was best she had left to gain a breath, decide who she was and what she wanted. Her time in Texas had helped her to cook—and to enjoy it! Her time in Australia had filled her mind and heart with wild vistas, the vast ocean, the incredible courage of the nurses she met. The distance between her and the man she fancied she had disappointed by losing their child had only intensified her desire for him—and a desire to be with him matched with a desire to be rid of him-- Joe possibly dying, possibly dead, chased every doubt over him and her away.

“We’re here?” Joe said as he came out of a doze. The train rolled slowly into the station at Penzance. “Present and accounted for,” she whispered to him. They clambered down onto the platform and filled their lungs with the wet cold air, so clean from London’s smoke and haze. They found a hotel, an old terminal monster, with rooms high and cold, but the fireplace had coal and they curled up in front of the small fire. Ceile dozed off. He prevented himself from sweeping her lovely thick hair from her face. Let her sleep. He knew of her restlessness at night. Her over-eager desire to please. Her jumpiness.

**

“Why Tintagel, my queen?” Joe asked as they stood among the amazing ruins the next morning.

They had taken one of the town's few taxis to a huddle of cottages around the cliffed-in entrance, and chose a door and knocked on it to ask for a guide. A woman with a flowered apron, white with flour, answered the door, and they had a cup of tea while she completed her baking, set her oldest girl to watch her bread and cakes in the woodburning stove, and then, stout in wellies and a raincoat, led them herself into the deeply carved headlands where fragmented eroded walls sloped down into a saddle between the two massive spurs. Their guide, a Margareta Pelsquith, was a well of information. It was the medieval historian Geoffrey of Monmouth who first associated Tintagel with the legend of King Arthur. In his account, King Uther Pendragon comes to Queen Igraine of Cornwall in the guise of her husband, and Arthur is conceived in the seaside fortress.

However, she said, the castle remains were probably built by the Norman Richard, Earl of Cornwall, in the early 13th century. Joe and Ceile didn't care as they viewed the ruins on both sides of the rugged chasm that almost separated the 'island' from the mainland. Some walkways carried them down the natural and man-made drama of the location, cliffs and crashing waves. "Not to disappoint you two dearies if I ruined stories about Arthur...but I recently heard there are ruins beneath these stones, and one stone found in one had 'Artos' on it."

That fascinated them both...and after hearing and walking around more, they walked off together, while Mrs. Pelsquith thoughtfully waited.

"Remember Stonehenge?" Ceile said, sadly.

"Yes...That seemed the end of things."

"Well...I want to...make a new beginning of things...here, at this place...not fully understood but full of stories and...Arthur...my dear king." She spoke the last three words to him. They went into each other's arms and stayed that way while the ocean winds whipped their trench coats.

Joe's hands rested on Ceile's head, resting on his left shoulder. He stood, his eyes closed, joyful but sad as he knew on this spot all was well, but miles away, even an inch away, circled the world, circled the winds that bedeviled them, tearing them apart, yet pulling them back together again.

“Joe,” she whispered. “I want to adopt a child.” He shut his eyes with joy...but the tearing winds forced them open...to rain, as gray clouds scudded in, fresh from the Atlantic.

“Any month with an R in it,” their guide said, hastening up to them. “And R means rain!” They scurried up the steps and onto the cliffs pouring off into the declivities with the Atlantic surging below, and they found a welcomed shelter. More rainproof than the Americans, Mrs. Pelsquith left them, telling them to follow the marked trail and “come in for another cup of tea,” she said.

The storm poured around them. “We talked of adoption...and you hated it.”

“Because I was a noisy miserable bitch,” she said. “And completely self-centered—and just horribly disappointed and so full of self pity I couldn’t climb out of it.”

“Yes...to some of it,” Joe said. “Ceile, that was a bad time, and...I should not have brought up adoption.”

“Now I’m bringing it up. And...this has to do with being at Bryncote. Adelaide and Sydney—with their surprise and grief, I volunteered to help with the children—Frankie and his friend... and could have adopted them both.”

“Well, Frankie still has a mother...”

“Oh, but there are so many more...I once thought that if I adopted it had to be a baby, but that doesn’t matter now. I want a child that we can raise, whether from the first breath or millions of breaths later...perhaps Frankie.”

“Oh God, Ceile, that’s so wonderful...” They held on to each other until Ceile, who knew every sinew, every nerve in his body, pulled away... “There’s a problem,” she said.

“Ceile, you know the things I’m involved in. Big stuff, bad stuff that I can’t walk away from.”

She said firmly, “I could resign. Go back to the States and, and, adopt there—”

“Oh, God, no, no...” Joe was suddenly on his knees to her. He gathered her hands and his gray-hazel eyes had never before penetrated so deeply into hers. “Ceile,

you can't leave me—I nearly went nuts—the worst year of my life, I missed you so much. We're wearing our rings again. No, please, please stay with me."

She gathered Joe's head to her bosom as though it were a child. They rocked together, sighing and finally, needing a breath, she pulled away. "Impasse," she said, lightly.

"Oh yeah, oh...yeah."

"Well, I agree to stay with you then. Of course I'll stay."

"Thank you."

"With some conditions."

He got up and sat beside her. "What are they?"

"No condoms—but no thermometers, or books, or calendars. If I get pregnant, then I do. But I will then resign, and return to the States to have our child."

"Agreed," Joe whispered. They linked pinkies, but then linked hands, and then hugged each other, internalizing their vows, and hoping for the best.

That night, they pursued pregnancy, but without fear, or alarm. They would give themselves up to nature, and would let nature take her way now that they were contemplating adoption.

Harvey: Put Me to the Test - Archbury, Spring

Though Alyce Siddons had not bothered him for some time, Harvey finally phoned Constable Warner Whitcomb about her. They joined up, at Whitcomb's request, at the Cup and Vine one Saturday afternoon. Harvey was glad to see the place was doing well as it had expanded into a dining room, and the deserted upper rooms were being prepared for wedding receptions and banquets; he heard knocks and bangs of carpenters working away. Elspeth Trethels, after delivering her baby, and deciding to keep the little girl, had taken over management of the place—which would be a bit like the Count of Monte Cristo returning to his cell, Harvey thought. He caught a glimpse of her as she passed from the kitchen to the dining room. Older by a couple of years, and quite happily unmarried, she had recovered from her love affair with Blake. Now she looked rushed but happy. To Harvey's inquiries, her toddler, Iris Dale, was healthy and happy and nominally considered the child of Elspeth's late, unlamented husband. Good for them, Harvey thought, recalling the young, exploited teenager back in July of 1945 when her husband had chained her to a bed and would up dead himself. A rogue's gallery unreeled in his head...Troper, Toby Dormander, Drovnik--

Elspeth saw and came to him, shaking his hand and then hugging "My Roy Rogers." They invited her to sit for a moment and she did, letting on that she had bought millworker's housing, next to the abandoned cotton mill at the end of the high street. She planned turning them into rentals; she read that civilians were returning to England as travelers. She was also planning on moving a half-ruined Tudor half-timber building two miles from her pub, not lived in for twenty years, lock stock and barrel on to the pub's adjoining grounds—for a hotel. "Well, my best wishes," he told her, delighted at her initiative. "You must be busy."

"Yes, and I hired the most perfect woman for the kitchen and to help with the housekeeping—like me, she doesn't give a snap for marriage." Harvey smiled at the remark and wonder how much she had been in love with Adam Blake. Blake, it was reported was crazy in love with her, but maybe she had looked at the American captain as means of escape, or for some fun in her deadly dull world. Maybe.

After Elspeth withdrew, Harvey and Whitcomb sat in the inglenook and sipped on bitters. Whitcomb withdrew a folder from his overcoat and opened it. "Siddons

has a checkered past. She was discharged from the RAF in 1944 for dereliction of duty. She came to Archbury, to be with a lover of sorts, a Colonel Troper, or a Major Troper—his rank shifted—he had been assigned to the 918th. She left for a while, no date, and came back, married to this chap who manages her so-called business career.”

“Ah,” Harvey said. The chief rogue, Troper, now in Leavenworth in the States, serving a life sentence for murder—for Elspeth Trethels’ husband. He recalled how Joe had clashed—putting it mildly—with Lt. Colonel Troper, Commander of the 511th Fighter Squadron, attached to the 918th back in 1943. Stripped of his command, he was demoted to Major after some other crap he had pulled, and seemed to deal with it, although the antidote turned out to be money.

Whitcomb continued: Despite her profession, Alyce Siddons had not exactly been a troublemaker—and again he wondered why she and her husband had created the fracas they did. “Didn’t do them one jot of good,” Whitcomb said. “The husband was making some pretty tidy money selling the petrol that he extorted from the chaps at the base. If he had just given up on Willamette, he would have assured his weekly cache of fuel from others. Course, Simmons at times seems some kind of proper Charlie, I’ll tell you that. But maybe...he’s smarter than he seems. I wonder if he’s a bit like a music-hall magician—saw one once; called a chap up to the stage and while he kept him and the audience distracted, picked the man’s pocket and removed his belt for a finale. The fuel stealing, putting the missus up in court might all be part of it. But I still don’t think he lights any bulbs.”

“What pocket might he be picking?” Harvey wondered.

“That might come out in the wash...And now, sir,” Whitcomb said instead, “what can you tell me about that woman, that, uh, Erika Bridgestone?”

Harvey’s expression said it all: Now what?

Whitcomb took some time lighting a Woodbine cigarette. “The lady’s been in the local area a good deal for the last few weeks and seems to be ‘digging up dirt’—or attempting to about General Gallagher.”

“Dirt?” Harvey asked with a shade of amusement. After Joe took command of the 918th in early 1943 he had been too damned busy to get into trouble—except

with the brass with whom he fearlessly tangled more than once--though Harvey knew a committed journalist could turn anything into trash.

“Does the name May Hudson ring a bell with you?”

“Ah... yes.” Harvey recalled the woman’s name; his memory was one of the reasons he had excelled as an adjutant. He briefly related what he knew, ending with “I understand that General Savage—the former CO of the 918th ‘exposed her’ to the somewhat credulous Gen--Col--*Major* Gallagher at the time. Did Bridgestone contact her?”

“Quite impossible. The woman Hudson was found dead last December. Our coroner ruled it a suicide—hung herself in the back of her tobacco shop—she was pregnant—or had been. She had a badly botched abortion and well, certain neighbors described her as depressed. Miss Bridgestone asked about re-opening the case, stating that the General had been in this area at the time of her death.”

He stopped when a laughing “Huh!” came out of Harvey’s mouth. Whitcomb threw his cigarette into the fire. “My reaction as well to the lady’s request and to her ideas...but clearly, she is attempting to smear the General. And I take that personally--when that B-17 crashed back in 1944, and killed two of our citizens, Gallagher didn’t try to ignore it as a mistake of war. He let it be known that it was terrible thing and made sure we knew the truth about it. I don’t know if you learned there was a special mention made of the Colonel at St. Barnabas after he was injured and had to be sent home.”

Harvey recalled the sad business he spoke about—a psychologically mangled young man, a Wally Bolen had lost control of a training flight and errors had killed two Archbury citizens and exposed his traumas in a German POW camp. He recalled Joe declaring that the investigation he insisted on was “for the people or Archbury. Eventually, they’ll want answers and I want them for them.”

After another half hour, they shook hands goodbye, and on his way out, Elspeth Trethels emerged through the kitchen’s swinging door. “And you and your lady must come to supper—the woman I hired to help me with housekeeping, and she can cook almost anything!”

Harvey, on his way home, stopped in Archbury to pick up a loaf of bread and managed to secure a few eggs and miraculously a quarter pound of butter.

Carrying his purchases in a string shopping bag he had learned to carry with him in case a chance to purchase food came up Harvey walked out the door and found, in the enclosed entryway, Alyce Siddons.

“Mam,” he said and started to leave when her surprisingly strong arm held onto him, and her lips brushed his ear for no reason. When he jerked away, he thought he saw the flash of an elbow disappearing. “Colonel,” she practically purred and then swung out and down the wet icy street. Harvey then did what Whitcomb suggested he do: contact him about the lady’s actions.

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Harvey and Guy Adsley were assigned a new case: defending a Negro USAF corporal accused of dereliction of duty, at a USAF radar station attached to Northolt. His duty: a four hour shift guarding the radar room. He had left his post, and, eight hours later arrived at the gate to the facility. There had been no incident in his absence, but the facility was always at top speed as it monitored aircraft crossing the channel—which could be unfriendly, to say the least. In the heightened feelings of postwar tensions, a radar facility could be taken over, and aircraft with unfriendly intentions could be allowed in for mischief.

They met the corporal at the stockade at Northolt. Corporal Brian Shelton, was quiet, unassuming and admitted openly he had been derelict, which was not a capital crime, at least. He did not seem frightened, rather resigned—but struck Harvey as holding his cards close to his chest, much like Willamette, who had had a far more fearsome charge to contend with than dereliction of duty.

“You have an excellent record,” Harvey said.

“I hope that be taken into consideration, sir,” he said. He then fished for his handkerchief and blew into it—Harvey saw a bright red blot on the cotton square.

“Are you all right?”

“Just a nosebleed. But never had ‘em before.”

“I understand. Court martials aren’t joyful things.”

“No, sir.”

Adsley, who had been quiet, suddenly asked, “What are you hiding?”

Shelton flinched, ever so slightly. “Not a thing, sir.”

Old strategy: One lawyer attacked the client’s calm, upending him so that the other lawyer could move in and get the client to talk, by being sympathetic. And there was a lot to talk about; nobody had addressed certain anomalies in the case.

“Corporal,” Harvey said kindly, “whatever you are hiding...will come out. Please tell us.”

“Yeah, I’m hiding, because nobody’d believe me.”

“We might,” Adsley said, “and might not.”

Shelton looked into the faces of the two white officers. “I was standing duty. Guarding the inside door to the radar room But then...I saw—through this high window---all these lights in the sky.”

“Lights?” Adsley’s voice was somehow both neutral yet amused.

“Sir, I don’t know. Or I don’t understand. I glanced out the window on my right. It’s not a big window sir, and pretty high up, but there I saw, sir...” Sweat broke out on his forehead, despite the chill of the room. “I saw things I could not explain. I mean, sir, I gave those crafts a good looking at, and I couldn’t make sense of them. Left my post, sir—to get a better look. I opened the door to look out. That’s when my memory gets... real...bad.”

“When did your memory return?”

“When I came to...I was on soakin’ wet grass, at least a mile away. Grovesnor’s Common—kinda of a local lover’s lane. I—got--to my feet and started walking, and found the road and came back to the radar station. Reported in at the gate.”

“Eight hours later,” Adsley reminded him.

“Man—sir--I never sleep more than seven hours, even when I’m tired.” Under questioning, he described how he felt both drunk and incredibly alert—he walked directly back to where he belonged. He couldn’t do anything else. “My Pa told me, soldiers don’t desert. He served in France. One of the Harlem Hellfighters.”

“Who?” Adsley asked. Stovall saw two things: Shelton was both irritated and quiet about Adsley not recognizing one of the most feared and fearsome fighting units

of the AEF; and that Adsley was not being rude, he just did not recognize the name. Harvey did, but only after he had commenced studying the history of the Negro soldier in the American armies. He had checked out a book from the local library, titled "The American Army in France, 1917-18." The kindly British author saw fit to include the Negro soldier as well, which an American author might not have.

"After being taken into custody, were you asked how you got out in the first place?" Harvey asked.

"Well, no sir."

"Or why you left?"

"No sir."

Adsley prepared to say something, then looked at Harvey, and then away. "It's true," he said, out loud. Clearing his throat, he asked, "So, corporal, tell us—what do you think happened to you?"

"I don't recall a thing. I must have been hurt. I asked to use the latrine. Hurt a lot when I made water. Thought I smelled some blood in it...then I realized I had blood comin' from my right ear."

"Corporal, did you see a doctor?"

"I asked for one. Never saw one."

"Are you all right?"

"Yes sir. I never saw blood again except from my nose. Got some ringing in my left ear still."

"We'll get you a doctor," Stovall said.

"Thank you sir."

Adsley then spoke. "The radar facility reported no such strange activity."

"Well," said the young man, "if they say so...but..."

"Yes?"

"I saw those lights, sir." His voice was steady as was his gaze.

“Can you describe them?”

“They were steady but they darted around, in ways I’ve never seen planes do. And I’m beginning to feel that—they were calling to me.”

“Explain that.”

“I can’t sir. I just can’t. I wish I could.” This was no copping a plea.

After another hour of serious questions and good if surprising answers, Harvey and Guy took their leave, into the cold wet afternoon. Their feet crunching on the gravel walk was the only sound as they gained their Jeep, and Adsley turned the motor over while Harvey pulled his muffler around his throat and latched up his trench coat. “Guy?” Harvey then said. He had encouraged the younger man to call him Harvey but so far had not taken up the offer.

Adsley pulled on his gloves, and then wheeled them out. On the road, with water tailing from their Jeep’s wheels, he spoke. “I believe him, Colonel. I saw something of what he was speaking about, once.”

“Like what?”

“Something that flew well over my head once, one Saturday morning when I was walking my dog in the park—in Greenwood, outside Indianapolis. It didn’t dart about, and have bright lights, and it didn’t grab me and put me down somewhere but I sure as hell saw something I couldn’t understand.” He drove further before adding, “It disappeared just like that...Have you ever seen anything like...that?”

“No, but associates of mine saw things—so-called foo fighters.”

Some 918th pilots confessed to seeing orbs of intense light that were just there—sometimes darting about like a firefly; sometimes keeping pace with the planes. Gallagher requested they write up reports and then told Harvey to sit on them—and they were finally forwarded to Washington through Stovall, at Wing’s request, made and kept copies which came in handy when it was claimed the original reports were lost—possibly destroyed. “Some theories claimed they were some kind of crazy flak that the German had created; it had magnetic qualities that clung to the planes. Obviously useless, maybe a misfire that the Nazi high command bought into out of desperation-- because these orbs of light never did anything except puzzle the hell out of those who saw them.”

Adsley spoke, a little carelessly. “Well, what I saw...was no glob of light. It was saucer-shaped, kind of like those things other people are seeing from Washington state to Argentina—and New Mexico thrown in. I read about a place called Roswell that reported a crash of a saucer...”

A downpour interrupted their conversation; Adsley concentrated on driving through torrents of rain. “Man, when I get back home, I’m movin’ to Arizona,” he said, his teeth chattering. He finally pulled off the road and they sat there, listening to the rain smash down on the oiled canvas roof of the Jeep. Adsley folded his arms, and then spoke again, but about the issue really at hand. “Christ, it’s true. Nobody bothered to check out anything—like how the hell that corporal got off base in the first place. Testimony that a guy saw him at his post, where he should be, ignored. Not seeing a doctor. Man, I knew the black people in the States never got a good deal, and I didn’t like it, but this gets me.” The cloudburst ended. “So where do we begin? I’d like to talk to the guy in charge of that radar station. Or maybe the people who were looking at the screens. Were they keeping their mouths shut?”

“Let’s get more evidence first before we ask some difficult questions. And then ask them carefully.”

In the damp Jeep, they brainstormed. Then followed a busy week framed by late dawns and early evenings. While reviewing the backlog of cases and appeals, they phoned and phoned and phoned. The calls asked permission to speak with British radar crews stationed at Abbots Bromley in Staffordshire, Abbots Ripton in Huntingdonshire, Abbotsinch in Renfrewshire in Scotland, and Aberporth in Wales. Abindondon in Oxfordshire, and Abacaster in West Riding. “Why do all these places start with ‘Ab’,” Adsley wondered.

All the people they spoke with were polite—but negative. Harvey banged down the phone with some frustration. “Dammit, I know they’re lying—at least some of them.”

“How do you know that?” Adsley asked, pouring hot water into strainer full of overstrained tea leaves.

“No evidence,” Harvey admitted. “And let’s say they were withholding stories.”

Phone calls, some grudging voices, British, Welsh, and American, finally permitted the JAG personnel to talk with a Lt. Hugh Griffith, at an RAF radar site in Cardigan, in Wales.

Securing orders, Lt. Adsley and Lt. Col. Stovall drove to Wales, all the way to the southwestern coast, and the road in places edged on the surging, frothing, pulling sheet of the gray Atlantic. About two thousand miles, more or less to the west, Harvey thought, was Montauk Point, Long Island...from here, a long stone's throw from home. But at the moment, Wales was serving up Harvey's interest in history and legend. They took a direct route to Cardigan, then inland about six miles north from the radar facility. The RAF facility was far from town, down a lane that they missed twice before finding the twin gravel ruts leading them to a small huddle of buildings.

A RAF distaffer met them and escorted them down hallways before leaving them, with cups of tea, in an incredibly cold room. A single window gave onto a small valley which terminated in the soaring chain of hills. The beauty seem to mellow Adsley. "Kind of makes me want to mount some charger hung with cloth of gold, ride into some strange forest, and seek out Chapel Perilous."

"You read grail legends?"

"Yeah... the landscape sure gets you to thinking about knights—you know, the knights that sought the grail—and each one rode alone into a forest. I had a professor once in a literature class who in his lecture made a point that stuck with me. The knights never followed a path into the forest. They just rode in at some point and created their own path."

"Yes?" Harvey said after a long moment of silence.

"Well, when confronted with difficult situations I recall how those knights would enter the forest not by a path or passing through a gate. They made their own entrance where it seemed right."

Where it seemed right. Harvey remembered that phrase which became more important to him as his life unrolled for several decades into the future.

Griffiths opened the door and snapped a salute. "Sirs, reporting for...questioning."

Stovall returned it. "Not to mince words, Lieutenant, I got the distinct impression that you saw something on the radar screen on 13 March 1948."

"Aye sir."

"You don't mind talking about it?"

"In that my commanding officer is willing to ignore the fact that I am talking with you." He removed his cap, revealing his typically Welsh face, with eyes set back under folds of skin. At first, both men had a hard time dealing with his Welsh accent, and he spoke more slowly. "The night of April 18 I was watching the screens. Just had a good cup of coffee, and was wide awake. At 9:47 pm I then saw a series of blips on the screen that I could not explain, because they moved too fast for aircraft. They came from the northeast. As well as fast, they were erratic, and moving from side to side. They continued southwest."

Harvey scribbled notes. "We need your testimony that you saw these things."

"You'll have it sir." Harvey arranged for his deposition to be taken. After this was completed, the three men met at Griffith's invitation at a local pub, after he finished his duty shift. They drank a local brew, "Grail Ale," which was a sweet light gold but had the kick of an angry mule. Adsley reacted quickly to the drink and grinned, "Well, no more searching for the grail, huh? We found it! Right here in the glass!"

"Maybe that's what the grail was all along, a strong drink," Griffiths said. He was unaffected by the stuff but was smiling genially at the two American officers who were struggling with their ale.

"So, do you think that the grail's in...Wales?"

"Oh, I don't believe in that rot."

"Even after what you saw?"

"Medieval legends can't compete with lights in the sky. Not those sorts of lights." The ale was affecting him because he said, lowly, almost inaudibly, "I was with a glider crew during the war and I saw lights too—couldn't explain them. You Yanks call them 'foo fighters.'"

He and Adsley were driving back the next morning, the cold air seemingly warmer than the rooms in Cardigan they had occupied the night before. As Adsley drove, Harvey read over the report, done in long hand. As they drove along, Adsley said, "It occurred to me that we need to ask the locals around Shelton's radar station if they saw anything."

"Farmers go to bed early," Harvey said, recalling his family's life and work. "According to Shelton, there were no sounds involved, like thunder, to wake anybody up."

"I think we need to check."

"How?"

"Let's check with the Vicar of All Saints Bakewell—that's the parish in the area and right on the line if those lights were moving in a southwestern direction from the northeast. Up on a hill, too. If the vicar doesn't know what's going on, he's not up to his collar."

Harvey glanced at the young man, impressed. "You're good."

"Grew up reading Perry Mason. That would be something he would do."

"What was your favorite?"

"The 'Case of the Howling Dog.'"

"Me, 'The Case of the Sleepwalker's Niece.' There was one with a locked room murder mystery too—"

"That was brilliant! I can't remember the title either but I liked that one too. Don't think I could solve it though—course, Erle Stanley Gardner could figure it all out." They continued reminiscing about Perry Mason plots through lunch at a roadside pub, and then hit the road to get back to Archbury by nightfall.

Stovall and Adsley tended to routine matters the next day and then in the afternoon, got a Jeep and drove to Grovesnor's Common, near White Hill. Consulting a map, Adsley drove them as straight as he could over roads that ran like gray ribbons over a range of hill called the "hog's back." They then saw, in the vale below, the steeple of All Saints, tall, gray and imperturbable. "Man, I guess there were always be an England," said Guy Adsley. He wheeled into the

minuscule car park, which indicated most of the worshippers came on foot from the tidy cottages and bungalows nearby. The parish church, built of two different kinds of stone, presented a solid façade of mullioned windows flanking the massive entryway, all crowned by the spire.

“Have a care there!” shouted a voice when they braked to a sudden stop at a fence protecting a vegetable garden. A relatively young and very tall man rose up from the dark soil, trowel in hand. Blond as a Viking, he was about as imposing. He had on an ancient sweater and wellies encased his large feet.

“Sir?” said Harvey, climbing out. “Can you guide us to the Vicar?”

“I am the Vicar, Morton Brickstaff—what’s the story, Yank?” In the RAF as a chaplain, he had done liaison work between the two allied but competitive air forces more than once. Harvey later described him as gruff—but affable.

They introduced themselves, their work, their objectives...and were rewarded with the no-nonsense Vicar Brickstaff motioning them into his office, which they entered from an outside door. His housekeeper was rung for, tea requested. Her delivery of the flowered china set briefly interrupted a serious conversation between the three men. Brickstaff reminded Harvey of a spiritual movement in the twenties that declared that Christ was no soft namby-bamby as he was frequently pictured on gas company calendars—he was as tough as the desert he survived forty days in.

Soon the two JAG lawyers hit paydirt. “You saw those lights as well?”

In answer Brickstaff drew out a leather bound journal, opened it up to that date, and read, “At 6:43 am heard some noise I did not recognized and observed four crescent shaped flying objects from my bedroom’s western window. The objects circled the area. Objects could move from side to side. Suddenly, they left, in a southwestern direction. Vanished as though never there.” He paused and said, “Shall I keep on reading?”

“Of course.”

“Two of the parishioners, who asked not to be named, also saw those things.”

“Did you call the authorities?”

“No...but told myself I would if I ever saw them again, or any of my people did. So, this young man of yours, not only saw these objects...but was abducted by them?”

“Well, he has no memory of how he ended up a couple of miles away.”

“Hm. Is he well?—no after effects?”

“Well, he was bleeding from the nose and ears we understand, but was well when we spoke to him. What is your point?”

Brickstaff rose and motioned them to follow him. They walked down corridors to the nave of the church, and then were ushered through a door which the Vicar unlocked. He snapped a match and lighted a kerosene lamp in a sconce, then lifted the lamp out and carried it with him. Thrilled with this bit of adventure, the two men followed him down a flight of steps into a chamber paved with tiles, two walls covered with built in but empty bookcases, and frescoes on the third wall. Brickstaff led them over to the paintings, rendered in medieval style of flat figures on emblematic backgrounds. There were scenes from the Bible, both Old and New Testament. There were some saints.

There was also, in a low spot, in a corner, an image of a man on his knees, hands clasped in prayer—seeming in deference to a small figure dressed in a gray robe, seated on a chair or throne that looked oddly like Stonehenge. The man in the gray robe leaned forward, his hand extended upward. He had a face like a cat, Harvey thought, but also knew he was seeing old frescoes, and in bad light. Brickstaff saw his interest and said “When reading over the parish records—some as old as the 11th century—I found a story of a peasant in the area who swore he was kidnapped by a star—at least he described it as bright and flaming—and that ‘he blede from eares.’ Those the priest spoke to at the time claimed the peasant could speak in tongues, which did not last. That was the end of that story. Well, what do you think Colonel?”

Harvey, after a moment said, “The chap in the gray—doesn’t look quite human.”

“No. Well, shall we get out of this refrigerator?” They hurried upstairs to the nave, much warmer in contrast. Brickstaff took them back to his office. He answered a telephone call, made another and then devoted himself to his visitors. “I majored in archaeology before the war. Wanted to go to Egypt. Though I decided to take

up the cloth, I didn't lose interest in digging up the past, and I found Bakewell very interesting..."

"Yes?" Harvey prompted.

"Gentlemen," he then said awkwardly, "how can I assist with this young man?"

Members of the vestry entered to take up parish business and looked with some suspicion on the two men in Yank uniforms. Brickstaff encouraged them to call him and offered any help. They climbed in the Jeep for the cold drive back, and along the way, agreed that as interesting as the last few days had been...it was no way to defend the sergeant. Their defense might hurt Shelton's future; he told them he wanted to remain in the Army for several more years. The best thing they could do is point to his excellent record, emphasize that he offered no excuses; and reported himself at the gate. Mercy.

When they counseled Shelton about what they had learned, in Wales and at the parish church at Bakewell Abbott, he was at first excited—then relieved—and then philosophical. "If you talk to people who've never seen it, the story seems crazy."

"Yeah.... And if we were to proceed on this for your defense, it might hurt your future."

"Yeah, they already think a lot of black boys are crazy anyway—from syphilis or smoking junk or just that we're all crazy by being born a Negro. Who'd want to do that?"

"Well, we are proceeding on your excellent record, and how you reported on yourself."

The court martial went quickly, and they got the verdict they hoped for: guilty of dereliction of duty, a temporary demotion to private; his rank would be restored in three months. Addressed but not recorded—that yes, the two men attending the radar did see strange blips on their screen that night. It took some doing to get the two lieutenants to talk because they, for understandable reasons, did not want to report about the strange things they observed and could not explain. Stovall and Adsley had told them about others had seen the crafts the blips represented...

Shelton managed to meet and thank them and then said, in a tone that indicated his trust in them over strange matters, “Ever since that event sir, I think I be... I got the second sight, sir.”

“What?—uh...do you mean...psychic?”

“Yes sir.”

“How so?”

“Well, I received a letter from home. Even before I opened it up I knew I was going to read bad news. The letter told me that my grandfather had died.”

“I’m sorry,” Harvey told the young man.

“Well, he was old, and grandfathers dying happens a lot. But sir, I don’t...”

When he fell silent, Harvey waited and then finally cocked his head. “Are you all right?”

“Sir, I know...that you have an MIA son. And there are ways you could find out...about him.”

“Sergeant—ah, Private--you’re getting into areas that...you don’t know, you can’t know.”

“But I do, sir.”

“What, then?” Harvey felt the blood draining from his face. He thought it was a ridiculously melodramatic phrase, but he could feel it happening.

“I don’t know...where your son...is,” he said. “But...I know...people know. Some man does...he be—is an American...a general.” After a moment, Private Shelton said, softly, “I be sorry, sir. I don’t think I made you happy.”

“No,” Harvey told him, honestly, after a few minutes. “But I thank you...thank you.”

What happened next was proof that every good deed gets punished. Harvey, soaked from a sudden cold shower, had entered Troyroys, which could, with a fire in the hearth, be very cozy in the midst of rain and cold. Molly happily greeted him from the kitchen, with a promise of potato and leek soup for dinner. Harvey declared his happiness for potato soup and then turned to the mail, which the

postie had handed him on the road. He was cautiously exhilarated by Shelton's story and tried to stop himself.

There was a grungy envelope addressed to his wife. Harvey, obeying a whim, opened it and found a photo of himself and Alyce Siddons. Weeks earlier, she had brushed her lips on his ear, somebody had caught this on film, and now the picture was evidence he was having an affair with the woman.

Lord, Harvey thought, now what? He wavered between shredding the picture and keeping it, as evidence for being harassed. He decided on the latter, and took the photo to his office, clipping it to a manila folder. He waited for some kind of follow-up, and it did not happen.

May arrived with trees budding, at last...and in the middle of the month, when Harvey opened the door to his office Adsley handed him a copy of the *Chicago Tribune*, just sent over from Grovesnor Square: "Truman writes end to segregated armed forces" Harvey read. He smiled as he perused the article, and then folded the paper, with a frown. "Now what?—the army I understand is still refusing to even consider desegregation. This is great but great things have a way of kicking up bad things too."

"Yeah." Guy Adsley had grown more thoughtful in the last four months. Though never a show-boater, he had become more cautious. "I never believed that the United States had a spotless record, but it's pretty damned dirty and there's a lot of dirt to clean out. When people say 'At least we didn't crowd the niggers into poison showers,' you think, yeah, well, they were too valuable for that. Cotton. Sugar. Rice. It all needed picking, combing, burning, processing. You get it for free practically and then you send the Southern colonels to Congress to make sure it continues...Man, capitalism really stinks doesn't it?"

"So you turning Communist?" Harvey joked.

"Nah, Communism would work if everybody was perfectly rational," he said. "Me, I'm looking forward to buying my first new car when I get back to the states. Though I wonder about the workers putting it together. They work like the devil at what must be a boring job and I get to pay next to nothing for a new set of wheels, with which I intend to drive my intended anywhere she wants and then take the resulting kids to the beach some day. It's a confusing world, Harvey."

“Guy,” Harvey said in way of comfort, “it only gets more confusing.”

“That’s good to know. So, what do we do?”

It was a quiet but earnest question. “Be kind to each other,” Harvey said, finally.

**

“Great God, what’s that?”

The exclamation arose from Vicar Brickstaff’s manly throat.

They were standing in the rose garden. Pvt. Shelton had requested to visit Bakewell Parish after Harvey had told him about the curious images in the basement. To help ease increasingly tense relations between the Brits and the Yanks, Harvey, at McNarney’s request, arranged for some newspaper coverage—of what seemed to be no more than a young black American soldier getting a personal tour of local British history. A local newspaper reporter showed up and took some nice pictures.

They descended into the basement, and Shelton examined the image. “I don’t know if that’s what I saw,” he admitted. He listened to the description recorded in Brickstaff’s diary. “That sounds more like it.” The reporter was cautiously intrusive, taking some pictures and asking some questions.

They emerged from the church to look up and see an oblong shape hurtle across the sky to disappear as though never there...and then a fighter, silver in the sun against a darkening sky, hurtling down.

The top half of the steeple exploded when the plane clipped it with its right wing. In the maelstrom of stone, iron, and noise, they flung themselves against the nearest wall for protection.

The debris hammered down like hail and seemed to go on and on...Harvey recalled that awful day when the Luftwaffe gave the 918th a pummeling... In the distance was the roar of a jet powered aircraft...but thankfully, no sound of a crash. Already people were screaming but in fear, not pain, thank God.

“Godalmighty, we survived,” said Adsley, getting to his feet.

“No thanks to that pilot,” Brickstaff said, angrily, and then amended his words.

“No, thanks to him. He clipped the steeple only...that was the act of an excellent

pilot considering the dive that plane was in. Unless he's mad he wouldn't have done that deliberately."

They then heard the *nah-nah nah-nah* of police vehicles coming out of Padgett and two other nearby towns, and they scattered to learn if anybody had been hurt. Harvey and Brickstaff then quickly returned to the church's office, to try to get a call out amidst continual ringing. The people of Padgett surged around.

They finally learned via the wireless that the pilot had nursed his plane to Northolt.

Phone calls secured the rest of the story. After landing, flipping his canopy open, and climbing out, the startled pilot confessed to what happened and within hours demurely confronted and was taken into custody by authorities for "shit deadly flying." Those were his words. Harvey and Adsley kept their mouths shut about what they had seen, and had urged Brickstaff to do the same...until the investigations started.

Harvey and Adsley requested to defend the pilot, a thirtyish veteran of the Eighth, a Captain McKinlay Dorsey. To succor public anger, the court martial was quickly set up. Handsome, composed and contrite, Dorsey told his two lawyers an admittedly outlandish story: on a routine flight, he had seen something that looked like a silver "something or other"—it seemed to know it had been spotted, and took off. "I radioed my position and then took off after it—which I was told not to do—but I chased that thing for ten minutes and went up so high that hypoxia set in and next thing I knew I was headed in, right into that church." There had been sufficient accounts of strange flying objects seen in the last three years to lend credence to his description. The court martial went smoothly, with the accused accepting his temporary demotion, and graciously proposing to make a personal apology to the town of Padgett and the parishioners of Bakewell. He and many others, including Harvey and Guy contributed to a fund to rebuild the steeple, which would take more than a few years. The pilot did everything he was told, including not mentioning to anybody else what he had said to Harvey and Adsley: the figure in it—didn't look human.

**

Harvey still consumed every word he could find on the Nuremberg Trials, now in the midst of the doctors' trials, which he had helped prepare. He didn't ignore the usual complaints not only from Germany, but from the States, including Robert Taft in Ohio who huffed that the trials were useless—any aggressive nation would go to war, expecting to win, so how the hell would a simple spectre of an international tribunal scare anybody? Harvey put the newspaper down—okay, the Trials were far from perfect, but never before had civilians suffered so at the hands of the war-makers, and the old ways would no longer do. The Trials were in some ways like any explorer—you didn't know what the hell was out there, but "sail ye forth" into storms, rocks, and you name it, to chart things, to find ways in—like the grail knights, entering the forest. Harvey knew that a lot of printer's ink was going to be lavished on the Trials someday in accounts that took advantage of hindsight, and he might contribute to it.

Another disturbance: Harvey was ordered to the office of General Doud, and when he was ushered in, found Dave Creighton there too.

The two men brought Harvey up to date on McGraw, who was Creighton's special quarry. Harvey wondered if he were going to be drilled about General Gallagher's attempted killing, rumored to be another of Creighton's objectives. "McGraw's now officially two months AWOL. The last sighting of him was Magdeburg, near the Polish Russian border."

A place of absolute ruin, Harvey had read. The ancient city had been a key point of East Germany, and securing it—and destroying it—had been high on the Soviet army's agenda. After a moment, Harvey said, "Why you are telling me this?"

"You're involved already, you know that."

"Well, I have not become involved more since I last saw McGraw in Nuremberg."

Doud drilled him with a look. "What about this Erika Bridgestone?—she's combining your name with McGraw's defiled name, you may know—"

"How so?"

"Nothing in print so far. She also seems to be digging up some old—or better, false dirt on Joe Gallagher, something about an old girlfriend."

“She has the right to investigate,” Harvey said, somewhat heavily. “I know the story.”

“She’s playing some game,” Creighton said. “That’s no news flash. I’m going to put a tail on her.”

Harvey thought that as ambitious as she was, this would probably thrill her—but the young woman was putting her nose—her elbows—and her ass--where they didn’t belong. He wished he could talk with her. She seemed to be an accident in the making. He was glad she was being tailed. It might save her life.

Joe and Ceile: Firm in Uncertainty: London, May 21

Three days after the Truman's momentous decision that the Armed Forces were to desegregate Joe was taking numerous phone calls and writing letters regarding his all-Negro training battalion, and its future. Joe was both glad and sorry that there was no real future for this specific plan. The USAF generally applauded the decision while the ground pounders, the Army, put up reasons why integration was wrong—more like rationalizations. He knew Pres would fight for integration and when Pres went on the march, watch out... A knock at the door, and Lt. Lovelace came in. She was pleased by Truman's decision too, though a bit rocked at how much work they had accomplished was being put aside. "Yes?"

"My request for transfer sir," she said. "My future husband is transferring to Randolph."

"Uh, well, well, well." He studied the documents, and struggled with sorrow. "When's the wedding?" he then asked.

"Not decided on yet. When we get Stateside, the mothers-in-law will get busy." As he unseeingly examined the papers, pressing back a sudden pain in his heart—a small one, but a pain nonetheless—she waited. He glanced at her with a vapid smile. With a most unvapid voice, she said, "Sir, I don't want there to be any bad blood between your wife and me. I would appreciate if you would tender any apologies your wife thinks she deserves. They are sincere. I never meant to offend her. But I did."

"That's quite the gauntlet you slapped down," Joe said, jokingly. "But I understand."

"Sir, I admire your wife. She's accomplished more in her life—than I could accomplish in three lifetimes, and has saved lives..."

"And," Joe prompted her.

"She assumes too much, exaggerates things into catastrophes, and at times seem quite intolerant of imperfections. And that includes you too, I'll bet. And I apologize sir and wish I could withdraw every word I just said—and thank you for letting me say them."

"You are welcome." He didn't add "And there is some truth to what you say."

“I hope sir, I hope you have a long and happy marriage.”

He heard the way she deliberately cut out Ceile from her hope.

“I hope so for you too.” He signed. He returned the papers. They saluted each other, both knowing that she would not leave, not for a while. They both resisted the desire to place lips on the other’s lips. She left, and returned to her typewriter. Joe turned to his work, and before the day was over, had requested a new aide. One, he hoped, not quite so beautiful, or so unassuming. Frankly, he hoped it would be a male.

He brought up Julie’s request for transfer to Ceile a few days later. Casually. Ceile was also casual about it. Years later, she told Joe that she toyed with sending flowers to Lt. Lovelace at her departure, decided it looked like she was thumbing her nose, however beautifully, at her rival, and so said or did nothing. After all, she was marrying a kinsman.

He turned to another issue, which was not exactly an issue: Vorodenko had been found—alive, well. In East Berlin. Through complex back channels, he had requested to communicate with General Joseph Gallagher. Of course, certain sets of stars were suspicious. Other sets of stars encouraged communication; one was no less a five-starred soldier, Ike. Quiet conversations with Dave Creighton. Permission extended. Joe sent a message back through the back channels, requesting a meeting. Nothing was heard for a long time.

Sandy: The Distance of Doubt - Los Angeles, May

The semester ended with a grind of exams and projects. A weary Sandy jumped when Aurora came up behind him as he fixed dinner and kissed him on the neck. He told her Barbara was coming for dinner.

“Great!” She put up the card table and laid three places with mismatched cutlery. “Why...?”

“You need a reason?”

She caught the edge in his voice. “Not at all. It’ll be good to see her.”

After they ate, Sandy went out to fetch ice cream at a new Walgreens two blocks away and the two women washed the dishes. “If you’re wondering,” Aurora said to Barbara, “I’m staying.”

“Oh,” she said.

Aurora talked, perhaps more forcefully than she needed to, about her reasons. First, the *LA Times* was impressed with how her article had attracted Hollywood. They were offering her more opportunities. Sandy came with the ice cream and served it with drizzled brandy. Barbara then yawned, enormously. “I haven’t been in a real bed in over 48 hours. I need a drive home, if you don’t mind.” They did so and Barbara, before leaving the car, told Aurora “You have some of your clothes still in the closet.”

After climbing out, with Sandy’s help, Barbara then paused and smacked him on the mouth. “Congratulations.”

He drove off, feeling Aurora’s eyes on him. He then said, “Sweetie, you know I’ve always worried about her. She’s got sugar in her gasoline—”

“What?”

“Sugar pollutes fuel and can cause planes to crash.”

“Okay,” she said, not agreeing to anything but just...agreeing.

**

In June, Sandy reported to Bartonair Systems in El Segundo. The parking lot was half-full. Sandy parked in the visitors lot, and walked a long way to the front doors. He could see the mysteriously empty Obregon plant in the hazy distance.

He went in. After several hours, during which he was photographed—fingerprinted again—interviewed, and issued a security pass, he was directed to Claud Walkert. He had to climb a flight of wooden stairs and entered an office with windows giving onto the main floor.

The man was cordial, getting up from his coffee-table sized desk. Some plans of something were scattered on its surface. “Could always rely on you for the finest work in the wind tunnel.”

“Thank you,” Sandy said, not knowing what the else hell to say. Maybe the guy was being sincere...he had done good work, he knew that, no question.

Walkert talked to him about what was going on in the plant, pointing out activities from his perch. He then hauled him downstairs and showed him a corner of the plant where Sandy could work—which could be seen from Walkert’s eagle nest, Sandy was quick to notice.

Well, what of it? He was here not only to work, but succeed in solving the problem, submit it as his senior project, get out, and start his Masters at Cal Tech that fall—if he were accepted. He had not told Crusard that he was switching loyalties, or trying to. The required paperwork had been accomplished, and an interview at Cal Tech was forthcoming.

He came in late one evening to learn that Aurora had just come from Barbara’s apartment. She told him this after he showered and towed his hair dry. “So, what’s up?” he then asked.

“Why do you think something is up?” she said, smiling.

“You get a kind of electric aura about you when you’re excited,” he told her, grabbing her...she let him and they fell on the bed to kiss and enjoy being together, which didn’t happen a lot. “Enough, you maniac,” she said, pushing away, but gently. “I have some questions.”

“Figures,” he said, lying on his side, his head propped up with his hand.

She got her notebook and sat crosslegged beside him. "Sandy, what do you know about Claud Walkert?" She heard his sharp intake of breath.

"Who wants to know?"

"Me."

"Why?" Sandy wondered if she had learned...that he was being supervised by Walkert. He had not told her this...for more than one reason.

"Barbara got on a footstool to check on a closet shelf for anything else of mine and found a small notebook way back on the shelf, leftover from Betty. It belonged to Ray Zemler—you told me about him.... He had been keeping notes on Walkert."

"Like what?"

"Nothing interesting. Kind of a log of his activities."

"I'm sure Ray had his reasons."

"But he must have had a reason for hiding that notebook in the closet."

"Maybe it was just in his stuff and got left behind."

She had never directly talked with him about Ray's death. Now she did. "Do you think he was killed deliberately in that explosion?"

"I don't see how he could have been—meaning, everybody was busy that morning, running around—you're gonna kill somebody with a bomb, it needs to be or the victim needs to be..." He trailed off.

"Sandy...you said that Ray spoke with you before he died...what did he say?"

"He spoke about a bell. And then...'more said he.'"

"What might he be trying to say? I bet it wasn't 'more said he.'"

"I was around some dying guys during the war. A lot of them couldn't make a final statement but some could...and sometimes they were kind of strange."

"Perhaps he was trying to give you a name—'morsetti.' That's an Italian name. I've seen it--bring me the phone directory."

He pulled it from under the phone, saying the Armers gave him their old one so it was not up to date. She flipped through the Ms, and found Murseti Funeral Home, and a Morsetti Italian Cafe. There were some five more Morsettis and Marsettas. "You gonna talk with them all?" Sandy asked.

"Yes."

He checked the bedside clock. It had been a mere fifteen minutes since they flopped down together. Nothing was changed...and yet there were new clouds on the horizon, including taking her into confidence about things. They both examined Ray's notes. They were scrawled quickly, at times hard to read, and seemed a pretty pedestrian report of Walkert's activities at the University, the wind tunnel and at Bartonair Systems: he came in, worked, left. Ray noted whom he talked with. But one question easily caught their attention: "Does Walkert have something on Crusard?"

On the final page, they found a quickly sketched bell, with "die glocke" written under it. Aurora said, "I think that means 'bell.'" The next day she found a German-English dictionary and confirmed it. Of course, Sandy recalled Ray had whispered about "another bell"—which kind of tuned into a conversation they had the night before he died about bail-out bells.

"Oh, hell's bells," Sandy grunted.

**

In the middle of all these events Sandy contacted a USC flying club and was offered a good rate for pilot training by a licensed instructor. He didn't want to, but understood Crusard's wisdom about better understanding aeronautics by flying. To stick to his decision he even quit his job at the garage, and was pleased when his boss said he understood, but if he wanted his job back, hit him up. In late April, Sandy calmly drove to the Burbank airport, but his hands were cold on the warm steering wheel. Butterflies invaded his stomach when he was assigned reading, and given his first lecture, and the metallic taste of fear came up in his throat when he was in the passenger seat of the Piper Cub. But it felt familiar. His teacher was Miss Jane Corley, who had ferried planes in the war and was now studying sociolinguistics. "No objections to me being a dame?" she asked him at the beginning.

“Not a one,” he assured her, and he meant it.

But flying wasn't too bad. The pre-war Cub was a helluva lot less complicated than the B-17, and it seemed shockingly light as it buzzed away through peaceful skies. Jane actually let him pilot for a few minutes, and nodded at his strong horse sense about flying. However, after landing, Sandy shook Jane's hand, and walked, and then dashed to the men's room, for good reason. But he was going to make it. For the next five weeks, he studied a private pilot's manual, and twice a week he took flying lessons, in the dawn when the drafts were quiet, and at the end, he was flying in the bumpier evenings. “You're good,” Jane told him, when he skillfully banked off the updrafts of the San Gabriels. “Darn good. You should think of joining the California Air Guard. They need pilots and they pay you for training.”

He smiled at her, but did not tell her that he was soaking wet under his arms and needed a toilet... But he took her advice and inquired about the Air Guard.

On June 2 he soloed. While bringing the Piper Cub down on the runway of the Burbank airport, he struggled not to recall landing the Piccadilly Lily...and didn't quite make it...he bumped the little plane down on a lovely sun-lit runway...Perfect. After he deplaned and was congratulated, he unashamedly took out a handkerchief to blot his face and neck—before being washed down with a bucket of water by Jane. He laughed, if forcibly. Then he casually trotted to the men's room.

He felt no particular desire to keep flying, and certainly did not have the time or the money to do it, but he could fly and was damned good at it. And he loved the quietness of the air, above the beeps and bustle and blasts of traffic; seeing clouds once again at eye-level, rather than up in the sky...and yeah, nobody was shooting at him any longer. Piloting still frightened him...but he was sure the California Air Guard, in which he enlisted ten days later, would knock that out.

Harvey: Put Me to the Test - Archbury, Late Spring

Harvey had come to really appreciate having Molly at the house. She was discreet and hardworking, and that mid-spring evening, knowing that Melva had a late appointment with Burnham (for an ear infection) Harvey found it good to walk into a warm lighted house. After changing, he came into the parlor to find Jackie, his brown skin gleaming in the light of the flickering coals, playing with toy blocks that Harvey had bought for him a week earlier. He chirped happily at Harvey's appearance; he too, like many people, liked the plain, simple, and humane man from Providence, Rhode Island.

Molly hurried from the kitchen, apologizing for her son being in the parlor, but Harvey said jokingly, "If you bring me a brandy all is forgiven." She did so, saying supper would be ready any time he wished. Harvey enjoyed Jackie's play, which included him making three blocks into a train..."clack, clack, clack," he chanted—and Harvey chanted with him, and they both whistled "whoo-who!" which drew a laugh from the boy, whose baby teeth were white and even. It was like having a grandchild, he thought, with a quick feeling of pain, and they both looked up when there was a knock on the kitchen door. Molly opened it. "Colonel Stovall," she called. "It's the lieutenant."

Harvey greeted Lt. Byron Mahoney, in his uniform raincoat and looking uneasy. Harvey invited him in.

"Brandy?" Harvey offered.

"Yes, sir, a drop, thanks..." He rapidly sipped at the finger Harvey offered him.

"My wife was threatened today...and I think Jackie was kind of threatened too. At least the—guy—talked about the 'half breed' living in the main house."

"Any idea who, Lieutenant?" Harvey was no longer a genial host, but a demanding superior officer.

"His face was covered. Knocked on the door, and called her names not to be repeated." He shook his head. "Seems like things were nicer here."

"People are people everywhere. Full of fear. Though it sure seems like somebody's stirring them up."

Melva then arrived. Harvey knew her face well enough to know she was rattled but her chief interest was in Lt. Mahoney's presence. They told her what had happened.

"Any trouble," Harvey added, "come after us."

Mahoney grinned slightly. "I will sir, thank you. And I got other troubles in a way. My boys and I are being transferred to West Berlin. Just got orders yesterday."

"Berlin?"

"We've been assigned to Tempelhof to work on its runways." Mahoney named the chief USAF air field in Berlin, which, Harvey had read, boasted one of the largest buildings in Europe, with seven full floors below its damaged upper levels.

"I guess air traffic is growing," Harvey remarked, and he recalled his bland statement within two months. "Well, we'll miss you, and, we will look after your wife."

"Yes sir," echoed Molly standing in the entryway to the kitchen, holding Jackie by the hand.

After he left, Molly carried Jackie to bed. Melva wilted on a kitchen chair, wincing as she extended her palm, laced with cuts. These extended up her right forearm.

Harvey brought a basin of warm water and she sponged her scrapes. He doctored them with iodine and bandages. "What happened?" he finally asked.

"I was pedaling home and I swear I felt something like a wire—stretched across the road. It scraped by my hat. I skidded the bicycle."

"That sounds like a guerilla tactic," Harvey said.

In the morning, he found a filthy name scrawled on the mailbox.

**

Constable Whitcomb was pleased to see Harvey and Melva Stovall when they entered the constabulary in Archbury. Though all business, he gladly remembered that the couple who stood before him first met in his place of work, back in July 1945. He smiled when they congratulated him on his daughter Anne and her husband Kenneth becoming parents to be; he then frowned when they gave their

report, which included the presence of trespassers. “Damn, Archbury has changed with the war. Pilfering, schoolboy pranks, the usual clandestine ladies. Not good at all.”

“Have there been other such reports?” Harvey asked.

“More than a few, but nothing quite like that,” Whitcomb said, calling in an aide. “Keep your eyes open and get on the phone quick if anything else might happen. We’ll get the area under better patrol.”

Two days later, when Harvey and Melva met at the Star and Bottle, he caught sight of Alyce Siddons. She perched at the bar, smoked, sipped on something—and when Melva visited the ladies toilet, Alyce hopped off her chair to launch herself at him. “Oh, you don’t know how sorry I am,” she said.

“Sorry the hell for what?”

“For what your wife is doing...oh, duckie, don’t you know that when she goes on her rounds, she’s with other men, people’ve seen her—“

“Madam, hold your—lies,” Harvey said. She was drunk; her gin-breath practically burned his eyes. Harvey rose from his chair and found Melva returning. “Let’s get some dinner,” he said, and steered her outside, just as the skies tipped. Harvey glanced inside as they hurried away; he glimpsed Alyce, her head in her arms, and a man hovering over her, with a drink.

Though both pretending not to, they cautiously walked up to their house that evening. Molly had the night off, and she and Jackie had gone to the cinema in Archbury, which was showing Disney’s *Dumbo*. All was peaceful. They lighted the fire, Melva fixed tea, they chatted in their matching chairs before the fire and walked up the steps to their beautiful bedroom—and found that someone had shot through their window. Some shards glittered on the carpet. “Possibly a hunter,” they agreed, as they sometimes heard pops after rabbits as some men tried to augment the family larder with fresh meat. But they reported it to Whitcomb in the morning.

Dear old Archbury, Harvey thought. Rossiter Lane, Providence, Rhode Island suddenly seemed rather attractive—though in his imagination he saw the empty

bedrooms where beloved people once rested their heads. Then Pottle and Johnson, waiting like a friendly mouth to consume him.

That night, he woke up with pains in his chest.

Sandy: The Distance of Doubt - Los Angeles, Early Summer

Walkert, for the two months Sandy labored over his project, proved to be a helpful and rather non-intrusive mentor. And Aurora, happily, was being rather non-intrusive herself. He had been accepted by the Air Guard, as a pilot, which required additional training, lots of it. He didn't sleep much but he felt fairly peaceful and confident.

Sandy finally identified the issue with the manifold—and finding the solution then became easy. They were almost collegial, with Walkert saying, “You found the problem. When a problem is found the solution is more easily found.”

So, it had not been a bad couple of months but Sandy could never quite shake a feeling of furtiveness in the plant. It was not unusual that projects were off limits but to him, it seemed many of the workers kind of brushed by him, or just plain ignored him. Some were friendly but still seemed standoffish.

But Sandy felt pretty damned good as he went home on a mid-June evening, when Los Angeles seemed like heaven on earth as a pleasant breeze pushed at the palm trees, making their fans glitter in the lovely sun. He stopped at one of the ubiquitous drive-ins to have a sandwich and a beer. A news vendor on the nearby corner was being besieged by pedestrians as well as by people stopping their cars, flipping money and being tossed a sheaf of paper. Sandy walked over, and bought a copy the *Los Angeles Times* special evening edition...

“Berlin in Crisis.” Below: “Cold war of words becomes hot.”

Oh, my God, Sandy thought. Now what? Though spread pretty thin by studies, heart ache and things he didn't like, he had tried to keep up with Europe—which, since 1945, had been trying to avoid war. There had been a series a conferences, some failures, some successful, and treaties were signed. The Dunkirk Treaty united England and France, followed by the Brussels Treaty which united the “Benelux” countries to England and France. These treaties were largely to deal with and further prevent German menace, and the banding together had worsened Soviet aggression, and the United States had come forth with the Truman Doctrine, which had dispatched money to Turkey and Greece...and the European Recovery Program, the latter being initiated by George C. Marshall in

his speech at Harvard which called for the relief of poverty, hunger, desperation and chaos.

He scanned the news and then turned to go back to his car. Feelings of worry were then swatted away when his eyes snagged on the most recent *Saturday Evening Post*. Featuring one of the always anticipated Norman Rockwell covers, the cover also featured an article and its author: "One Sergeant's Story"—Susan Nesbit.

Oh. Dear. God.

His first reaction was to buy every copy—and stuff them in the trunk of his car! Feeling as embarrassed as hell, he bought only a single copy. When he got home he threw it, face down, on the small coffee table. A phone call from Crusard then dragged him away to their electro-magnetic shenanigans which were actually quite interesting. Crusard was concerned about what the hell was going on in Berlin, and reviewed the general situation for Sandy. He theorized that it came down to Stalin wanting all of Berlin, and eventually all of Germany...without declaring war, and describing his actions as routine and for security, intended to drive out the West.

"Well, well," Aurora said when he came into the bedroom. She had two Los Angeles newspapers spread over the bed. They were heavy with ink about the crisis in Berlin. But she held up the magazine. "How come you never told me about this?"

"Fool in paradise. I kept hoping she would forget all about it....I mean, she finished the interview over a year ago." He was glad that he had minded himself around Susan and so had nothing to reproach himself about, then and now. "Well?"

"It's a nice article. Wish I'd written it." They talked, a lot more...with Aurora finally making it clear that it seemed damned clear Susan was in love with him and what about that?

If he were in love with her, he pointed out, he would be *with her right now*.

Aurora said, "Of course," after a moment. During the rest of the evening, she wondered how to bring up the subject of marriage as it seemed a good opening. If he proposed, she would finally know how they stood. But, one planned-on

marriage had not worked out for him and in she had rushed. She'd better wait. And there was an international mess afoot.

As they were preparing to go to bed, Gene Armer came knocking on their door...to tell them he had seen and read the article too. The snuffling tongue-lolling Felicity had come with him and she was soon in Aurora's arms, her tummy turned for scratching, and as she crooned over the dog, while listening to Armer and Sandy talking...as a journalist, she heard the somewhat official quality of his questions...as though he were interrogating him, almost. "Why didn't you say something about being featured in a national magazine?"

"I was hoping it would go away or not appear."

Armer turned to a far more important topic: "And about this crisis—might you be called up?"

"I don't know."

Aurora forgot her seeming irritation over the article in the Post to query him about this possibility. They made love that night in a way that told him she didn't want to lose him. What a thing for a woman to think of him.

A week later, the Berlin crisis had rapidly escalated and they all worriedly read the latest headlines. Sandy had forgotten about Susan's article until he walked into Bartonair and one worker he had at least talked with hailed him, magazine in hand, and was grinning almost pleasantly. "Hey there kid," he said, "how come you didn't tell us you were a star in the *Saturday Evening Post*?"

Walkert walked straight into this...and asked to look at the magazine.

A few hours later, when Sandy was standing by the water cooler, focusing his eyes and snapping his neck, Walkert was suddenly at his elbow. "You had quite a career in the Eighth Air Force," he said. "I had no idea that you went from a sergeant to being an officer."

"I was commissioned after the war to be an, uh...aide to a general."

"Yes, your boss...who has quite a reputation." Sandy decided not to be too suspicious about his comment. The article provided his former CO's name, and identified his high reputation.

A good surprise: Harvey dropped a note that Joe was flying in the airlift.

“He must have yanked the hell out of some strings to be assigned to the airlift, at his age, the stars, being so badly hurt in January,” Harvey wrote. “But I also wonder if the latter is the reason he was sent back into the air. I don’t know what Joe has been working at but it had to be top secret.” To Sandy’s cautious inquiry if anything had been found out about “the incident,” Harvey responded in another letter: “Reasons range from his aide’s jealous boyfriend, to Stalin’s personal order—to brass hacks in the Pentagon wanting to get him the hell out of the way to protect some secrets he knows about. And then it could have been some lousy drunk.”

There was another surprise at home: Aurora was being sent on a press junket—for *Command Decision*, a film about the Eighth Air Force, based on a play that examined both its glory and its horrific loss of men and planes. She would leave on July 28. She knew that the assignment arose from her addressing flight nurses, and Hollywood glamour was exciting, but it didn’t make her a serious journalist. She still couldn’t get the go-ahead for an investigation into the plant not opening. Damn, she had growled to herself, put on a cheerful smile for Sandy, and then grouched to her father on the phone. “One step at a time,” he advised her. “Remember the difference between being strong and being tough.”

“Ah, shit, honey,” Sandy said when he learned of her leaving. He was getting so used to having her home and the idea of her leaving scratched marks of loneliness in his heart. Big marks. Marks that competed with other marks of people leaving and not coming back—and his other suspicions and fears and feeling at times that he was having that awful falling dream only this time he was wide awake--after they made love that night, he murmured into her hair... “Say, how about getting married, hm?”

She sat up, trying not to be too—fast—and relaxed. But she smiled... “You bet. In August. We’ll both have finished our obligations by then.”

He too was sitting up, excited. “How about your parents coming here? It would be great...”

“Daddy puts every edition to bed himself and Mama wouldn’t come without him. They understand. Let’s just go to the Pasadena court house and get married. Tell

you what...we'll visit the folks this coming Christmas and, and, maybe get married again."

"Sure honey. Whatever you want."

Planning to say the words on 15 August, life objectified for them both. Aurora, gritting her teeth a bit, left with the other press people who followed planes carrying Clark Gable and Van Johnson on a series of personal appearances in San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle and points east. Sandy accompanied her as far as he could before departure, and before kissing her goodbye, he said, "Well, say hi to Clark for me and tell him I'm keeping his secret."

"Hold on, buster—what's this secret?"

He told her about the time he actually walked into a remarkable scene: at Claridge's in London, where Gallagher, on orders, was attending a reception. As his aide Sandy chauffeured him there and waited. Bored, he walked around and visited an obscure facility for the usual reason and bam, there was Captain Gable...rinsing off his dentures and slipping them back into his mouth. "When he saw me, he said, 'Sh, let's keep this our secret.'"

Aurora, though no big Clark Gable fan, and pretty realistic about the world, was still surprised that the movie star's famously melting smile was partly artificial. "And what did you say?" she asked.

"I told him I would and you know, for the next 24 hours went around thinking me—I--and Clark Gable were only ones who knew—but I didn't feel like a fool; I realized he was nicely asking me not to spread it around—you're the first person I've ever told about meeting him like that."

"Well, I won't say a word either."

And she didn't. Other events helped.

Harvey: Put Me to the Test - Archbury, Summer

“Colonel Stovall,” Harvey enunciated into the phone. He had recently gotten a telephone strung into his study. Melva had made the attic room for Molly and her son more livable with fresh paint and a second hand bed. Molly had run up some curtains and a bedspread on Melva’s treadle Singer.

It was June, lovely beautiful June. Soft days, with the skies painted with clouds heaped up in silken battalions. Rain, of course, but it was not as cold. Two months had passed, relatively quietly. Harvey and Adsley had been hard at work, and overturned some convictions, which either released some men from the stockade or cleared their records so that their dishonorable and less than honorable discharges were transformed to “honorable.” At home, things were quiet as Molly worked hard and helped Roxanne whose morning sickness had extended into the second trimester. Things were quiet, perhaps deceptively, but Whitcomb had kept his promise about the area being patrolled. The only incident had been when Molly’s father had shown up drunk and pounded on their door, then lurched around to the back where he woke up Mrs. Mahoney. She was so scared she was helplessly retching, and Melva called for Dr. Burnham, who took her to his recently built infirmary in Henderson Close. Harvey attempted to get leave for her husband but now-Captain Mahoney did not receive it. He and his engineering battalion had been hard at work, extending and improving the air strips at Tempelhof, replacing the pierced steel planks (which had replaced Marston mats laid over the grass) with concrete. According to his letters, which Roxanne partially shared with Harvey and Melva, a lot of German civilians were working long and hard hours, including women, some of whom worked in the only shoes they possessed: high heels. Another letter let Harvey know he and his men were being transferred to Wiesbaden for similar work.

Back on the June evening, Harvey, his ear on the receiver, was nicely reminded about some enforced recreation from by David Creighton, speaking with his general’s bark about him attending General Hap Arnold’s reception at the Langham in two days.

“Yes sir,” Harvey said.

“Good. I’ll be looking for you and that lovely wife of yours—Harvey, is everything okay?”

“Of course General,” Harvey, recoiling at the question and his fib—or maybe a lie. Harvey had kept the relatively minor vandalism of Troyroys quiet, seeing no reason to make it public, as long as the local police knew. By now Alyce Simmons was working respectably as a cashier at the new greengrocer’s, at least during the day. Her husband on occasion would appear, in a flashy suit, some double breasted thing with a noisy silk tie. He still looked like a thin gray cat, whiskers and all.

“There’s been some scuttlebutt about you being depressed—fighting with your wife.”

“We’re fine, General, uh Dave, thank you.” After he rang off, he put the phone down, carefully. About the only real fight they had was months earlier, over the light blue wallpaper for the bedroom which he favored over the floridly floral paper she had preferred. Was the scuttlebutt due to Alyce Siddons...or possibly that Erika Bridgestone? He wondered if the tail placed on her revealed anything.

But a few days ago, Guy, who had really gotten to like Harvey, asked him, quietly, about Melva. When pressed by Harvey, he admitted that some personnel had gotten reports she was involved with Roy Burnham... “I don’t believe it,” Guy said, who had been to dinner with them more than once—and after getting over his surprise at Melva being notably younger than Harvey, treated her with utmost respect. “I guess all small towns get such stories going.” Harvey, who had known Roy Burnham for some time, didn’t pay it one bit of mind—Melva spent a lot of time with the guy, but that was the nature of their work; and, he thought, he often spent more time with Guy Adsley than he did with his wife.

Going to the Langham for the reception was a big bore, though Harvey respected Hap Arnold who carried a lot on his well-starred shoulders for a long time during the war. Melva could not accompany him, as she was making another presentation to the Council. She had a model for the Council; Lady Sydney’s school at Bryncote, and Lady Sydney was a proud member of the Women’s Institute... She would join Harvey at around eight. He knew Melva would be exhausted and told Molly that he and Mrs. Stovall might spend the night in London rather than taking the long trip back.

Leaving Molly and Jackie in the garden in the daylight that would linger until nearly ten o’clock, Harvey set off for the Archbury train station, in his pressed

Dress As, now Air Force blue. From King's Cross station he took the Underground and emerged on the street to see the Langham rearing up in the dusk. Harvey was assailed with memories, most of them good, one great—including how he and Melva were on their first date at a special dinner Joe gave at the Langham. Joe had stood up to a Congressional inquiry that day and sent 'em packing; Ceile, recovering from injuries suffered from a downed plane had come to testify; Max Gallagher was there, and Brit, Frank and Phyllis Bailey had made it, with Vorodenko and Irina too. Sandy had gotten his unexpected field commission, but there was also poor little Terry Cahill—how were she and Merriwether doing? He walked into noise and smoke.

Harvey stayed near the doors until after seven o'clock. He watched people coming and going, searching for Creighton...and recognized Erika Bridgestone, dressed to the nines. But she looked like a thirteen year old dressed up in her mother's cocktail dress. At least she left him alone, though she saw him. But, dammit, he wanted to ask her something that was probably an empty threat—but—who was this "he" she had threatened him with? Hell, even if she knew, she wouldn't talk. It was a bluff. Nothing but.

Harvey checked at the massive desk for a phone call—nothing—and deciding that a drink would help pass the time until Arnold's scheduled appearance at 8:30, he slowly pressed his way to the bar. As he ordered a scotch and tonic, he felt his chest flutter and burn.

He accepted his drink, found a chair and sat down.

Alyce Siddons was then sitting on the arm of the chair. Her arm around his shoulders, a finger flicking his left oak leaf, she was talking a blue streak, and didn't stop when Harvey demanded, "Mrs. Siddons, what the hell do you want—"

"For you not to kill yourself—oh, darling, there's so much to live for—she says she's always busy with the girls who are preggers but darling, it's not your fault if she's seeing Burnham—behind your back--"

Harvey rose from his chair and walked away, but she followed him, her voice loud as he pushed his way through uniforms, turning faces, grins, winks, pointing fingers. The smoke was like a blanket. He had to face her, but not here—not among all these faces peering at a middle-aged lieutenant colonel trying to deal

with a blowsy blonde, whose neckline was so far down her soiled bra was showing...

When he came to a wall, he faced and barked at her: “Mrs. Siddons, please stop this charade. I don’t know what the hell you’re up to but it won’t end well—”

“Oh darling!” she cried, throwing her arms around his neck. “Don’t worry—I love you—”

People were watching this, though pretending not to...She was pushing him toward maroon curtains and onto a terrace beyond, over which the darkening sky arched; clouds were gathering, clouds that were spewing lightning and the smell of rain. She kept pushing at Harvey until he reached the edge and his body pressed against the railing. Snatching her arms, he folded them against her and looked for a bench. Sit her down, talk to her, get some answers. He was snared in a cobweb, and he was the fly.

Her husband then rushed Harvey, who had little more than air at his back.

Harvey recklessly rushed forward to meet him. They collided. Harvey pushed him away, trying to swing at him, but Alyce grabbed hold and pushed him again to the edge of the terrace, screaming at her husband to help, dammit, you piece of shit, help me--

Lights were popping. Despite Harvey’s dazzled eyes he realized that Erika Bridgestone was there—she was shouting at him. Lights kept popping. Bridgestone seemed to rush at him.

Harvey walloped face down on the tiles. In back of him there was a scream and the some shouting... Rain plopped about.

Harvey, a flat stinging taste filling his mouth, pushed himself on his back and became aware that Creighton, in a trench coat, its shoulders drenched from a sudden shower, bending over him. Suddenly, Phil Doud was there, peering down at him.

Harvey looked around the terrace. “I think there’s a woman overboard,” he said and fell into the pit.

**

“Here,” Creighton said, wringing out and handing a cool compress to Harvey.

They—he and David Creighton--were in an examination room, at St. George’s Hospital, across the street from the Langham. A nursing sister should have been attending him but the woman had been politely ejected when the brass arrived, as was the doctor after he checked Harvey for broken bones, hematomas, and ordered an x-ray of his skull.

Harvey laid the compress against his stinging face. On the outside, he was neutral, on the inside, he was inventorying the events as he recalled them. They were a mess. Where was his wife? Was this connected with some of the ugly events happening in and around their home?

But this, Harvey thought, holding the pad to his throbbing cheek, was no vandalism. It had a quality of a hit. Or a frame. Clearly...he backed away from the adjective. Nothing was clear. Links, ideas, theories. Wait for what is known.

He did know this: Erika Bridgestone had gone over the railing. One long story down to pavement. She was in surgery now.

Then he was taken away for x-rays and then returned, swiftly—pretty fast too, and he later learned that some money had speeded up the process. As they waited for results, Harvey began taking better stock of who was around him.

“Sir, can you tell me what happened?” Harvey then asked Creighton.

“First, I was looking for you when I was told you were in danger--”

“Who told you?”

“Major Merriwether—his wife told him. But *why* is what we have to figure out. But how I learned was from a couple of sharp ears.”

A knock at the door: Lucas and Terry came in. He grinned, though it hurt like hell, at his two acquaintances from Nuremberg. “Well, come to see a banged up old man huh?”

“Actually, we were originally here on our honeymoon!—show them the ring, sweetie.”

Terry, grinning, held up her left hand to show a modest ring. “We’re still arguing about who got who first.” She brushed his forehead with a kiss. “A baby’s coming in about seven months.”

“Well,” Harvey said, and awkwardly shook Merriwether’s hand and bestowed a kiss on hers. “May I speak, sir?” Terry asked General Creighton. He nodded. “I was in the ladies room with stocking problems. I was bent over in a chair behind a half wall, when that blond woman came in and made a phone call—I didn’t clearly hear what she spoke about, but I heard the name Stovall and somehow—it didn’t sound good. I got out of there after they left and found my husband--“

“And I found General Creighton,” Merriwether ended.

“I was looking for you and for Bridgestone’s tail when Merriwether found me,” Creighton said. “I’ve been getting reports about you being depressed—anxious—unhappy at home because your wife was seeing other men. A picture of you and this Siddons woman together. We’d gotten wind of this, but we didn’t buy it exactly. But I was going to talk with you about it. That hellzapoppin’ scene on the terrace and all the garbage about you suggests that you were going to be murdered and then framed for a suicide.”

“Don’t laugh, but Siddons’s been pretty well forcing herself on me—and told me that Melva’s been carrying on behind my back,” Harvey said.

“She’s being tracked down. A woman that stupid will be found.” Creighton leaned forward. “And fortunately, we got some photos, taken by a photographer who came out at all the noise.”

“Bridgestone?”

“No, some fellow named Jack Willingrace. Just a photographer for the Sentinel. He found us and offered up the photos for a price. Harvey,” he said directly, “why was this Siddons dame and Bridgestone trying to kill you?—of course, you exposed Siddons at the court martial but that’s breaking the butterfly on the wheel. Can you give us something?”

Harvey was feeling dizzy. The pain was tearing into his chest; it hurt to breathe. He felt cold all over and to do something—he suddenly sat up, still holding the

compress on his head. "I don't know, really..." he began and then the world was turning into gray cubes.

Terry cried out "Colonel Stovall!—Colonel?"

"Harve!" shouted Creighton as Harvey shook himself to keep awake—keep alive-- Harvey said to Creighton, "Find my wife. She may be across the street; she said she'd come, I don't know how she might find me..." The world went away.

...Not quite, because he woke up in a hospital bed. It was late morning and hallelujah, Melva was there, at his bedside. "A very polite gentleman, a Major Merriwether, found me at the reception and brought me over here, last night," she said in way of greeting. She leaned over, kissed him on the mouth, and with her hands flanking his shoulders, she said, "What's going on?"

"Have you been told anything?"

"I only know there was an event at the reception that involved you," she said. "And I imagine you have been told not to talk about it."

"Well...yeah...." Time to come clean about something personal. "For a long time I feel that I've been on the verge of a heart attack...been having pains here—right now, as a matter of fact."

"You silly boy." She pressed her soft, narrow hand on it. "Hurts again?"

"Yes."

"Yes. A nice doctor—with a Russian accent I think—took over your case. First, your head is fine though you will have headaches for a while. He then said you were probably suffering some pleuritic pain—left over from pneumonia, made worse by having two slightly cracked ribs—cracked from a while ago."

"Pleurisy?" He was so relieved and felt so foolish, he refrained from saying "Is that all?"

Unfooled, she perched at his side. "Harvey, have you been hiding things from me?"

Harvey, though rolling in a flood tide of relief that also included phrases like "you idiot..." looked at her directly. "Because I was afraid I would be sent home. Home to the US."

“And you don’t want to go home? Why?” But the question made her nervous.

“We’re happy here. You have very important work. We have a home. I didn’t want to—I guess—be given a medical discharge, and you get over to the States and then I die...”

“Good heavens. You’ve been holding all this in, haven’t you?”

“You guessed it.”

Her voice became stridently happy. “Just before I left, the glazer finished with the windows and replaced the shattered one. The new bathroom fittings are being installed next week and you’ll get that big warm bath you always want, like a lot of you Yanks...”

He listened to her speak, thinking the world had rarely seemed so wonderful. An orderly then delivered a tray with a bowl of oatmeal and a pot of tea. Harvey ate, and felt even better. They looked up at a knock on the door, and Creighton came in. “I need to use the toilet,” Melva said, and left.

“Well, sir?” Harvey asked. “What about...Bridgestone?”

“Alive. We can talk to her later today. Lucky, too, only a concussion, and a dislocated shoulder. But you need to tell us about this Bridgestone dame. Did she have some kind of vendetta against you?”

“What about Alyce Siddons?” Harvey asked instead.

“Still looking. Hey, Colonel, look at this,” Creighton said. From his wallet, he drew out a small photo and presented it to him. Harvey squinted, found his glasses on the bedside stand and peered at it. A pretty blond woman held a two year old baby in her arms. Her wonderful smile could be seen in the toddler.

“Yours?”

“Mine. That’s Heidi—and our little girl, Joanne.”

“Congratulations.”

“Well, I could be her grandfather, but she’s my little girl. When you gonna have kids Harv?”

“Well, I’m a little old,” Harvey said.

"I've gotta year on you, pal. Don't wait. And, you old war horse, we'll keep our eye out for Alyce Siddons. Now. About this Bridgestone. You've met her before. And she's been saying that Wales is dead. As if to draw us out, I think."

Harvey became even more uneasy. Creighton's eyes let him know he was not on the hook for anything but there were questions.

"Has that been confirmed?"

"About Wales, no. Harv, you think this Bridgestone kid might have killed her?"

"God, I hope not," Harvey said.

"Yeah, she was still our best lead on McGraw."

"Is that how people get ahead these days?"

"She's on the hook for assault and battery. She might be willing to talk if there's a plot."

"Plot," Harvey muttered. Yeah. Siddons stalking him, pretending to be a rejected something or other; Melva seeing Roy Burnham on the sly; a murder, disguised as a suicide or maybe somebody was going to be framed for it. Good God, why?—was this like Joe's attack?

"It's connect the dots, but we've got to connect them—we might learn things."

"Will Joe be one of the dots?"

"Maybe."

Melva quietly returned. "Get some sleep," Creighton said, and left.

She, daring a rebuke from the nursing sisters, stretched out beside her husband, her arm over his chest, their cheeks meeting.

**

Alyce Siddons was dug out of hiding a few days later, fearful, unrepentant—nearly—and provided some answers, but not all of them. Lt. Colonel Stovall, out of the hospital, crisply uniformed, feeling fine...was sitting in a small room with Dave Creighton at USAFE HQ when she was brought in by a matron of some lock-up. Alyce's face held marks on it, which she said was from the "donnybrook on

that terrace. Got out of there when I saw that others were coming. Got out of there, I did—hid with my husband till he threw me out when his doxie comes in.”

“Mrs. Siddons,” said Creighton firmly after she answered a series of questions, “You may have had reasons to dislike the colonel here but attempted murder—is damned idiotic. What’s going on?”

“I was havin’ some fun with the colonel here, that’s all.”

“And an open tab at the Star and Bottle. Who was letting you charge drinks?”

Her eyes opened wide and Harvey glimpsed how beautiful she had been at one time.

“For blackmail purposes, yours?”

“How the bloomin’ hell should I know? All I know—more what I know—“ Her angry, drink-raddled face creased. “The colonel had to be got rid of.”

“Why?”

She wrung her hands.

“Mrs. Siddons?—did Erika Bridgestone open the tab?”

She shook her head.

Creighton moved in. “Would you like a drink?—of the real stuff?”

“Yes.”

“What will you give us?—and that includes being straight about Bridgestone.”

“Yes, yes.”

He spoke words at the door. Alyce shook and then emitted a small shriek when there was a knock on the door. The matron came in, a glass of gin in her hands.

Creighton took it. He held it out of her grasp. “Well?”

She knew the rules and played by them. “I was told—that—Colonel Stovall knew things.”

“What things?”

“Why the hell would they tell me? They knew I had a grudge—or my husband had one.”

“And you were set up for gin.” Creighton lured Alyce with the drink. Tears ran down her cheeks. “Are you finished with me?” she whispered.

“No. Who is this ‘they’ who wants Stovall dead because he knows things?”

“If I knew, I’d tell you!”

“Would you?”

“I’m scared.” This was no pukey little plea for pity, this was an admission.

“What about Bridgestone?”

“I don’t know shit about her.”

Creighton was wise enough to believe her. “Mrs. Siddons, you’ve been very helpful.” He handed her the drink. She gulped it, without shame.

She was taken away, and the two men went to Creighton’s office. “Like hell,” Creighton said. “But I wasn’t expecting that poor stupid bitch to know much. What do you think?” His flinty eyes, which had been so warm and sweet when he looked at his daughter’s picture, drilled into Harvey’s.

“She’s terrified. Poor woman.”

Creighton chuckled. “Harvey, if everybody were like you, there’d be no war. And I would be unemployed. But you’re right. She’s been used and she’s scared. And if we can find out who used her, maybe we can get to the bottom of things. I think it’s Bridgestone.”

Harvey shook his head. “I don’t think so. That kid’s a novice.”

“So was Lady Macbeth, relatively speaking. It’s an ugly world, Harvey. Makes me want to take Heidi and Joanie to some secret garden some place and hide them there...as always Harvey, you get me thinking about other things—if not Bridgestone, then who?”

At that moment, Creighton’s aide, whom Harvey had last seen in Normandy, came in, with a folder of photographs taken on the balcony. Harvey examined them both eagerly and fearfully. One photo made him clearly recall that he had

been pushed down. He was hitting the tiles—and there stood Bridgestone, a scream frozen on her face, her arms thrust out—but over him, as if protecting him.

They received word that Bridgestone was conscious and requesting to talk.

After discussing and agreeing on a series of questions, and a strategy of sorts, Dave and Harvey were finally admitted to the woman's room at St. George's. She was sitting up in bed as best she could. Her left arm was in a sling. Her face was half hidden with a bandage running from her forehead to her chin, over her right eye. Her left cheek was bandaged in spots. Her right ankle was bandaged and slightly elevated. But she was ready to talk. "Well, am I being arrested for attempted murder?"

"Not yet," Creighton said in his inimitable way. "As a matter of fact, our visit includes our thanks for your attempt to help the colonel *not* to be murdered." Creighton handed photos to Harvey to show her. She had some trouble focusing on the vivid picture but saw what was being traced for her. Bridgestone was straddling Harvey's prone body and she was screaming—at Siddons. She studied the images and then let it drop to her chest. Her eyes went to Creighton's. He said, "Tell Colonel Stovall your thanks, if that's what you are tendering. He pointed out that you seemed to be trying to help him, not hurt him."

"Yes," she said.

"Why were you trying to help him?"

"I knew those two were up to no good. I followed them."

"There's more than that."

"Does this have any connection with General McGraw?" Harvey asked.

She was silent.

"Miss Bridgestone," Harvey said, going off the script he and Creighton prepared, "who was David McGraw to you?"

"A missing general."

"Who is Alyce Siddons to you?"

“I saved your life from her.” She then put a hand to her brow, her eyes closing... which could be feigned, could be real. And she had a point. The two men gave their thanks, and withdrew, with Creighton closing the door—but not after catching the eye of Bridgestone as he dramatically let her know she was not off the hook—yet.

Outside the room, Creighton told Lt. Col. Stovall, “Start figuring out who wants you dead. And why.”

“Is this connected with the attempt on Joe’s life?”

“I don’t know,” Creighton said. “And for me not to know...”

**

Three weeks later, after a bone-grinding day at his Langham desk, Harvey spent a bone-grinding evening corralling a report for McNarney and after three cups of coffee sought the men’s room. As he was washing his hands, he heard shuffles of noise---and then, in the mirror, saw one of the wooden stalls rattling open, and a pale face peered at him.

Glad his fly was zipped, Harvey turned around: “Miss Bridgestone?”

“I thought you’d never get here,” she whispered. “I’m being followed—”

“You have been tailed,” Harvey said, reasonably.

“I know those two bas-- guys are out to—I don’t know, maybe *kill me*—”

Harvey knew it was not the time for rationalization; her teeth were clenched with fear and spit flew from her mouth. “How can I help you?”

She pled for him to take her *somewhere safe*. He got her to his office; he hastily locked up documents, tables, reports, and letters into a drawer, glad he had two more days before submitting the report to McNarney. Thinking ahead, he knew a woman with her left arm in a sling would attract attention, and he flung his trenchcoat over her shoulders. They exited through two back offices which led to a concealed set of stairs—which is how more than a few generals and special guests had entered and left the premises. She was silent during all this, but her face was straight and she asked no questions. .

Holding her right hand, he checked the one staff car and the two Jeeps and praise God, one of the Jeeps had keys in it—possibly on somebody’s orders, but Harvey decided to face that music later, if it struck up. They climbed in, Harvey turned the key in the ignition and carefully wheeled them out...and into a soft late summer rain that was suddenly punctuated by a growling rip of thunder. Harvey, his rank on full display and donning a poker face, drove up to the gate sentry—and said, in a tight voice, “You’re needed in the garage.”

The sentry called for a replacement and then hot footed it away, and they drove out. Harvey dug into his memory and finally found King’s Cross station. He parked the Jeep on a side street, helped her out, and they strolled into the soaring building...and practically jumped on an express. They got off at Sudstree and as the late evening light succumbed to night, they walked and walked until Pinetree rose up, ghostly gray. “Where?” she said. This was the first time she had spoken in an hour. “A good place,” he fibbed. He hoped. Although collected, she had trembling fits and kept nervously rubbing her forehead.

Harvey knew of the concealed doors and even a sliding passage that led into the dank bowels of Pinetree. It was crudely electrified with glaring bulbs set every ten feet. The final door had to be stepped through like a ship’s door; a right angle gave onto a room and they finally came to a stop at two mismatched chairs at a metal table. She dropped into one. “Thank God. And thank you, Colonel.”

“Skip it,” said Harvey, not unkindly, thinking about where the nearest phone was. “If you have thanks, you know what’s more important—information.”

“God, yeah,” she muttered. She smoothed her hair, wincing as she pulled her arm out of the sling, and then replacing it. “I’d uh, kill, for a cup of tea.”

As if in response, they heard the elevator, far down the corridor, thump and the cage-door opened.

Footsteps—two pairs--coming closer. Her right hand flew to her mouth.

Harvey, for once, wished he carried a pistol.

A figure came to the door. Backlighting in dim light...“Dave?” Harvey said.

“They’re here, bring it on,” he called over his shoulder. Creighton’s aide, still the same man, who never seem to change expression, arrived, carrying a tea tray. He put it down and actually spoke: “One lump or two, mam, sirs, mam?”

“Thank you,” Creighton said with grim amusement after he finished serving the tea. “Keep watch.”

“How did you find us?” whispered Erika after she swallowed half a cup of tea in one gulp.

“Tails. They’ve been following you, but you two were so fast they couldn’t catch up with you—but they kept me in the loop and guessed right about you two heading for Pinetree. Well, Miss Bridgestone?”

She swallowed two cups of tea before she talked. By now, Creighton had produced a painkiller for the lady and didn’t have to tempt her with it. Simply, three days earlier, she had been nearly killed in what to her seemed to be a kidnapping attempt and she had been dodging in and out of doorways, stores, and pubs, not daring to return to her flat. “It started after I got—thought I got—a line on David McGraw.” She shakily placed a cigarette in her mouth and Creighton lighted it. She was now more adroit at smoking Harvey noted, but she was still a novice. “I’ve been trying to find one. I think I must have got too close.”

“What is your interest in David McGraw?” Creighton’s voice had become flint. “Best come clean.”

She went back several months. Bridgestone was the woman’s page editor for the *Kansas City Clarion*. She did it because nobody else wanted it. At a luncheon for women news reporters, she saw and heard Bea Wales, famous warco, talk. She was not impressed. Wales seemed tired and not very interesting, though everybody applauded. Later, after drinks with friends, she was driving her car out of the parking garage beneath the hotel and—she screamed when the passenger door was flung open and Wales was hurtling herself in, and down, with the dramatic hissed order of “Drive!”

She did—to her apartment. Wales, hiding in a coat too big for her, her face buried in its fur collar, insisted they take the service elevator up, and then waited in an alcove for the younger woman to unlock the door, turn on the lights, look around, and motion her to come in. “Who was she hiding from?” asked Creighton.

“I don’t know. She was sick—in body, maybe the head. She drank all my bourbon and ate only crackers and took a fistful of pills and slept until four o’clock the next day. She begged to stay and well, I got kind of tough with her and said ‘You can if you tell me what is going on.’”

“And did she?”

Erika stubbed out a cigarette she had taken about two puffs from. “She said that a General David McGraw had become involved with finding an aircraft on some secret mission that really went bad. The aircraft disappeared and the crew was never seen or heard of again.”

“Was she helping to cover up the incident too?”

“Yes. No. I—I--don’t know. But don’t ask me what the mission was about. She didn’t know herself. She had come across some notes from McGraw, but no details. But one thing she knew for sure—that McGraw was selling his soul to find out what happened to that aircraft.”

“Why did he want to find it?” Harvey could not help but notice that Creighton, whose face never seemed to change, clenched slightly with excitement.

“It was full of Nazi loot. That’s what I seemed to get.”

Nazi thieving prior to war’s end had been known about, but the massive scale of their looting had stunned the Allies. Looting was always an aspect of war, but the Nazis had made it completely programmatic and enormous. Harvey had read about the Army monuments men rescuing art from hiding places in mines and caves; uncovered had been paintings, jewels, statues, even altars...and the search continued as museums and churches sought missing treasures. The Nazis had even stolen the famous Amber Room from the Winter Palace in Leningrad. It had been taken to Konigsberg and from there it had disappeared. So fascinating was the deliberate theft of art by the Third Reich—rumors were that Hitler wanted to open the biggest art gallery in the world in his hometown of Linz in Austria--that movies had already exploited it. Harvey and Melva recently had seen *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* in the Archbury cinema; Danny Kaye, in a curious musical, had played a milque-toast accidentally involved with a vicious search for a black book listing where Dutch royal jewels were hidden.

“I’m not saying yea or nay about your story—“

“Not my story. The one I understood.”

“All right. But do you know if this was connected with Colonel Stovall being set up for a suicide?”

“I don’t know.”

Creighton cracked his knuckles, loudly and deliberately... “Miss...who are you working for? We know you have filed some reports for US wire services, but you’re not a paid reporter.”

“I’m here on my own dime. I’m working for myself, honestly. But not the, the— loot. I’m just trying to get a foot into big time reporting. Of course...I would like to learn about that mission, the failed mission...I came here because, well, Bea Wales had a plane ticket to England and notes about talking with Colonel Stovall. It seemed a wonderful opportunity. Now I know opportunities can stink.”

“Umm, maybe,” he said. He motioned for Harvey to come with him. They both used a nearby men’s room. Creighton said, in a few crisp words that she was not to stir, and Harvey had faith she would not.

“Dave,” he remarked in the privacy, “you seem to know a little about everything. I didn’t believe you a while back when you said you didn’t know. Now I believe you. But what do you know about McGraw?”

“We are 99% sure McGraw did not go over to the enemy. Contacts in the USSR have not spotted him. All we know for sure is that he disappeared after being last officially seen in Nuremberg and perhaps sighted in Magdeburg. What we just heard is new to me.” He zipped up, buckled his trousers and then faced Harvey. “You’re right. I can’t get any intel from Washington. And for me to be stonewalled...I’m kind of scared what it means, and I don’t mean to my job.”

“Talk to her some more.”

They returned to the room and Creighton spoke again with the haggard young woman. “Miss Bridgestone, do you know why Bea Wales was focused on Colonel Stovall?”

“She said the Colonel had read certain documents given to him by a young woman, in Nuremberg. Those documents seemed the key to everything. Such as where the airplane went down.”

“I did not read them,” Harvey said. “I handed them off and they were sent to Washington.”

Listlessly, she lighted another cigarette and let it smoke in the vee of two fingers. They obeyed Creighton’s request to stay there while he went “topside” and made some phone calls. Harvey leaned back in the chair smelling dust, damp and cigarette smoke and finally looked at her.

“Want to belt me?” she asked.

“No.” He hitched himself up. “But how about listening to me?”

“Sure, okay.”

“If I sound too pat, sorry. But, Miss Bridgestone, consider this: We’d like to know what happened to Bea Wales. But I doubt if anybody truly misses her.”

“She did great work.”

“At times she did. But she was not loved.”

“I think Dave McGraw did. She actually told me that she and McGraw had their asses kicked in ’45. He got into serious trouble by roughing up some enlisted man and she had walked into a joke report like a rookie southpaw. They met over drinks, dinner and then, in the morning, rather than having coffee and saying goodbye—they made a date for dinner and to their surprise, both kept it.”

“So they were in love with each other?”

“She was but wasn’t sure about him...she did say he needed her. Just didn’t desire her. But needed her. I guess it matters. She’s risked her life—or maybe lost it—trying to find him or help him—“

“Or trying to find what he went after.”

“In any case,” she said in a slightly spirited voice, “certain recent events help me realize that I am swimming with sharks, wearing a raw t-bone steak around my neck.”

“Are you going home?”

“No money.”

“I bet I could find you some work—I know an owner of a news service...and there is a lot to write about. Not one-quarter as exciting but you wouldn’t end up in hospitals or in dungeons like this. So, what do you want to do?”

“What do *you* want to do, Colonel?”

It was unexpected question, posed with unexpected vigor. After a moment, Harvey knew this was no come-on, a trading of favors. She wanted to know what he most desired. But she already seemed to know. “Colonel, I held out on, uh, General Creighton. The plane that McGraw was trying to find--your son was involved in the mission—meaning, I think, the original mission, during the war.”

“Wh--how?” This came out in a harsh whisper.

“And that’s all I know. Bea Wales seem to take some pleasure in it. Colonel, I’m scared enough to talk for your protection.”

“You have it. Unofficially of course.” Harvey spoke like an automaton.

Down the long gray corridor the elevator clanked and Creighton came striding down, his noisy footsteps a warning. “We have an escort coming—and Harvey, some anxious phone calls from the missus.”

“I can imagine.”

“Miss Bridgestone, a question,” Creighton asked. “Why were you seeking out May Hudson?”

“If I could find something about her I was promised a very nice tip.”

“What kind of something?”

“Something to smear an important general.”

“What was the tip?”

“On McGraw’s whereabouts.”

“Who was giving you these tips?”

“It was over the phone. Don’t know the person. I didn’t find out anything. And that’s over.”

“If and when you remember—get in touch with me, pronto.” He paused to give his next question emphasis “And, who is this important general?”

“All I know was that it was an important general. I mean...well, they’re all important aren’t they?”

The question was too ambiguous to answer. It was odd, all agreed later, that more information merely clouded the strange web of events spreading over the last few years. Both Joe and Harvey were nearly killed. Both incidents had to be connected, somehow. As for Creighton, he had to heat up the search for David McGraw, now AWOL for eighteen months.

They went up the elevator, threaded through the back corridors and a staff car awaited them. Creighton rode in the front with the driver. Erika accepted Harvey’s slip of paper, with the name and number of a British journalists who had contacts with Anson.

The rains were not through and a downpour smashed on the car. Using the noise to cover her voice, Erika Bridgestone, hatless, lank hair, make up washed from her pretty face said to Harvey. “There’s a woman named Veronica at The Cup and Vine. Her real name is Mara. You want to speak with her.”

Harvey struggled with duty over humanity and let humanity win: he did not tell Creighton about Mara. At least not immediately. Did he know about Mara? Of course...! Should he tell Creighton about his son being mixed up with... Ah, Mike, he thought, wishing his son rested under a white stone cross somewhere, at peace, leaving them both at peace. Now...was Mike involved with something terrible? Erika described that McGraw was on a trail of a plane full of Nazi loot...and if Mike were on that plane...

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Five days later, dressed in a turtleneck, a light jacket and matching trousers, Harvey walked up the graveled drive to the Cup and Vine. A few cars were parked there, and some customers were seated on benches outside, enjoying pints of beer in the afternoon of sunshine, and waiting for the six o’clock “ordinary

dinner” service which Mrs. Trethels had created. She greeted Harvey and then nodded, with some worry, when he asked to speak with her housekeeper.

Harvey waited...tense, but part of his tension had been alleviated when he finally decided to report this to Dave Creighton. He let Harvey handle this on his own...while demanding immediate reports.

“She’s gone,” Elspeth reported, after checking the kitchen, climbing the steps, calling around, and then hurrying down the steps from the gallery.

Harvey hurried out to the back of the establishment, oriented himself, and then passed on the blind side of the greenhouse just in time to stop Mara Vellen from escaping through the ground-opening of the former black market dump. She had checked out the place for such an escape...Her dark eyes were neither furious nor sad; rather, they looked very tired. “Yes?” she said.

“Miss Vellen,” he said, extending his hand to her—to shake. “I am Harvey Stovall, Lt. Colonel in the United States Air Force. We’ve never met formally, but I have heard much about you.”

“You were adjutant to General Gallagher.” She shook his hand and allowed herself to be led back through a side door that she indicated. This was a store room for carpenters working on the inn, and had some sharp instruments. “If you are here to arrest me...fine,” she said.

“I have no such authority,” Harvey said. “Which means, that I really cannot even detain you.”

“You wouldn’t even try?”

“No. Rather, I want to know...how I can help you.”

“By forgetting you found me here.”

“That would ultimately not help you. Either you flee, or you’ll wait here until found by people more powerful than I am.” The look in her eyes caused him to ask. “Might they hurt you?”

“No. Not yet anyway.”

“I’ll get tea,” Harvey suddenly said, recalling Creighton’s kind and timely service a few days earlier. He took one helluva chance leaving her there by herself. He

spoke to the concerned Elspeth; he had found her housekeeper and needed to speak with her... Elspeth, rather than asking, "Why?" nodded to the man she beheld as her savior or at least Roy Rogers.

She was still there thank God, when he returned bearing tea. She cleared a sawdusty table and placed two chairs for them. He poured the tea and then dropped some milk into the cups and stirred them. "Miss Vellen," he said, "consider me your lawyer. All you say will be held in confidence."

She was silent. She was not angry; rather, she just looked weary.

"I saw you at the Congressional hearings, in London, back in 1945," he said. "You were very brave."

"How much information are you privy to about me?"

"Immigration control is seeking you. I also know you invited Alexander Komansky to come to London back in January."

"I solemnly promised my father to put certain things into his hands," Mara said. When Harvey was silent, she said, quietly, without a trace of fear, "Are you familiar in any way with the henges?"

"Minimally." Harvey knew of Joe and Sandy's seeking out of information about the Nazi device, and knew that the government was interested in knowing more about the "thing." Otherwise, Harvey had kept his distance, both dutifully, and personally. He twisted slightly on his chair. Now what?

"We don't have to speak of those things. But I can speak of the people involved with them. Casimir Posnan and my father worked out the principles of the henges in the late twenties. In 1940, an Otto Heinzma convinced the Reich to build them though they were not ready to. Posnan helped my father and me escape into the mountains and never gave us away while he was forced to work with the scientists they had kidnapped. Casimir escaped from Heinzma and was brought to England and eventually went on to the United States."

"And?"

"When I applied to immigrate to the United States---I was told—that I could not, unless I agreed to marry Casimir Posnan. I agreed. Then I decided not to."

“Why?”

“My surviving child died. I had no more reason to marry Posnan.”

Harvey did not let his sympathy stop him. “Why is this marriage so important?”

“Posnan refuses to work in any way until I am his wife.”

“Ah.” The next question was a difficult one. “Why does he wish to marry you?”

“He wants to protect me. Give me a ‘good life’—maybe a life beyond threats that he and my father got me involved in, without meaning to.” She smiled slightly.

“To be truthful, I don’t believe I would be his wife in all sense of the word, not unless I desire to.”

“Would marriage be so bad?” Harvey asked. “Unless, you love another.”

“No. Meaning...no, it would probably not be bad. But I love no one...I could barely love my children. I didn’t mourn either of them.”

“It’s freedom then, isn’t it?” he finally ventured.

“I’ve been little more than a puppet for science, for politics...now for—some war in the future—Colonel, your country dropped an atomic bomb on two cities and everybody knows that the Soviet Union will have a bomb like that soon. So your country needs something even more powerful and I’m being enlisted or forced—or extorted into helping—“

“Miss Vellen, the US did invent and use the bomb—but in three years there has been no other use of it.” He paused and then said, rapidly, both wanting an answer, and wanting to run away, “What are these henge things? What are they for?”

“Not for weapons. But they could be turned into weapons. The Nazis tried. You might succeed. But I promised my father...not to let them...be dismissed. He said they were capable of good, too. Though I don’t know how.”

At this moment, Elspeth Trethels knocked on the door, and came in, fearful but not apologetic. “Veronica, dinner needs serving and I can’t do it alone.”

Mara looked at Harvey. “Join us for dinner,” she said. “Then...I will come with you.”

As Harvey waited, sipping on a brandy, they finished the table d'hôte supper and served it to the guests. He helped them clean the kitchen, admittedly to make sure Mara did not run away. With Elspeth waving quite forlornly, he escorted the silent Mara to his Jeep, and drove her to his home. He had called Melva with a few details, and she said, "Say no more. A word I've picked up from you is 'weeds.'" Mara spent the night on the couch. She understood when Harvey dozed in a wing chair.

In the morning, Harvey, still dressed as a civilian, and Mara Vellen walked into a gray and damp Immigration Control office, near Croydon airport, where she told reception her name and that she had come voluntarily. Harvey spotted Creighton in the car park and was glad he had been honest.

Waiting, they could hear doors opening and the shuffle of feet...they were given cups of tea in a private room with gray walls and a metal table with chairs...and asked politely if she needed anything. "I need for Mr. Stovall to sit with me," she said. Harvey gladly stayed with her, aware of possible peep holes or listening devices. Also cognizant of this, she slid pieces of tablet paper from her bag and proceeded to write down notes in her lap and passed them under the table while she drank tea and chatted.

Her message startled the hell out of Harvey: "Did Clare Schmitz contact you in Nuremberg?"

He nodded, deliberately.

She scribbled. "I told Cl. to find you. You are trustworthy. She had to get documents safe."

He wrote a note back. "I received docs and passed to superiors. Nothing else."

"Clare's uncle chemist at Farben—it helped bankroll henges. I was told he 'knew secrets.' Before dying, gave to Clare."

These notes were safely folded into Harvey's breast pocket when the door opened, inviting Mara Vellen into ...a tangle of bureaucracy, a long trip...marriage and, Harvey, hoped, a secure life with perhaps some happiness. That quality could be hard to find and despite his current happiness with Melva how well he knew how it could change in a heartbeat. They briefly hugged each other, and Mara

whispered her thanks to him in Serbo-Croat. She translated: "That means, go with God, Harvey Stovall. Please, the henges...be careful." Harvey later figured that the documents the poor woman got to him were probably about the henge, that damned henge, not about Mike's missing plane.

She walked down the hallway. Harvey then left, and found Creighton, still waiting, drenched from a shower. He handed over the notes. Creighton read them, without reaction. But he let Harvey go. But his eyes...told Harvey to forget everything. He would try. God, would he try. But Mike could not be dismissed.

That night safe in his home, next to his wife, needing distraction...after an hour... "Well, well..." gasped Melva as they lay together, a bit stunned. "I may have to call on myself."

"Hm?" Harvey murmured, his hands entangled in her long soft red hair.

"For delivery in nine months," she said. "If that didn't make a baby, I don't know what else could." Laughing, they burrowed into each other's arms although Harvey felt some guilt. A sudden storm then illuminated the windows and banged out thunder that seemed to curl around the house and around them. "Hm, rain right now is so perfect," she murmured. Harvey tried to agree, but recalled how lightning was called "sky snakes"—and he sensed snakes all around them.

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The next day, Harvey found a snake of sorts in the mail box. Mara wrote what she could not tell him before being escorted away. Back in January she had finally located Sandy at Paddington Hospital. Defying the rules she had visited his room. Though running a high temperature, he was not there. The nursing sisters had no idea where he had been taken. Mara pressed them to find out. He was found, five hours later, listlessly walking down a hallway. Somewhat delirious with fever. "Colonel," she wrote, "in those same five hours, General Gallagher was almost killed—within only a few blocks away from the hospital. I know it must only be a coincidence, but the timing is strange."

Stovall crumpled up the note, walked to the kitchen stove, and pitched it in. He was shocked to his core. No. Maybe, but how? Sandy could not have—never—why? Should he tell Sandy? No. Not him. Still...

God.

And the next day, an enormous snake uncoiled through all headlines on all newspapers in London: “Train and road traffic into West Berlin stopped by Soviets.” He read how the Soviets had announced the evening before, on June 23, that due to “technical difficulties,” passenger and goods trains between Berlin and the western zones would be “discontinued.” A vital bridge near Magdeburg was blocked for “urgent repair work.” Two days later, waterway traffic was held up...considering that most of the food and coal came from the eastern zones, western Berlin, administered by the US, French, and British, was stranded...like an island.

Harvey was surprised, but not much. He was aware how the Soviets, from the get-go, hindered the Allies moving into Berlin, shrugging off verbal agreements, and bringing up other “agreements” that nobody in the west was privy to—such as the case of American Colonel Frank Howley who was bringing up 500 officers and soldiers into Berlin and the Soviets stopped them, coolly announcing that “the number of persons was too large” to advance into the occupied city. The Allies never received such a number and when the Soviets were asked to rationalize the figure, silence. Now the Soviets were taking advantage of a lack of formal agreement about railroad and highway use and blocked them. This was not the first time; but for almost three months the Soviets had periodically hindered Allied movements and uneasiness about the future had caused a stockpiling of supplies, brought in by air—at least air corridors had been agreed on.

And another source of uneasiness—how few ground forces were available to the allies, and how western war plans had been predicated on using bombs, like the ones with atomic power. Those would not only destroy the other side, but our side as well...

But plainly, in June 1948, Stalin was finished dithering about with free elections—notably, elections refused to install Communist candidates into Council seats in 1947 as he envisioned. But after a severe winter, forced migrations, and other brutal measures taken by the Communist authority, the people of West Berlin rejected it as a political regime.

The response from General Lucius Clay to the blockade: the American forces in Berlin, as the British forces had already commenced to do, would be supported by

an airlift. Then, on June 27, the newspapers and the BBC announced that the airlift would not only support British and American armed forces, but support Berlin civilians in the western sectors, whose desire for freedom from Soviet control depended on food and coal being delivered. Inspired by their British brethren, who commenced the airlift—and challenged the US to do the same--US forces squared their shoulders and waded into the mess. The first airlifts were disorganized, bringing foodstuffs that were less important than flour, dry milk, and coal, but a spirit that was born out of “let’s show that Bolshevik bastard who’s boss in the West,” the Allies, which eventually included France and Australia, started taking incredible measures to keep West Berlin alive.

Harvey then heard surprising but great news: Joe was flying in the airlift!

Joe: Firm in Uncertainty - West Berlin, July



The C-54 Skymaster, laden with coal, rose from Wiesbaden field near Frankfurt and into the air corridor. Lt. Col. Glen King glanced over at his co-pilot who was making his first run: none other than Joseph Gallagher. Brigadier General, both looking every year of his age and war experiences, but also grinning like a teenager behind the wheel of his first car as he entered headlong into “Operations Vittles.”

Joe saw King’s glance and damped his pleasure. King had been flying three weeks longer than he had, and the weariness was already besetting him. There was relief coming as more stateside reserve pilots and crews were arriving to Germany, removing their numb behinds wearily and warily from the DC-47s, which were being replaced by DC-54s to take up duty—for however long. A lot of men had been called up so quickly they had to drop everything from education to diapering the new baby; one pilot Joe talked with was in such a hurry he could only hide his new car, still being paid for, in an old shed south of Glasgow, Texas.

They both could not help but pull back a bit as a shiny Russian Mig scooted by—quite some distance away from their air corridor, one of three open lanes to Berlin—but close enough. Joe forgot his fear when he knew that he was following planes, and planes were following him. He remembered once remarking to Komansky, during the war, during one of their missions, “All these planes in the air—it’s a pretty sight.” Sandy had nodded but his remark was both deflating and honest: “It’s also to the enemy.”

Joe glanced out again to see the Mig gone—and then snottily coming around for a second go-round. So much for peace and “Uncle Joe” Stalin—who could not

exactly be defined as the enemy as a shooting war had not been declared, thank God. “Sir, I’m honored to fly with you again,” said King. “But what makes you take to the air again?”

“I asked to,” Joe said and let it go at that. He had volunteered in the first days of the airlift, as he understood everything was so ad hoc that any pilot or crew who volunteered was snatched up—including some glory seeking desk personnel, whose flying experience was at best adequate. Well, he was desk personnel in a way although he felt he had been buried in the dungeon rather commanding his duties from a desk...and those duties ended when Truman desegregated the armed services. After three days, his request was granted, followed by orders. He was assigned to the Airlift and thank God his health permitted him to do so. He told Ceile directly that evening; no candles, no special dinner. They went to bed that night with uneasy orders in their heads—make a baby. It would be a while before they knew. Ceile stayed with her duties at the USAFE hospital. She hated Joe taking off again, but he was a pilot before anything else—and that included her.

But Joe knew the higher brass could make better use out of a Brigadier General than having him fly in the airlift. The mystery of Percy Vivyan had not been solved; Harvey had been nearly killed in London. Joe figured that perhaps he was granted permission to fly in the airlift as a pilot was a way of protecting him—too visible to be knocked out perhaps, or a moving target is harder to hit. Maybe. Whatever, he was enjoying the airlift more than he should.

Joe peered out at the sky again, and said, “Well, Glen, what’s your opinion of this dance?”

“Not gonna say until they get air traffic control better. It’s working, but if this thing is gonna grow, they’ve got to figure things out better—too many close calls. There’s talk about two more traffic control systems going in to coordinate with the main one. Plus, what I saw at the beginning was pretty bad; with all that had to be done, crews just standing around waiting orders; planes were coming in half-empty, and then, once you get the stuff on the ground, how to distribute it? Then General Wedemeyer got into the act and appointed a William Tunner who coordinated the lifts in China and Burma and over the hump. I gotta cousin who

flew the hump and he said Tunner is all right; got the traffic in the IBC theatre doubled in weeks. But I don't know, supplying a whole city—"

The Mig, danced around them again. On the interphones crackled muttering and cursing.

King smirked. "The Soviets have tried to louse us up by parachute diversions and shining beacons right at the planes—and then these jokers—but we're under orders to fly and not to engage in trouble."

"Wise," Joe agreed. The Mig looked like it was romping in daisy-covered fields, but one such Mig brought down a British civilian passenger aircraft before the airlift began. To roars of Allied anger, the Soviets had seemed to shrug their shoulders; the West knew they should be getting the hell out of Berlin; if they had then this would not have happened, tovarich.

The Mig changed directions and came around again, sunlight winking off its silver body.

"If he wants to play chicken, let's play chicken," Joe announced. A certain day in 1943 came to mind.

King grinned. "Yes sir, I obey a general's orders sir."

The Mig prowled up, headed for them...at Joe's orders, King changed the course...and they headed straight into the Mig's nose, twelve o'clock high!

King broke out into a sweat...he glanced at Joe whose gray-hazel eyes didn't give a damn—here it comes, here we come...here it comes...

The Mig changed course and slicked off.

"Hot damn," Joe said in a voice that could have been saying "Pass the butter."

"Damn hot," King agreed.

The crew, which had not been consulted about the maneuver, cheered when they learned the objective.

But everybody was grave as they finished their run.

At Tempelhof their plane flew over surviving apartment blocks. King pointed out small figures on the buildings; heads tipped back, and waiting. “Now that’s a sight to keep you on your toes. Those people and their kids are counting on us.”

Joe took this in. He had been briefed about the whole affair but he knew you can’t tell what it’s like until you’re in the middle of it—pretty much how he learned how bad war can be when he merrily flew off on his first mission with the crew of the “Could Bees.” Could be...no, was...this was another interruption in his marriage. Perhaps fatherhood. After they had made desperate love the night before he left, Ceile said to him, sadly, but not reprovably, “I don’t want to be alone anymore.”

To his reminder that Harvey and Melva were fairly nearby, she said, “They’re far away and busy. As much as I like Melva, it’s Harvey I feel close to—have you realized that I don’t have any close friends who are women?—oh, Danzo, this is no conversation for the night before you leave—”

“Yes, yes it is...” Joe sat up, and bunched his pillows behind him. It seemed time for some air-clearing. “I heard certain...things...about you and Mag Johnsen there in Texas.”

“That he taught me to cook and like it?” she snapped. “We were never lovers, don’t be worried.”

“Good,” Joe said, honestly. She had tilted her body away from him. “How close were you though...?”

“Maybe as close as you and Lt. Lovelace. Don’t kid me, Joe, I can see you two meant something to each other. And for good reason,” she admitted.

“Yes. Yeah. Ceile, we both had a hard year and a half. Let’s forget it.”

“I can’t forget not wanting to be lonely anymore. And, Danzo, I intend to stay lonely.” She was still turned away when she said this. He thought it better not to try to gather her in his arms. He stroked her shoulder and arm...and then said, “Ceile, have you ever had a girl friend? All your friends...seem to be men. Nothing wrong with that,” he said, a little too hastily.

She eased herself over to face him. Their heads went down on their pillows. “Not that many,” she admitted. “I guess I mainly ran with the boys. Baseball games,

flying—shooting—joining the Army. You know Joe, I've had women friends but not that many...Maybe I want no rivals to the throne. My throne." She said the last words sarcastically. "Well, I am going to try to be nicer. Less suspicious. But Joe, if I hear about some fraulein, I will come over there and cheerfully kill her."

"No doubt."

"Seems odd we were trying to destroy this city, not too long ago," Glen said, breaking into his reverie. Joe saw the people below and without seeing their faces could understand their hollow strained eyes. Political ideology was playing its foul tune behind all this, but the real objective on their part was to keep people fed and warmed. Yes, that was good. Clear. Let the politicians talk and dance, as long as their talking and dancing brought this crisis to its end with West Berlin safe and without a bomb being dropped. It would take a while. Joe had been brought up to date with affairs before leaving London, including how the Marshall Plan or Europe Recovery Plan had helped impel the blockade; the money issue which, ironically, the one thing the non-capitalist Soviets pinned all the problems on, and the need to stand up to the USSR—and Stalin. Oh, it would be easy to write Berlin off, but the West was taking its stand, and West Berlin gratefully accepted help.

So Joe plunged into the airlift, flying as much as he could, and was soon gladly marveling at how efficiency grew; the grumbling decreased; and how the clear cut objectives of the lift made the "dance" a lot easier. He never made a point of his rank, preferring to be one of the boys, but was glad when he learned the crews appreciated having a guy with a stars on his shoulders sharing the danger and the grind with them. It was an experience that was both bone-wearying but served up to illustrate a fine old adage: "It's better to give than receive."

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One warm night in August, Joe had suited up and feeling very much at home, sat with the pilots and the crews in the ready rooms at Wiesbaden, listening to complaints, drinking coffee, and waiting their call. Refreshed with six whole hours of sleep, Joe was reading the most recent *Herald Examiner*, flown in from Paris. They were literally doing a milk-run; fresh bottled milk was their load. Outside, overhead, plane after plane droned over; skids of tires were heard, shouts and curses as the crews unloaded and reloaded. Though not an entirely smooth

running operation yet, the Airlift was settling into routine, finding better ways of doing things; new runways were laid; better planes arriving; a steady sense of mission; flights were now arriving every three minutes rather than six minutes. But there had been “Black Friday,” a day in which three planes crashed and men died; it had provoked a better system of landing planes, and better attention paid to data coming from the weather shack. There was even some charm coming out of the situation as pilot Lt. Gail Halvorsen threw some candy down to the kids he had spoken with, which was against the rules. More kids, and he threw more candy, and when it made the news, his superior officer was angry, and then grew cooperative as giving candy to hungry kids took everybody’s imagination—even the toughest most insolent crewmember got a kick out of throwing candy down, tied to parachutes that American schoolkids created out of old handkerchiefs. Everybody laughed when the Soviet press screamed about this bit of charity. “Candy will not win hearts,” bombasted one state announcer.

Like hell, they all agreed, and the candy drops, called “Little Vittles,” continued.

Joe, as they waited their call, hungrily read news coming out of Washington, and European capitals. A thick editorial declared that the Soviet blockade had articulated Soviet aggression, and therefore simple subversion was no longer the normal way of business, if that ever been the normal way...and Europe and the United States and Canada had to create an organization in order to counter this threat. Joe, an exact hybrid of a warrior and a dove, agreed that enormous measures had to be taken, and these measures could be carried out with modern communication and travel. But they had to be backed up by guns. Big ones. The newly installed intercom crackled and everybody glanced up—“Gallagher, report to Operations.” Feeling a bit abashed—at least his rank had been left out—he gathered up his gear and left, wondering if he were being given orders to return home—which would not be hard, he told himself. He had done his part, and, frankly, was concerned at how he was “enjoying” the airlift.

He briskly walked down the gray corridor, knocked, awaited summons, and opened it to find no less than General Lucian Clay, the man in charge, black eyes weary but still able to shake people, including him. His aide was at a desk, chopping away at a typewriter.

Joe had been so long with the boys that he felt a bit gauche—he saluted, and then shook Clay’s hand, but knew this didn’t seem good. “So what’s up?” he asked, calmly lighting a cigarette. He had taken up smoking again, partly to pass the time, and partly to steady his nerves which were on edge with near exhaustion. He wasn’t proud of returning to the habit, and hoped quitting the second time would be as easy as the first.

“It came through channels, but you, Joe, have an interesting invitation—from East Berlin.”

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Despite Berlin being split and polarized into West and East, there was still car and foot traffic between the zones. Many west Berliners had their jobs in East Berlin, and East Berlin actually welcomed the West Berliners to the east with promises of free food—to the accompaniment of droning radio broadcasts that damned the west, told West Berliners that their Allied-issued currency was no good; that the Allies were only feeding them to exploit them...God, what a bore, Joe thought. As far as he was concerned, the Soviets offered little more than ideology, which they sharply defined as a desired contrast to the decadent West. As he peered out the windows of the pre-war German sedan, being driven by a civilian, he could see that East Berliners had faces that looked like tightly sewn buttons. Unlike West Berlin, which was already reviving under the Marshall plan, East Berlin looked swept and tidy, but the swept roads only went through canyons of gutted buildings.

Joe felt odd in a suit and tie. He sat still and looked bored as they were stopped, questioned, stopped, questioned. Trying not to perspire he recalled how, some four years earlier he had also been in a suit, in Germany...and sitting down with a group of German officers who requested his help in assassinating Hitler—after Hitler was dead, then Germany could surrender.

Joe jerked away from the memory. He turned his thoughts to Heidi, who had survived that and then so much else—she must have felt like Dante being led safely out of hell, but forever changed.

The sedan crawled through the reviving Tiergarten, down the Unter Linden, and then northerly to Prenzlaur Berg, a residential district. Joe was silent, seeing from

the ground the site of broken walls, gnawed by rain and snow, mounds of rubble, being slowly swept up and removed; people navigating their routes and their lives as normalcy stalled. Ground zero, he thought. Three years away from Year Zero. This could never happen again. He took revived pride in the airlift, which was fighting the “enemy” by food, milk, and coal—and chocolate.

The car eased through two intact gate posts, and drove into an estate which had been buffeted and damaged by bombing or shellfire, but never destroyed. He stepped out, looked around, and then, escorted by two men in civilian suits, who had stepped away from concealing trees, he walked into what seemed to be an empty house. He was led down a flight of steps. A young soldier of the Soviet Army, in boots and tunic waited. He nodded to Joe and opened a door.

The sight that greeted Joe recalled how, in the Ukraine, in a crumpled flight suit and crush cap, he had been led away alone to a Soviet officer. In boots and the distinctive tunic, the burly man waited for him in a chair, an arm extended imperiously across its arm, and two dark eyes regarding him arrogantly.

The man awaiting him here was in the same posture.

“Nik!” Joe said.

Unlike the Vorodenko of that earlier interesting “adventure” in 1944—this Vorodenko rose to his booted feet and came forward to sincerely hug Joe. Joe hugged back, relieved to know that he was alive—and relief surrendered to curiosity. Anything might happen—good and/or bad. Good—they were left alone. Bad—were they being listened to? Even more bad—was this the beginning of some new adventure? He had been sent on missions with strange opening acts, like this. However, maybe meeting with Nik was the mission, and the reason he was sent to the Airlift. Joe had been described as a damned good diplomat after building some strong connections despite the disastrous aspects of the Poltava mission... and the Airlift needed friendly voices talking over the drone of planes and Soviet posturing.

First, Vorodenko introduced the young soldier as his aide, Lt. Bronnitsey. He nodded and withdrew and Nik did not shake his head or send a harsh look on his back. They seemed to be friends. Bronnitsey spoke English well.

Of course, vodka was poured and glasses clinked. “Not like old times, but here’s to better,” Vorodenko said, motioning Joe to a heavy old brocade chair. He looked around the luxuriously furnished basement. “SS officer,” Vorodenko said. “I have been told that after the war, the fellow had destroyed all his uniforms and living here with his wife, pretending nothing had happened, when two of your officers knocked on his door, talked with him, searched his house, and arrested him. The bastard had a US pilot executed, took his head, had it boiled down to the skull, and presented it to his wife. The fool still had it. The fool’s neck has since been—as Americans would say—stretched. The wife insisted he had done nothing wrong and called the US authorities monsters.”

“I heard the story,” Joe murmured. “Well...what’s up, tovarich?—why the invitation?”

“It must be quick. We have one hour before I can be missed. First, I wanted proof you were alive. We know of that strange business at Bryncote. All I knew is that a man had died, or disappeared—there had been a shooting. That was all. I feared it was you.”

Joe leaned into the face of his old friend. “Apologies Nik, but do you know anything about that affair?”

“We heard Percy Vivyan supposedly abandoned his wife—she was to have another man’s child. That is all....I liked the Viscount, Joseph.”

“And?”

“And, that he was a member of the ‘intelligence community.’ I don’t think the Viscount crossed over to our side. We officers are linked like spiderwebs and I have heard nothing.”

Joe sat back. “Nik...this is in confidence. And there’s no ideology or politics or anything...at least that’s obvious. And I don’t know what the hell is going on except ancient mysteries, I guess.” Joe then related how Lady Sydney, in a rather casual conversation—that contrasted with the intensifying aura of concern and fear over Percy’s disappearance—that her brother had been seeking out artifacts. It started with a portion of a sword that had pretty well fallen on Sydney’s head during the wedding weekend. Then renovation had revealed old secrets—and the Lady Beryl necklace had been found, as he knew from the dinner party at

Troyroys. The old manse had been swept from attics to the basements and to all buildings around Bryncote for “things.” Percy—actually Percival had been called the descendant of Sir Percival, of the roundtable...his namesake was beginning the process of digging into earthen structures, hunting...for what?

Vorodenko smoked through two cigarettes as Joe reported. “Reminds me old Russian folk tales...all we need is prince, talking horse and tail feather of a fire bird! Poor joke...but what do you think?”

“Well, there are more things out there that are dreamt of in our philosophy, Horatio, or Nik,” Joe said. “I grew up hearing about the ‘star people’...” He told Vorodenko about—uh—the legends around his home in Connecticut, centering on Starfire Lake. “They’re deemed ‘Indian lore,’ but I never brushed them off so easily.”

“Neither did I,” Nik said. “There are stories like that in Ukraine—including blue lights.” They were both silent, as they smoked, and wondered... “Well, enough of this, it still does not give us any idea about the Viscount.” He poured two more libations.

They clinked second glasses of vodka and the chime seemed to bring them back to the current mess. “So, cards on the table Nik—my superiors agreed to this little trek because we need all the communication we can get. What is Stalin up to? Is it just Berlin?—which is more than just a city.”

“Stalin believes that Berlin should be in possession of the Soviet Union, completely and absolutely. Yes, it’s a kind of trophy. But more than a trophy, he wants to disfigure the British, embarrass the Americans, and show who is boss.”

“I know you—” Joe mouthed the words “hate Stalin.” He then said aloud, “Nik, what is your take on Stalin? We in the West can’t quite pin the guy down. Roosevelt and Harriman spoke highly of him—”

“Stalin is a paradox. He is one of the most intelligent, remarkable man I ever meet. He is like your Lincoln—from provinces-- by his intelligence and his determination he survived arrests, Siberia, more than once. He was a journalist. He writes, and reads constantly. He speaks softly and has a sense of humor about himself. One American I met in party of Averell Harriman said Stalin quoted Walt Whitman to him. But. He is an...” Vorodenko paused to get the word out: “An

ideologue. One idea: Marxism. And he will make his idea of Marxism work. Some say that Lenin wanted to get rid of Stalin but Stalin—got around it. He made the plan to bring Soviet Union into twentieth-century greatness. And he does it. And the fact that ten million people die, and maybe more—to make omelet you must break eggs.”

“Are the reports on the purges true? Or some kind of anti-Soviet propaganda?”

“Yes, to the ‘meat grinder.’ We think only half the numbers were reported.”

“How did you survive? We’ve heard what Stalin did to his officers before and during the war.”

“I was of low rank.” He tapped the boards on his shoulders. “And went into high rank very quickly because of purge of high ranking. And I escaped...maybe...because Stalin could not scare me. At times dying could end heartache. Maybe he knew this. And...I also have a cousin who helps protect me...she is not Stalin’s woman, but he loves her pirouettes at the Bolshoi.”

Silence while the two men poured a third small glass of vodka and drank a toast to the dead.

“Is Stalin planning to make another omelet?” Joe then asked.

“Stalin ordered Soviet Military Administration in Germany to celebrate the beginning of the blockade because he was sure that Britain, the US and France would give up, not enough soldiers and that ‘you would not could not start a war.’”

Joe chuckled. “Our General Clay felt that the Soviets were bluffing about Berlin since they would not want to be viewed as starting world war three. He believes that Stalin did not want a war and that Soviet actions were a way to get the West to obtain concessions, figuring we didn’t want to start a war. So, Nik, does Stalin want concessions?”

“Now I think he wants the whole *bardas*—*mess*-- to go away but won’t give up. Perhaps he is waiting for concessions but I think he will be the one to concede—after he makes such a long stand that he can turn something to his advantage. But Stalin does not want war. Soviet Union has little left to fight another war. Plus, he is tired of war. The people are tired of war.”

“Our side is too.” Joe thought about Curtis Le May’s reported strategy: using fighter escorted B-29s, the Allies would approach Soviet air bases and bomb them; ground troops attempted to reach Berlin; Washington vetoed the plan, thank God.

“Joe, when you get talked to about our talk—they will ask, What of Stalin? Well, I tell you as I told you. He is a paradox. He is good. He is evil. He wants our people to live better; but he will kill to make sure of it. He is strong in his visions and will do anything to make them come real. He is a dreamer but cannot separate dream from reality. He is personally responsible for the meat grinder in the thirties; he would assure the denounced one minute, and in the next, order arrest, trial and execution. I have heard that before war broke out, he both denied and feared it, and when it came, nearly resigned. He was drunk for weeks. Then he came to himself and inspired our nation. But what I have heard recently is that his paranoia is growing worse. So it is...”

“We’re spending a lot of money, and men who thought they were home are in the air, and people have died...but this airlift has kind of re-united Britain and the US, gave France a kind of a shot in the arm after their less than stellar actions in the war—you know, they blew up the radio towers that were giving the incoming planes such trouble?-- and a helluva lot of Germans who considered the Allies as vermin are figuring maybe we’re okay after all. My mother tells me that one of the most affecting articles she saw come across the wires was about the life of a West Berlin family—such as how the mother and the family may get up at two in the morning when the power comes on; the kids do their homework and she cooks and cleans as she can. Started a lot of sympathy in the US. But yeah, this is gonna be a thorn in both our sides.”

“Yes,” Vorodenko said, and a look of unbearable sadness crossed his face.

“What other thorns are you feeling?” Joe asked, gently. “Nik, I saw a picture once—”

“Of wife and child.” Vorodenko face clenched. “They died in the Ukraine.”

Silence. “During the...troubles?” Joe knew he was using a term the Irish used to describe their political agonies. But he didn’t wish to say the words “famine...and collectivization.” Carried through by Stalin and his party secretaries, it was said

that over ten million had died of starvation and illness, and Vorodenko said, the number may be only half.

Vorodenko read his thoughts. “Add to that cannibalism.” He lighted a cigarette with a shaking hand. “My wife’s brother was a party secretary there and was trying to help those wretched peasants—who were hoarding wheat against starvation. My wife took our son when she went to see her brother. She died too with her brother when he was arrested for being a Trotskyite.”

“And...your son?”

“From what I could learn...the boy was starving, was killed stealing potatoes from a garden. The man who killed him...ate him.”

“God,” Joe said softly. “How can you serve...Stalin?”

“The boy—with his finger in the dike—I and other men like me—feel we are keeping the dike from giving way. Stalin can listen. Although those he listens to must be so—careful. You know one reason Stalin trusts me as he did?—I was never member of the Party.” Joe’s expression urged him on. “Stalin came to believe that card-carrying Party members, due to their closeness to the centers of power might be spies. Agent provocateurs. Counter-revolutionaries...Trotskyites...one word of denunciation might be all it took.” He looked at his large, remarkably graceful hands. “I have so far survived his purges. Purges which took the lives of men he once trusted and helped him. Purges who took officers and generals and admirals. He turned them into his enemies for no reason except his paranoia. I hope I can escape him some day and Irina and I live in our *dacha*. I have been given one.”

“Would it be better if the dike gave way?”

“If Stalin goes, who would replace him? Someone worse?— perhaps.”

Time was running out. They knocked back another round of vodka. “Tell your superiors what I say.”

“You tell yours...including Stalin, if you can.”

“Of course. Despite being ideologist—and a bloody idiot--he believes in ‘backburner’ talks too.”

“Nik...two things. How close are you folks to having the bomb?”

“Close enough,” Nik admitted, sternly. “If you think we Russians—“

“Didn’t say that. But when?”

“By end of decade. And, so?”

“No one nation should have ‘all the marbles’—being armed equally may be another way of keeping the peace, but preventing war. That’s the best to hope for these days.”

Nikolai Borisovich nodded at this. “The second? But first, let me talk...Joe, what happened there in London? When you were to meet with me?”

“Were we to meet?...when?”

“December 30.”

“I was meeting you?” Joe’s memory of that night suddenly crystallized. He was meeting Vorodenko at the Jersey Lily Hotel, in Turnet Close. Or meeting Lt. Bronnitsey who would take him to Vorodenko. He sat there, face placid, mind reeling...“I was struck by a car—a lorry, actually.”

“Then the stories were true.”

“Yes.” Joe could feel, see—his memory unfolding, like a deck of cards being fanned out—

“What did you wish to talk with me about?”

The cards refolded. “There was a fighter pilot, a Harley Wilson in the 511th attached to the 918th...” Lt. Harley Wilson, P-51 pilot had figured large in Joe’s thinking recently as Ceile had unknowingly copied his foolhardy stunt of rescuing Joe Gallagher back in early 1944. It threw bright light on a recent letter from his grieving sister...a Mrs. Watson wrote to Joe asking if knew anything more about her brother’s fate. Joe had penned a letter that was sincere in his admiration of Harley’s courage, and was silent on Harley’s thirst for fame. He was like an alcoholic, one of his fighter pilot friends said of him to Joe. One drop—and he was addicted, unto death. In his final flight as the outside man Wilson saved lives and but took his own and it was not exactly a noble act. Nothing was ever heard of him after that, no reports being sent back; not a trace of him was found. Joe took

pity on Mrs. Watson...and it came to him that he wanted to learn about that young man's ending. The unsettling and unattended wake for Harley at the Star and Bottle defined the pilot's ambiguities and it had bothered Joe perhaps more than it should.

"Harley Wilson saved my bacon," Joe said. Nik's abilities with American slang did not include Joe's reference to pork and his face revealed it. "Meaning, he saved my life."

"Is—was—this your aide, or your engineer or something who saved your life by landing your plane?"

"That was Alexander Komansky. He was at Poltava and the Bryncote wedding—and at that reception at the Langham back in 1945. He and Irina--"

"Yes, yes, of course."

"Coordinates have Wilson going down in Soviet territory. We never heard anything of his fate. No body, no dogtags, not even a report of a lynching. And I've understood," Joe said delicately, "there are rumors of Allied pilots being held by, your, uh, people. Can you help?"

Nik assured him he would do what he could, and his face betrayed nothing about Allied servicemen being held; either in shock, no, it can't be true, or yes, you are right.

It was time to leave. Joe this time moved in for Nik's hug and whispered, "How is Irina?"

"She gives me a little girl ten days ago," Nik said, eyes awash. "Who I hope never knows war."

"What's her name?"

"Bryna. Irina's mother's name. But sounds like your daughter, yes?"

"Yeah..."

"You need to know that I tell you something too." Joe nodded. "The impact diamonds—the ones smuggled out at wedding--processed correctly, they create an impenetrable shield against radar."

Joe had one question: "How?"

"They can't," Vorodenko said. "Big bluff."

"Are they good for anything?"

If Nik had an answer it was deflected by a knock on the door. Time. An American handshake followed by another Russian hug ended their meeting and both went to their respective sides, enlightened about each other's ideology, plans and hopes, each knew their words would be reported. Between Nik and Joe they agreed: war must be avoided now and in the future. Nice promise, a good one.

Sandy: The Distance of Doubt - Los Angeles, Summer

On August 1, Sandy felt uneasily at liberty. Barbara was gone for three days at a clinic in Modesto. The Armers had gone to San Diego to see their son, who was finally at the US port after two years at sea. He had no duties with the Air Guard. He had completed his project. Walkert issued both vocal and written statement of approval. Crusard promised him time off from their electro-magnetizing. His girl was in Seattle, and a call from her promised him to be home on August 5.

After cleaning out his temporary desk, Sandy made his way through the plant's main floor, empty of workers as there was a half-day vacation to re-set and test some systems. He was looking forward to going home and sleeping—for two weeks...

In the silence, he heard Walkert rapping on his office window. After getting Sandy's attention, he motioned him to come to his office. "Damn," Sandy muttered, scaling the pine steps, wanting to get home and into the shower to lather the smell of fuel and machinery the hell out of his hair—and mull over again his interview at Cal Tech. His interview two weeks earlier had gone well it seemed, but the days dragged on and there was no word.

He opened the door of Walkert's office to find Ian Crusard also there, a tumbler of whiskey and soda in his hand. "Well, congratulations," he said, beaming. "Wally Barton is extremely pleased with your work and will be adapting it for the 108 model—with your work, Bartonair can get that plane landing and taking off in extremely cold conditions—should be a great hit in the Alaskan territories." He paused. "It could make Bartonair thousands—thousands--of dollars."

"Thank you," Sandy said, politely accepting a similar tumbler of whiskey and soda. "You know, I never have met Mr. Barton personally." He took a few sips.

"Well, he's still not in good health," Crusard said. He then continued to talk while Claud Walkert nodded, spoke a few words and...then the words began to blur, like a rainy window fogging up on the inside, soaking wet on the outside. Had...the...drink...been...

Sandy woke up with a mouth so dry it was an effort to open his lips.

He drifted on for a time. Finally, consciousness began to intrude again on his brain, which felt like a flat, gray circle. The circle became diamond shaped panes.

He was in a bed—a large, beautiful bed—in a place he did not know...

He landed on the floor and his legs went out from under him. He sawed about on the Oriental rug he had fallen on when a triangle of light fell on his face...from an open door.

Crusard spoke. "Don't be scared. You're at my cabin."

Sandy could not even utter an obscenity his tongue was so parched.

He couldn't help Sandy get to his feet, but encouraged him to get on his knees and then carefully stand up—then shower, breakfast, and he'd feel better. He gestured toward the bathroom. While Sandy used the toilet, and made himself realize he was *fully clothed*, Crusard turned on the water in the shower and pointed out a razor. After he finished showering, and before lathering his face, Crusard handed him a cup of coffee in an exquisite china cup and saucer through the open door. "No garbage in it," Crusard said, lightly. "Fresh clothes for you on the bed--and then you'll start getting some answers."

Better to know the crap he was in than not. He drank the coffee...and after a moment's nausea, he suddenly felt hungry. Clothed in his trousers, a plaid shirt not his own, fresh socks on his feet, he laced up his own shoes and opened the door to find himself on the landing that overlooked a beautiful living room. Two stories in height, the room enclosed rich rugs, magnificent furniture, and a two-story picture window framed a view of a nearby lake, backdropped by mountains so high they still had snowy tips. Ian Crusard lounged on a velvet davenport below, drinking coffee. Unlike the guy living in his office with a hotplate and a cot, here he was king of the hill.

"Well, come along!" he cheerfully called. "We're sorry we had to do it like this," he said as Sandy descended the handcarved staircase. He sat down in a velvet chair, the cushions of which gave like butter. Sandy felt a lump on his butt, which was his wallet... He took it out and found everything intact, including the piece of amber. Seeing that steadied him. It was a good luck piece; he had to believe that.

"Do what and why the hell?" he asked with some vigor.

“To keep secretive matters secret Sandy—this is for your own good, trust me.” Crusard gave him a fresh cup of coffee, poured from an antique silver teapot. Sandy took a gulp, and his reviving mind found his former CO... who could handle any situation and that sometimes meant keeping his mouth...shut.

He simply asked where they were.

“Karak des Chevaliers...my mountain cabin. This I hung onto after the hey-day. The name came from a crusader’s castle in Syria. We drove here last night.”

“So I’ve been kidnapped?” Sandy said calmly.

“Escorted quietly.”

“Then I’m free to go?”

“What we are going to show you, this should be considered—well, again, highly confidential.”

He had to play along. He was finally going to learn something, whatever the hell it was.

Breakfast was then served by a scrupulously clean middle-aged woman who may have been a spy, the way Crusard was acting around her—gracious but somehow furtive. She was short but looked powerful and Sandy wondered if she had hauled him upstairs the night before. Sandy was recalling that strange night, back in early 1944, when he followed Helene Conboy to her home after she had been led away by a short man. He then was intercepted by the same man and hauled in...not into a nest of spies but a sorrowing family. He had kept his mouth shut, just like he should now. Talkative, Crusard told Sandy how he had sold out everything to keep Bartonair afloat, except for this place.

Breakfast over, Sandy was directed to a bathroom to wash his hands. Not surprisingly, he saw no phones. There was a radio next to the kitchen swinging doors. He then calmly walked with Crusard out on the terrace, carrying a picnic basket as requested. Crusard limped along. A sturdy little boat with an outboard motor bobbed and bumped against the small wooden dock. Crusard held onto Sandy’s arm as he climbed down in the boat. After Crusard was situated, Sandy revved the motor, and they maneuvered out into the lake, still dark with shadows from the mountains.

They reached another pier on the other side. With the help of a chain and windlass, Crusard got himself out of the boat, and Sandy handed him crutches and carried the picnic basket.

A Jeep awaited at the end of the rough stone pier.

Walkert was at the wheel. "Good morning," he called. Sandy helped Crusard into the back and climbed in beside him. The Jeep plunged down a road that carved through pine and aspen. The road curved around a pocket lake, which was spinning off coils of blue mist. The continued over a sunny stretch of tough, harsh grass, following a pipeline.

"There we are," said Crusard.

Ahead: a henge.

**

They drew up to a clapboard shack at some distance from the henge. Beyond the shack were fragments of foundations and trampled ground, the ghost remains of Angel's Share, a boom mining town Crusard had spoken of being on his property. A colliery tower stood over the glory hole. Like any other ghost town, scavengers had claimed its sawn lumber and bricks.

Sandy was silent, wondering how the hell—they could not have built the henge by themselves. Probably Bartonair employees built it. The furtive feeling he had sensed there was real, not his imagination.

Walkert then spoke. "You should have been here months ago. It took us a while to realize this. Right under our noses, as the saying goes."

"Thank you, sir." Dumb answer. It seemed safe to be agreeable.

They climbed out of the Jeep to sit on some crude benches. Crusard opened the picnic basket and served sandwiches and coffee and Walkert lit into his ham and cheese like he was starving, and then talked with his mouth full. This was a Bartonair project. No government. No publicity. The lands they were on belonged to Crusard. Secret. Once operable, the henge would be sold for a fabulous sum; he didn't say to whom.

"You were involved with henges in Europe," said Walkert, directly.

"I saw them," Sandy said. "Two only. Neither worked."

"The henge can only be operated with a bell." Walkert said this in a dismissing tone, but Sandy finally heard key information about the henges. About Ray. About Ray's final words.

Bells. Glockes...

"Yes," Crusard said, tightly. "And where are these bells?" But he directed this to Walkert.

"That depends on where Casimir Posnan is," Walkert said. He looked at Sandy, tastelessly munching on a sandwich. "You will tell us where he is?"

"Where who is?"

"Casimir Posnan."

"Who?"

Walkert slammed him with a full backhanded slap. For a second he was a terrified kid in that goddamned basement... and he guiltily recalled poor old Sgt. Trask, knocked known by his angry fist, and sprawling, looking shocked and guilty on the floor of that Russian church... "I don't know a Casimir Posnan," he said.

Walkert's hand slammed him again. He merely stared back, his face throbbing. *I could die right here and now.* Play along, somehow... "Uh, sir, why do you think I know Casimir Posnan?"

Walkert stood up, entered the shack, and came back with the *Saturday Evening Post*. "This article tells how you were the aide to the general Gallagher who was connected with Posnan in various ways. I know he led an expedition to Yugoslavia to carry henge scientists out. Your name is not there but you were with him. It makes perfect sense. You met with Yellich Vellen and his daughter Mara. Vellen worked with Posnan before the war. We also know that you were at Bryncote, in England—where Posnan stayed prior to being smuggled out." He then said, "One day you or your girlfriend left your satchel behind. The initials told me a lot. Yes, I looked through it. And found a note from Mara Vellen."

Sandy decided to agree with Walkert's panel of evidence.

Walkert then decided to become friendly. "Come and see our project." With Crusard staying a respectful distance, Walkert took him into the shack which was a control building. There was a surprisingly simple console with dials and gauges. A valve drew water from the lake they passed.

They walked to the henge, its iron structure looking like suffering people with shoulders joined together. Walkert paused on the perimeter and gestured to Sandy. Crusard watched from a distance.

And nothing happened. No feelings of neon, no nausea, no desire to bolt and get the hell away.

"It is quite safe."

"Yes sir."

"You would not have to work here."

"No sir."

Walkert paused, dramatically. "Tell us where Posnan is. Think of incredible amounts of money."

After a moment, Sandy could only utter, "Ah..."

Walkert was obliquely direct. "I know about your women—this Aurora and Barbara."

"I know, sir," Sandy said. "But, uh, I need to contact people first. They could tell me where Posnan is."

"Who are these people?"

"I can't tell you."

"You mean you won't."

"No sir. But this would have to be done, uh, cautiously. Contact would be made at my apartment. They would trust me there." Sandy fabricated this without a tremor in his voice.

"Okay." The Americanism was harsh on Heinzma's tongue.

They all walked back to the Jeep.

Walkert then paused and said, "Wait for me." He turned and walked back to the facility. Crusard pretended to study the scenery. He pointed out a mountain tip that he called "Shivering Peak." "When winter light falls on the snow—the alpenglow is so beautiful." He then whispered, though Walkert was at a distance, "Give him what he wants. He's deadly. Please tell him where Posnan is."

Walkert returned, hurrying across the discolored grass.

They returned to the lake, motored across, and climbed the steps to the palatial cabin. The housekeeper, weirdly, served high tea, complete with scones. "Time to go," Crusard said, dabbing at his mouth. "We can reach Los Angeles after nightfall." They let Sandy ride in the back, undrugged, but blindfolded. The winding dirt road finally connected with a two-lane highway, which led them down out of the mountains. They stopped for gas. He crouched in the backseat during this. They once stopped, and led him behind some trees so he could urinate.

When they entered into LA proper, the blindfold was removed and they proceeded to his apartment.

Now he was expected to get in contact. Sandy felt like his head had four propellers in it, creating a lot of noise but making no progress in how he was going to get out of this...situation.

Walkert circled the Armer's home and parked. Sandy got out, followed by the grunting Crusard. He waited at the base of the steps.

Sandy went up first. He unlocked the door and turned on the kitchen light. Walkert came up. "Need some help Ian?" Walkert called down. Crusard then started up, slowly, grunting at every step. They entered and Walkert said he needed the toilet and did so.

Sandy and Crusard heard feet coming up the steps.

"Hey, warmonger!"

Blair Hurlbert stood in the doorway. A woman stood next to him.

"Well, Blair," Sandy shouted, hysterically. "Where've ya been?"

"Where've you been? I dropped by yesterday and the day before."

“With his bride to be, as soon as he divorces Arlene,” said Moire. She grinned as she said “Hi!”—right into the face of Claud Walkert as he came darting into their midst. He came to a stop.

Gene Armer then appeared at the door, saying their car was blocking his driveway.

“Well, hello, Dr. Walkert,” he then said.

“What are you doing here?” Walkert demanded.

“Komansky here is my tenant,” Armer answered.

Walkert looked at the multiplying faces—which included a woman who was returning the look all the male faces were giving her. He jerked a bow. “We are intruding. We will leave you with your friends.”

“Yes, let’s,” said Crusard. “Marriage eh? Well, best wishes you two.”

They left. They heard Crusard thudding down the steps.

As easily as that.

Gene Armer followed them, and they flung replies back at him.

“Are we disturbing something?” Blair asked, breezily, as Sandy listened for slamming car doors.

“Not a thing,” Sandy answered. He drew a long, shuddering breath and then launched into congratulations, at the moment forgetting Arlene, who surely had the baby by now, and how she had been sidelined by the former girlfriend. Later he remembered Arlene, and frankly thought she was well rid of Hurlbert.

Gene Armer then reappeared at the door. His nondescript face was still nondescript but a good hard edge was in his eyes. “Glad you’re back—we were worried.”

Sandy was silent.

Moire spoke up: “Should I know them? They look familiar.”

“Dr. Crusard—and Claud Walkert.”

“Have you been with them?” Armer asked Sandy.

Aurora and Barbara.

“For two days in the mountains. Sorry I didn’t tell you but the invitation just came up. We, uh, were drinking over some success and the idea came up of going to Dr. Crusard’s cabin...”

Armer apologized; Sandy bobbed his head like an idiot. Moire and Blair took him to dinner. He ate, joked, yakked about Aurora, and their plans to be married, and went home, said good night, and threw up. The next morning he bought something he never wanted to carry again: a handgun, a Walther.

And...nothing happened, that day or the next.

He picked up the phone to call for help—the FBI, the police, somebody...but was he putting Aurora and Barbara into danger? Should he call them?—he didn’t know where either was...Down went the phone.

Crusard, for the first time since February, did not contact him for their rendezvous in their secret labs. When Sandy, armed, casually walked into Bartonair on the pretense that he might have left a few things behind, there was some buzzing over Walkert not being seen in several days. Angry buzzing, Sandy thought. On the campus, the summer weekly *Trojan* reported on how Professor Crusard was missing.

The kaleidoscope had not formed a new pattern; rather, patterns were being laid over patterns...he had to find the real one...and one part of the pattern, he knew, was that somebody was coming to talk to him, very soon; he’d bet his life on that. Whether that person was friendly or unfriendly, he had no idea.

Komansky, let’s get some answers together, he thought. Writing reports while in the Army had taught him that recording things to make better sense. Writing a report forced him to see a few facts about poor old Wally Bolen’s flying errors back in early 1944... He went to the campus book store, bought two yellow tablets, three of the newfangled ballpoint pens, went home and started writing...the gun within easy reach.

Armer knocked on his door the next day. He confronted an unshaven Sandy...who eased open the door to peer at him.

“Memoirs?” Armer asked, looking at the papers.

Sandy merely looked at him and said, "Are you the person coming to talk with me?" He sat down at his desk, and brushed a piece of paper off the Walther.

"About what?" Armer asked, calmly.

"About what the hell happened four days ago."

"Thanks for not making me beat around the bush. First—"

"Sir, I ask the first question--are you the chief of Bartonair Security?—and nothing else?"

"I'm here in that capacity asking you about doctors Crusard and Walkert. This is the last place they were known to be seen. Now, why are you confirming my position as chief of security?"

"Then why were you at the other plant?—the afternoon Aurora and I found Felicity." He was silent and Sandy added, "How else could Felicity—you said you left her at Bartonair—could end up where we were—unless you had been there."

"Yes, you're right, Felicity got away from me there."

"Somebody's in the plant, right?"

Armer's voice held the unmistakable warning of "weeds"—"An important guest of the government."

"In hiding" was unspoken.

They were at an impasse. Each had information the other wanted, but fishing for it could prove dangerous. Finally Armer said, "Sandy, for your safety, keep your mouth shut about this guest." Sandy gave a tiny nod. Armer ventured further.

"Any help--"

"I distrust the word 'help,'" Sandy muttered.

"You have reason." His tenant remained silent. "I helped you once. With less reason to trust me."

"When?"

“Once upon a time, there was a skinny miserable orphan and a beat cop...who bought the orphan coffee and donuts and pitched the idea of him going underaged into the army.”

Sandy stared at him. “*That* was you?” he whispered.

“Took a chance by getting your birth certificate doctored—and you paid off, and big. I’m as proud of you as if I had made you. Now do you trust me?”

Sandy just stared at Armer, his brain assembling details.

“I was a beat cop, but I had gone to college and was taking law classes. I could see better than the other cops you had brains. That’s the main reason I helped you. I passed the bar two weeks before Pearl Harbor, and the FBI was recruiting agents hell on wheels. I joined up. In 1947, I became chief of Bartonair Security, but undercover.”

“Were you and Ray in cahoots—?”

“We were, about the ‘guest.’”

A lot of things now made sense—why Ray always slept in the living room, next to the phone. The midnight girlfriend whom he never met. “Is this guest—is why Ray died?”

“I think Ray’s death was accidental. There seems to be no other explanation.”

“Yeah, I agree, but it was no accident you were chosen to be our landlord.”

“You know, Sandy—I don’t think those two brains—Crusard and Walkert knew it.”

“Are they really missing?”

“Neither have been seen for going on five days. We’ve already checked out Crusard’s cabin. Hard to find; a map in Walkert’s abandoned car took us there. Neat as a pin, and not a clue.” Armer then said, “Are they endangering themselves—are they endangering others—you for instance?—obviously,” he added, looking at the gun.

“Not anymore,” Sandy finally said. For some odd reason he went to the kitchen and washed his hands. Armer followed him. “Can you help us if anything else?”

“I won’t run away,” Sandy finally said in answer.

“Make sure you don’t.” He left and came back. “You’ve proven my trust.”

Aurora phoned him that evening. “Sandy, you okay?” she finally asked.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” he lied. “How are you?”

“Glad you’re home. I’ve been calling.” They talked of unimportant things and said goodbye. He cradled the phone, thoughtfully. Well, it was not as if Aurora was completely innocent of the quality of strangeness in his life. Hell, she had taken the Greek message to Washington. But did she want something? Didn’t she once say “God, honey, you’re a walking story waiting to be figured out.”

And, so? He knew phony emotions, and Aurora’s were genuine.

So was Barbara, who arrived home, and gave him a call. They had lunch at a drugstore.

The door opened three evenings later and in stepped the most beautiful woman in the world. After the hugging, the kissing, and the lovemaking, Aurora joked, “Clark asked me to give everything up and throw it all over for him, but I said no.”

“Poor Clark,” he joked back, and they burrowed into the sheets for another delirious round of lovemaking. Though delighted, she sensed there was something desperate going on with him. In the morning, over coffee, he seized the calendar, and they set the wedding date for sure. She eagerly agreed and they found the date of August 15. Only later did she wonder if his rush was something desperate. Or, maybe just loneliness.

Harvey: Put Me to the Test - United States, A Few Days in Summer



In August, Harvey paid a sudden visit to the United States—where he had not been in six years. His assignment: help escort a 48 year old American woman named Mildred Gillars who was returning to the US for the first time in nearly twenty years. A would be actress, with silver (or graying) hair, a certain arrogance in her attitude, a face neither aged nor youthful, and with a hauntingly familiar voice—which a guilt-ridden bombardier had tried to silence by bashing in the radio in the 918th's officer's club--she was going back to the United States to be tried for treason.

She was no less than “Axis Sally.”

“And to what do I owe this honor?” Harvey asked, ironically, in conversation with Creighton, who seemed to have his ear in every conversation.

“Mara Vellen.”

Harvey froze, but also knew he was not in trouble.

“Harve, you’re no Casanova, but you do have a way with women. In the flight across the pond, you can learn if she was a sincere propagandist and traitor for Uncle Adolf or if she is...just a simple nut.”

“But as a civilian—“

“She’ll be defended in civilian court, but the US Army is delivering her to Bolling Field on August 21. Her seatmate will be a WAC, and this woman has been told to get her to talk. We want to have two witnesses to what she might say.”

“I still don’t understand.”

“Just listen to her. And, mum’s the word about your connections with Mara Vellen. You got her where she needed to go.” Harvey would like to know if Mara were happy—but didn’t ask.

Harvey didn’t tell his wife about his assignment, save that “I will be away from home for a few days.” Home...he was flying home, Stateside, which he left in 1942, a recent widower, a former pilot, an anxious and proud father of a son in pilot training. He was glad in certain ways that he was expected, after a night, to return to England the next day. He then got to wondering about Erika Bridgestone’s “news” about Mike. What could he learn, if he tried? Or might he end up in some dead end, or dead himself...?

First, he had to fly to Frankfort am Main. He did so, orders folded in his pocket. Arriving early in the morning, he sat down and napped; he was startled awake when the media swarmed in with the cameras and microphones, recording the moment when no less than Axis Sally, in detention for the last seventeen months, without a lawyer or counsel, would arrive.

Finally Mildred Gillars, escorted by two MPs, trailed by a WAC in trousers and brown low-quarters, came down the corridor to the gate. Outside, a C-54 prepared to depart. She was dressed in black trousers but wrapped in a fur-lined black cloak. Her long hair was gray and it fell about her face like drapes.

Harvey gaped at the woman: she was 48, about his age, her former beauty still lurking in her mouth and eyes, but she was haggard...and yet on stage, bespoken by her walk, her flashing glances, her beckoning to “her WAC,” who had stopped a moment to receive a note on paper. A brief he had been provided about the “lady,” was pretty astonishing. Little more than a failed actress, her persistence had led her, by twists and turns, to end up in Germany, announcing music and propoganda for the Nazis. She was unapologetic, claiming she was a good American, and helping the war effort.

WAC Warrant Officer Sahadra, her escort, nodded to Harvey as he wordlessly joined them. Miss Gillars relished the attention of the men and women of the press; and cried “Farewell to Frankfort” as Sahadra gently took her arm and led her out. There was a great deal of time spent settling Miss Gillars into her aisle

seat, with Sahadra taking the window seat. Harvey sat across the narrow aisle and Gillars flashed her smile at him, flattered to have a lieutenant colonel as a male escort. Harvey and Sahadra both signaled the pilot that all was well...and the plane took off, and finally levelled into European skies, heading west. Harvey, his ear carefully attuned to the conversation, listened to how Sahadra flattered Gillars about her hair, her appearance, her personality.

The woman sucked it up...and soon began talking, happily, about her work in Berlin...and how trusted she had been in her work, which included travel. She created her own scripts, and made her own decisions—"Midge at the Mike," she said, naming one of her radio shows, "could do as she wished."

Good God, thought Harvey. She was admitting she was no pawn of the Reich, threatened into broadcasting for the enemy, as Tokyo Rose, who had been raised in California, had said. She had her own way and loved it. Harvey, throughout the flight, including refueling stops in the Azores and Bermuda, listened, made notes in his lap, and felt sad—not for her, but for the whole human race which could fool itself into the most idiotic of situations.

They landed at Bolling Field, Washington. There were the usual complications of escorting Miss Gillars from the plane, too many cars, too many people, gawkers—and then he and Sahadra were escorted into a small office where they wrote a report on Miss Gillars and submitted it to a hard-faced lieutenant. Harvey didn't take any pleasure in his report; he found Gillars stupid, maddening, flirtatious, narcissistic and genially blind in her refusal to think she had done anything wrong; nobody really understood how much good she had done; everybody else was completely wrong, and were at fault for her errors, which of course she hadn't committed. But once she laughed uproariously that "I guess I might be called a bitch but bitches often get what they want."

Like jail, Harvey thought. Or hanging, or being shot at sunrise. Maybe worse for her, utter contempt of her vanity, egocentrism and stupidity. She would eventually be sentenced to twenty years in prison...and as Harvey later learned, she became a teacher at a convent school.

Confined to base, Harvey took a walk before turning in, and walked right into a humid Washington evening... Home. The east coast. The smells...the looks of the buildings, the shiny post-war cars driving on the right side of the road. He laughed

a bit as he recognized how even the toilets looked and flushed American—not that sometimes weak swirl of a British commode.

Harvey boarded the same C-54 thirty-six hours later for a return flight. This time the flight was full of US airmen, on their way to Berlin. He was glad to climb off in England but wished his new friends well.

Harvey and Adsley continued to review cases. They were able to get charges dismissed and reduced against many soldiers, white and black. Summer with its intervening periods of dry warm days smashed into by cold fronts, turned into fall, with falling temperatures, gray leaves, and darkening skies.

Sandy: The Distance of Doubt - Los Angeles, Late Summer

A long awaited letter was found in Sandy's mailbox. He had just returned from a weekend with the California Air Guard, which was training him to fly cargo planes.

With shaking hands, he tore it open and learned that he was accepted as a Master's candidate at Cal Tech, commencing in fall 1948. When Aurora heard the news, she not only took pleasure in his being accepted, she decided—not entirely—that this was what had been bothering him.

The commute to Pasadena every day would be too much, Sandy told the Armers, which was actually more in the way of inquiring about his movements: could they move? Gene Armer agreed to this when Sandy showed him the letter of acceptance. But Armer found them a place: a one bedroom apartment in a shiny new apartment building, wedged into a narrow opening between two older houses, on Orchard. Sandy said he could not afford the rent, but that was solved, somehow... "And don't worry, I'll be around," Armer said.

Aurora had to excuse herself from packing as she was meeting a sudden deadline in revising and editing a series of articles she had written about the growth of the Negro population in the northeast for a book Routledge press was publishing on post-war affairs. She missed the sight of Sandy pulling Ray's cremated remains out of the cabinet where he stored it over a year ago. He unwound the jacket from the box. He heard something crinkle in the inner breast pocket.

There were some notes in Ray's handwriting. Nothing notable. A portion of a map of South America--Argentina and portions of Brazil. He peered over it, and saw that some place called Rosario in the province of Mercedes had been circled. He replaced them.

He called Betty Komansky in San Antonio about Ray's remains and was fortunate to get her between flights. "Do you, uh, want to take them?" he asked.

"No...could you... get them scattered them over the ocean?—Ray loved the ocean."

He told her he could scatter the ashes himself—he would rent a plane...and brought her up to date on his flying with Air Guard...he might even test on jets.

“Renting a plane?” Aurora asked, erasing a typo. He told her about the situation. “May I come too?”

“Of course. I’d like company.” Then, suddenly, he called Barbara about coming with them. She needed to get into a plane too. He heard the reluctance in her voice...but yes, she would come.

“It was really nice of you to think about Barbara.” Her voice edged on frost.

“Well, she needs to get up into the air again,” he said, simply.

“I love you,” Aurora then said, sincerely. “It’s good of you to think of her, and for that, I love you.” But she still resented having to share her man.

August 1, Sunday, featured rare thunderstorms. They ate lunch at a diner and at 2:00 they were climbing into a Piper Vagabond, rented at the Burbank-Pasadena airport. He paid for only a half-tank of gas. A rain squall suddenly moved through. He glanced back at Barbara who held onto the remains—perhaps to hold onto something. She was tense but okay. “We won’t take off until this is over,” he assured her.

As Sandy completed an instrument check, a man ran out on the tarmac, gesturing with his hands about a phone call—and pointed at Aurora. “Sorry, but I always tell Jacobsen where I’m going to be,” she said with a grimace, and climbed out.

She sprinted across the tarmac to the operations center, yanking her khaki raincoat about her.

He turned over the propeller when Aurora returned. She seemed to be staggering slightly.

“What’s the matter sweetie?” Sandy asked as she pushed her way into the tiny cabin in a huddle of damp khaki.

“Not a damned thing.”

This was spoken by Claud Walkert.

**

“Move, go,” he said, waving his small pistol at Sandy—and fanning it at Barbara.

Sandy, calm clicking down over him like a suit of armor, did as he was told though his brain was shouting, NO, NOT AGAIN!!! How many times could a guy get kidnapped?

He would learn in the next four days. Cripes, would he ever learn...

He could take the guy who was nursing a bleeding scalp, but Barbara was in the back--as the guy took advantage of. Sandy radioed for instructions; received them, rolled the plane down the runway, turned into the wind, accelerated, and they rose unsteadily over buildings, trees...

Barbara finally spoke: "Where's Aurora?"

"Ladies toilet."

"Did she do that to you?"

"The bitch—"

"Is she alive?" Sandy demanded.

"I killed her."

Sandy gripped the yoke.

Walkert gave him the heading and using his pistol like a hammer, he smashed the radio. He already had a parachute strapped on.

Below the city ended, a strip of undulating green-gray shore, then the ocean. Walkert relaxed slightly; at least the pleats stretching from his eyes to his bitter mouth softened. He pulled a radio from his pockets; searched for a signal, re-set, tested, and then spoke in some language.

The plane flew on, with Sandy keeping a helpless eye on the fuel line. No air-sea channel rescue, he thought—no way to radio for help. No lifeboats. He finally spoke with Barbara. "Are you all right?"

"Yes." Her voice was steady.

Walkert told him to circle. They did so for an endless hour. Finally: "There."

A ship was below, tiny in the enormous ocean.

Walkert's radio finally picked up a signal. He spoke in a foreign language. He indicated for Sandy to circle the ship. He did so for a long time. Walkert was wasting gas so they couldn't get back to shore. He opened the door, making flying even harder.

Finally Sandy found hesitation pointless. He and Barbara were dead anyway.

"Who the fuck are you?" he shouted.

Walkert must have decided that obfuscation was pointless. "Otto Heinzma."

Characters and events marched through Sandy's memory: Creighton, Tib, two German officers—snow, tracking through it, and the kindly and shrewd Brother Antonius there in the Black Forest encouraging him and Heidi to fight for their lives. Then drawing a picture of the man, whom he called Heinzma--and who had spent the night at his monastery and then walked away.

Heinzma then pointed his pistol directly at Barbara. He asked Sandy "Where is Casimir Posnan?"

"I don't know," Sandy said.

"Posnan knows where the bells are—tell me—now—if you value her life."

"Forget it," uttered Barbara. "He doesn't know."

Heinzma then said, "Tell me where Posnan and you—I—her—will be rich."

Barbara suddenly swatted pistol from Walkert's hand and it tumbled down into the ocean.

Walkert, Heinzma, hell, whoever—followed it.

His parachute blossomed open moments later. Sandy headed the plane back, flying away from the sun.

Barbara climbed in beside him. "Good God, what was all that about?—tell me later," she then directed, seeing the low fuel amount. "Anything we can dump?"

"That," Sandy said, nodding at the urn in the back. "You didn't know Ray but he wouldn't mind."

She heaved it out. She then sat, hands clasped, rigid...but okay...

For an hour, the Vagabond flew. A few more minutes, Sandy prayed. A few more. The foam-ridged ocean stretched on and on. “Stick with me, please,” he asked. He was shaking.

“Of course. Stick with me, as you always have.”

The engine sputtered...a little, then more, and more...Sandy thought longingly of Harvey Stovall’s plain soothing voice helping him down, down, a heavy plane with armor still in it, dead and injured, and he had to land that lousy plane...he could land this plane—into water. Actually, water was better than land.

“Shore!” Barbara shouted.

Five more minutes, he guessed. Five more...Within two minutes, the fuel line stayed on empty. The gallant little craft coasted in...Sandy thanked the gods of aircraft it had retractable landing gear—if the gear were fixed, they could flip over when hitting water...down, down...

“You okay?” she asked.

“Yes, okay. Remember, Barbara...we’re not crashing, we’re just landing.”

Barbara nodded, mentally running over the steps to take in a water landing.

Sandy sailed the silent plane down. Waves rolled below.

They hit. Braced for a water landing, they withstood it well.

As the plane rode the water Sandy pushed open the cabin door and swam out. He gave his hand back to Barbara who seized it and they paddled clear of the wings and struck toward the shore.

Waves sucked them back and pushed them forward. Their feet struck sand. Joining hands, they plopped step after step into the thick swirling surf, gasping, flipping water from their hair, stumbling, rising up and finally heaving onto a beach redolently decorated with seaweed...but it was dry, and helping each other, they lunged away from the debris line to the dry rim of the outer shore and collapsed.

**

Sandy logily woke up to waning daylight.

He twisted, his body flopping against sand. His drying clothes felt like sheet metal. Barbara was on her knees, her back to him. "You okay?" he asked.

"Okay...the leg stayed on. But it's banged up...and see..." She stood up to point to a small fire. She had gathered spiny twigs and small branches from the brush on the sandy ridge behind them. She pointed to a chunk of glass, the bottom of a bottle. "Beach trash, sun, and survival bivouacs. We need more wood."

He got to his feet—realized he had only one shoe--but headed for the brush that rimmed the shore. Looking like death itself, the black spiny bushes were at least plentiful. He went back and brought some more and then more to last the night, slowly approaching.

They stripped off their clothes. Sandy waved his trousers by the fire and then dug the sodden wallet out and pinched out the piece of amber. Barbara saw him staring at the thing but didn't ask. He replaced it.

She told him to put a pebble in his mouth to suck on. "We'll keep the fire burning as a signal tonight—perhaps we'll get to higher ground in the morning." She looked at a bluff a few miles down the shore. "We should head for that. We don't dare go through the desert to get to higher ground."

"How well can you walk?" he asked, plainly.

"Okay. Really."

"Well, I'm sure somebody is looking for us—at least, the plane will be missed. I gotta tell you—knocking that gun away—I think you saved our lives."

She had already forgotten she had done that. She hoped she had not saved them for a wretched death. "We're both doing well," she said.

Despite everything, he appreciated the thing in her that had changed. A former flight nurse, even minus part of her right leg...she, Barbara, she was in charge of their survival.

**

Barbara slept and he watched the fire, and they traded during the night. Over the ocean's sound they heard coyotes in the desert worshipping the night, their howls fragmented by the winds.

Dawn. Barbara gazed west into the ocean, and then east into the desert, seeking smoke, where somebody might be cooking breakfast. Nothing. They might die here.

Well, why not here? It was as good a place as any to finish a life she was not proud of.

She could walk into the ocean like that actor in that movie...and knock it off, she snarled at herself. Sandy needed her.

Why had she come on this trip? She could have said no. But it had been a test to herself, to know she could do anything despite having a phony limb...baloney, or some baloney; it was a way to get Sandy's notice. His notice always made her feel better. He understood her as she understood him—better than Aurora!—she knew his vulnerability; he understood her disappointments in herself but didn't try to placate them—except to say, "It's not your fault."

Was too. She loved a married Navy pilot and she thought that if she joined the Navy then he...Godalmighty, she groaned to herself. She then trained in the Navy's first class of flight nurses—excited to show those "glamor girls of the air," the Army flight nurses that the Navy could do it too, but it would also get the pilot's attention. The Navy, in early 1945, graduated the first class of navy flight nurses. They shipped out of Honolulu. Three weeks later she was back, missing part of her right leg, and shrieking with nightmares of a plane crashing into the Pacific, shortly after take off. There were twenty men on board. She tried to help. She knew she helped one man but slid into unconsciousness and remembered nothing, not even the pain she must have been in as her right leg was shredded...and gone. Her Navy pilot visited her in Honolulu. He came by to say he was sorry—about their brief affair and about her leg. At that time her hair had not been washed in two weeks and she was mutilated. She was crying when he left but crying only for herself. What an idiot. She, she was the idiot. She had undertaken military life and her love life entirely too breezily, and she was paying for it.

"Good morning," said Sandy, coming out of his sleep. "You need some sleep."

"No, I'm fine."

He got to his feet and started up the slope to gather brush. He stopped at a gnarled, raddled mesquite and began snapping twigs and branches---a burning sensation told him he had been stung.

He smashed a piece of wood on the scorpion. Scorpions weren't deadly—or were they? He walked over the ridge and down onto the beach, still holding the wood, trying not to panic.

On the beach, she saw the fear on his face. “What happened?”

Sandy spoke calmly, almost.

“Ah.” She made him sit down, first taking the wood out of his arms and handling it carefully for scorpions. Mentally, she was rolling out her training, which included desert survival skills. Scorpion stings are not deadly, though the victim could be allergic to the toxin. She tore off part of her shirt, wet it in the ocean and placed it over his forehead and eyes and told him to stay still. Let's see—numbness—tingling—uncoordinated eye movements—swollen tongue—slurred speech—twitching muscles—respiratory problems... she sat there and watched, only leaving him to wet the cloth in the surf.

Sandy breathed heavily.

“Dear, how do you feel?”

“Lousy,” he said. His memories were circling that strange visit to London months earlier when he had also felt lousy. The message in Greek that had yet to be fully translated. What was the heir Commenes supposed to do? Too much to do with this henge idiocy that chased him. His life was a disaster. His mind scrambled over shards and fragments and made, perhaps, connections.

Then he was dry heaving. She gave him her hand and he clung to it. “Am I...gonna make it--?”

“Of course you are!—and I'm not just saying that.” She tended him faithfully. When fear crept up she fought it back. She would see this out. Even if they died here.

The sun began to slide down to the ocean. She cooled him off, tended to the fire, watched for rescue.

Sandy finally spoke. He seemed calm. “Look, if I die—and you make it, this has to be told...”

“What is ‘this’?” she asked, cheerfully.

His tongue felt two sizes too big for his mouth...his big mouth, which so many...times...yes, times...he steered his mind to what he had to tell her. His fever and fear sharpened his perceptions...like a kaleidoscope shifting, and stopping... and all the fragments created a perfect pattern, sharp, clear, and pointing towards some kind of objective. It was all so clear, so suddenly, so completely.

“Heinzma—needed Posnan—for bells. Die Glocke.”

“The what?”

“He...Posnan...knows where the bells are.”

“What bells are these?”

“More said he’...Ray was saying ‘Mercedes,’ in Argentina. Rosario province. On the bit of map in Ray’s jacket. Heinzma needed this.” He then sank into sleep.

She sat by Sandy, wondering about what he had told her. Argentina—Mercedes, in Rosario. Die Glocke—her college German....that meant “bell.” The man Heinzma—what in the world was he involved in? Probably had to do with Sandy’s mysterious trip to London last January.

The sun was lowering. She fed the fire, placed a cloth over his face for protection and then limped a quarter mile down the beach trying to find a wink of light, something manmade.

Clang.

She looked up, around, to the desert, and then to the ocean. A bright light rode the heaving waters.

She started laboring down the sand, screaming into the wind, and screamed...and fled into the waves to swim if she had to...Frantically, she twisted off the prosthesis and waving it with one arm while the other one beat on the ocean, she made them see. The thing slipped away from her hand and sank.

**

Now this was familiar, Sandy thought. He had toppled into a deep pit when a blast of fire sent him into a place he had to ride like rolling surf while talking to his colonel...two men—there was a can behind the altar—Jeep—GI uniforms—he surrendered to Doc Douglas...

He went back to sleep. When he woke up, the nausea was gone.

He was in a utilitarian bedroom, without windows.

He sat up. He didn't bother banging on doors or yelling. Instinctively, he knew it was time to sit, wait, and listen. Iron bed. Flat pillow. Army green blanket folded neatly at the foot of the bed. His face had been shaved. He smelled acrid soap. It smelled wonderful. A bag slung up next to him dripped something into his veins.

He checked his memory. It stopped with the beach. Aurora...no, Barbara.

No phone. No surprise. The room was warm; he sensed it was hot outside. He heard roaring from somewhere. Jets?

After a while, he went back to sleep.

The door opened, emitting a man. Tall guy...with a moustache. Dark glasses, the kind that reflected.

"Ready to talk?"

Maybe this wasn't a dream. "Where's Barbara?"

"Miss Corbusz is fine. What happened to Casimir Posnan?"

"He jumped into the ocean. A boat was waiting for him."

"Tell us about Mercedes, in Brazil, where certain bells can be found."

"First, Miss Corbusz has no connections with any of this." Then he told him what he knew. Ray dying, and whispering the words. The bit of map found in his jacket, with Rosario circled. Then scorpion toxin that finally made Ray's words coalesce and focus into sense. Bells were in Mercedes, Rosario Province... He then told them about how he and Barbara were abducted by Casimir Posnan. No, they didn't tell him where the bells were found. He figured out when was sick from scorpion toxin... Barbara was the only he had told. "May I ask a question?"

“No,” said the tall man.

He asked it anyway. “Do you know anything about Aurora Richardson?”

“No.”

**

He slept again, and when he awoke, he found dinner. Hungry, he ate the breakfast. When he started feeling sleepy, he figured the food had been drugged...he slid off into sleep, barely feeling the sliding in and out of a needle...goddammit...He suddenly started fighting the juice in his veins and came to, however, briefly, and saw the tall man back at his bedside. He lifted his left forearm... sure, Sandy thought, look at the mark. Maybe you can tell me what it means.

He then drifted through gray corridors for a while, finally decided they were boring, and found a door. It opened into a room semi-lit from the sun easing through venetian blinds. He was in bed. He was in clothes. The other twin bed was empty, its sheets thrown back.

He heard a clank, like a shower door closing. He raised his head: “Aurora?”

The bathroom door opened: Barbara, who looked like an angel. She was fresh out of the shower, and wrapped in a robe—and using crutches, came to him. The robe gaped open and he saw where her sundered limb used to be.

He sat up, she sat down on the bed and they hugged each other, warmly, awkwardly. “Thank God,” he murmured. “We’re in your apartment, right?”

“Yes, right. And thank you for saving my life.”

“Thanks for saving my life,” he said. Then, “So, how—“

“Coffee first—then questions.”

“Let me get it.” He got up, staggered a bit, but made it to the kitchen, poured two mugs of coffee and returned to the bedroom. They sat on the edge of the bed and sipped. Their eyes met. “Thank you again.”

“I did okay,” she said.

“I did too,” he admitted. “For someone who was terrified—“

“Well, you did fine.”

“How the hell did we get off that beach?”

“American fishing charter out of Ensenada lost their fresh water and were coming into San Tomas, a fishing village about five miles from where we were. They saw the signal fire and the skipper had heard about a missing plane and so came to check it out.” The skipper got them on board and ignoring some complaints of clients, sailed back to Ensenada, northward on the coast of Baja California. The skipper was a Marine veteran from the South Pacific, and when he learned she had been a navy nurse, nothing was too good for her. An American official from the consulate in the busy port town was on hand to take custody of them when the ship hove to at the commercial docks. They were lodged in the consul’s house. She spoke with the consul about what had happened, the man who kidnapped them. She paused and then spoke. “A doctor was brought in. After I had eaten and cleaned up, he gave me a shot to relax me....When I woke up, I was in a bedroom without windows, God knows where. Same with you?”

“Were you questioned by some tall guy?”

“Yes.”

“About Casimir Posnan?”

“And Heinzma too.”

“What did you tell them?”

“What happened.”

“And what I told you...when I was sick?”

“My turn. What the hell is going on?”

“I’m not sure.”

“I was told...oh, very politely...that it might be hard to find my bones out in the desert.”

“That’s what he said?” A wave of nausea went over him. “We’ve got to find out about Aurora—”

“I’ve phoned your apartment already. Nobody is picking up.” Speaking like a nurse, she said, “First, we need breakfast. I don’t know when we ate last. But before that, you shower.” After he walked a little unsteadily into the bathroom, she changed into trousers and a sweater. Using safety pins, she pinned up the trouser leg to keep it from flapping. She swung on crutches into the kitchen to start breakfast.

In the bathroom, he took off his clothes—new, not his own of course—and lacking any kind of tags. He soaped down, scrubbed at his hair and then stood under the warm spill of water for a few moments, his brain assembling what it remembered. As he toweled himself off the door opened a crack and Barbara’s hand thrust in a maroon robe, and a razor—both had been Ray’s, left over from his stay there, with another lady... He shouldered on the robe and found Barbara, balanced easily on her crutches, beating eggs and frying slices of ham. He took care of the toast and poured more coffee. The radio was on and Sandy listened to Andy Russell crooning “Besame, besame mucho...” The announcer then came on with the weather—and a date—August 4. Four days.

He carried the plates to the table. Before taking a bite she said “I know a sincere threat when I hear one. Did he strike a deal with you?”

“No.”

They ate. “You know,” she then said, “I’m glad he threatened me as if I had two legs. No pity.”

He smiled at her, a little uncertainly.

“Sandy,” she said, finally getting the courage to put her hand on his--

The door knob in the living room clicked with a key and the door opened.

Aurora stood there. Oddly, she was wearing large sunglasses.

“I—had given up—on you two—you were dead—drowned, goddammit, and here you sit drinking coffee!!—WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?”

“Sweetie,” Sandy said, getting to his feet.

“There’s such a thing called a phone you know!—a phone, give a girl a call—you,” she said, turning on Barbara, “You--!—if that were some—“

“Cool down!” Barbara barked.

“Shut up! Goddamn you, you were—“

“DONT YOU DARE ACCUSE ME OF A THING.”

Aurora slammed the door on them.

“Don’t follow her,” Barbara said to Sandy, who had flung open the door to go after her. “She’s got to know there’s something going on—but she’s alive. And in danger, too, I’ll bet.”

“Lord, yes.”

They rapidly finished breakfast. She sent him off despite his taut offer to do the dishes. She sent him off not finishing the sentence she had commenced before being interrupted. Before he left, they hugged each other. “Barbara—well, let’s see what happens.”

She firmly nodded at his words. She started to clean up, pleased with the way she had shouted back at Aurora—who had every reason to be aghast, God knew. But, increasingly exhilarated from surviving recent events, and standing up for herself, she dressed, decided to get a permanent wave, leg or no leg. She returned to her apartment, with polished fingernails and a new shade of lipstick, crutching along with great elan. She found a note slid under her door: she was to contact a Dr. Douglas, who would arrange for a new prosthesis. In other words, no Navy, no questions.

**

Sandy felt as though he was getting home from a bad mission over Europe. A really bad mission. He took three buses, then, calmly, shopped for bread and milk at the local market, using five dollars placed in his wallet. His wallet had stayed with him, through the ocean swim and being processed in more ways than one. The amber was there.

He climbed steps, opened the door: and there was Aurora, sitting on the couch, a box on her lap. She still wore dark glasses.

“Are you all right?--Walkert said he killed you.”

“Got too hard of a head. He thumped me good and when he turned his back, I decked him with a metal waste bin. But I don’t know what happened after that.”

“What’s with the cheaters?”

She took off her dark glasses to reveal two black eyes, the black fading to green. Like lovers should, they went into each other’s arms though a bit carefully and made love until the proverbial cows came home. The milk sat on the counter for five hours.

The time came for questions as they showered, had brandy, tried to settle down. “Can you tell me more about what happened?” he asked.

Maybe the guy who attacked her—she gave no name--was too banged up to finish killing her or tying her up. She had to gather her wits first and then she staggered out of the bathroom to get help. She was taken to the operations building. A doctor was called. The police were called. Alarms went out. She was finally told to go home. She did, and stayed there, listening to the radio. There were no commercial radio announcements of the incident.

After three days she finally received a call after midnight. A voice said “They will be home soon.” After three hours of waiting, she wondered if home meant Barbara’s apartment. She had behaved like an idiot when she walked into them eating breakfast. Sorry.

“I know it looked strange,” Sandy said.

“As if that—well—Sandy, if you two were alone—“

“Hold on,” he said.

“I think you’ve been told to keep silent.” He nodded, curtly. “Me too, I take it.”

“It would be safer.”

Too late, she could not conceal a gleam in her eyes. Her relief was immense, but curiosity was making inroads. This was something enormous...

**

Sandy did not know that Aurora was reviewing, categorizing, and putting in order a conversation she had with Vincent Hunt Jacobsen some two weeks before the

incident and one that had taken on new value in the last 48 hours. He was always Vincent Hunt Jacobsen to her, never Vince, or Jake, as some of his colleagues called him. Their meeting happened suddenly when he called her into his spacious office as she was passing by one recent afternoon. She did, hoping for a new assignment; if not, she had some suggestions--she then expected the worse when he said, "Close the door." Eyeing him, she did so and took a seat. "Well, tell me what you know," he said. When she merely looked at him, he added, "About what the hell your boyfriend is mixed up in?"

"What do you mean?"

"Either you've got blinders on...or you've been sitting on a pile of information and when you stand up and gather it all up, you could conduct a palace coup."

"What is it—that you know or you think I know?"

"That guy Komansky—you live with with—a whole bunch of stuff leads to him."

"Like what?" She could not keep her face in neutral. It had lurched.

"He isn't in the center but his name keeps coming up—"

"As in what or how?"

"As in Crusard disappearing from USC. Oh sure, it was said he retired suddenly, but nobody could say why. This Komansky was helping him with secret experiments, according to some students. The bombing in the wind tunnel. He was roomies with one of the people who died. Walkert, some power at Bartonair, who endowed the wind tunnel supervised his senior project—"

"What is all this leading to?" she asked.

Vincent Hunt Jacobsen came around his desk, pulled out a straight back chair, suggestively straddled it, and poked his eyes and his plans into Aurora's eyes. She looked away, recalling a quote: "Cromwell, I charge thee, throw away ambition. For this fault fell the angels."

"The clues finally—well, I finally boiled it down to this—there is some kind of technology at stake here. Something big. The Russkies got the bomb now, right? Or they're gonna, any moment now. So, we need something bigger. This is the bigger thing."

She huffed a bit. “What is it?”

“I don’t know. But your Alexander Komansky does.” She was silent, knowing that he was right, or right much of the time. Jacobsen kept talking. “This is something that could make me—us—big.”

“Us?”

“Kiddo, you’ve got talent, drive, contacts up the wazoo and you could make a hermit take a flying leap off his ledge—“

She stood up, offended but calm. He breezily apologized. “I’ve got a wife and a mistress, both of which I love so I have no desire for you--yet. But you’ve got class and savvy—your face, your voice are right for tv, radio—we could even start our own service—all right, maybe that’s the stars when we’ve got the moon--but--“

Her disgust with him boiled over. “Oh, that’s all brother—this sounds like some goddamned B-movie feature about the spunky girl reporter and the powerful editor—“

“All right, all right—but think about it, okay?—the man you’re with knows things. And if you can’t see this, then yeah, you got blinders on.”

“Okay.”

“I can still call a few shots. I know you’re working on that unopened Obregon plant story—“

“And not much making headway—“

“Like hell. And you’re not trying or you’re hiding. Come on, kid, your boyfriend was an aide to a big man in the Pentagon and this big man married the daughter and heir to the plants and the planes which includes this Obregon place and I got word that the wife and your boyfriend probably got into the sheets together--“

“Dear lord...”

“I could drop a word—not to your advantage. Say, the higher-ups want to take another crack at that ghost-blimp mystery from 1942...”

She felt that she had just stepped into the LaBrea tar pits for reasons of his making and a few of her own. She said, “If you want, and to make the point stick I

will declare that those two missing officers had been kidnapped by those—UFOs, or whatever they're called." She stormed out, sick to her stomach for various reasons. Including the fact that the mystery blimp was a mystery...and people and family were left behind with awful rumors to sicken their own stomachs, and Jacobsen was merrily exploiting it. Her dad had pointed that out in a recent letter.

She and Sandy completed the move from Catalina to Orchard Street in Pasadena, with Gene Armer's help. With two weeks left of his summer break, they planned their wedding at the Pasadena City Hall, on Thursday, August 15, and then a car trip to the Grand Canyon, for a stay at the El Tovar. She had agreed but wondered why he chose the place. She also wondered about herself, and Vincent Hunt Jacobsen's words...

**

On August 16, Sandy hit the road for the Grand Canyon. Alone.

Two days earlier he had come home to find Aurora packing. "Hey, we don't leave for two days."

"I'm leaving," she said, firmly, but not unkindly.

"Hm?" The meaning of her words finally sank into him. "As...in for good?"

"Yes." She folded a sweater, two skirts, and pressed them into the suitcase.

This moment, which he seemed to know would come someday, was here. Again. Only this time in person rather than a letter written from Greece. "Okay, tell me why."

"Sandy...do you want to know what your problem is?"

"No—though I am sure you'll tell me." Suddenly, his tone was acid.

"All right, that was awful. But could I tell you what I think a problem about us might be?"

"All right."

"I always felt you were fearing something. I think you fear losing me more than you love me."

After a moment, he asked, "Can you tell me how you measure such things?"

“No. But let me tell you...what or how I thought this--you’ve lost so much. You lost your parents—your home—lost your youth in the army and war. You lost friends. Ray. You lost—well--I finally wondered you must be scared as hell of losing me too—the way you let me go swanning off—if you put your foot down and say, ‘Stay,’ ...I might leave for good...You never once said ‘please stay...you have to stay.’”

Another moment, a long one. “If I were to say those words now, would you stay?”

“No.” She spoke gently. “Because I know something about myself now, too. When you and Barbara were kidnapped by that monster and missing for three horrible days--I was terrified. But not so terrified that I couldn’t help but be thinking—what a story. What had led up to this? Who was this man? What was going on? It was an investigator’s dream! I might write something so powerful I could—tell Jacobsen to go to—well, I might vault into the big leagues.” With Jacobsen’s tempting offers echoing, she said, “I think if I really, really loved you I wouldn’t even dream of exploiting the situation.”

“But you’re a reporter. It seems that you—couldn’t help—well, it’s part of your work. And you haven’t asked a single question about that business and for that I’m...grateful.”

“That doesn’t cover up for what—well-- we could go on like this but, I guess I felt as though I’d be kind of stringing you along.” Or getting dangerous people angry with her.

“Well...I’m not going to beg you to stay.”

“And I wouldn’t want you to. Ever.”

Silence.

“Where are you going?” he finally asked.

She snapped her suitcases shut and said, “For tonight, the Figueroa.”

“Are you moving back in with Barbara..?”

“I’m on my way home—not immediately, but I’m going home. I have a story to complete and it’s not about a plane factory not opening.”

“Oh.”

“Sandy...I don’t ever want you to—uh—look, I think you took up with me because you were lonely—after—well, there I was eager as the proverbial beaver. Have you asked yourself if you kind of talked yourself into loving me—wanting to marry me?”

“If I have...then I’ve enjoyed the imagining.”

“I have too. But honey...don’t ever take up with anybody ever again because you’re lonely. You get taken advantage of.”

He had no answer for this.

He drove her to the Figueroa and they stood together like near strangers while she checked in. He helped take her suitcases to her room. Civilly, they had a drink in the lounge. “What’s the story you want to complete?” he asked, in way of some conversation.

“I’m going back home but by way of the ghost blimp.”

“Hm?”

“Seems to me that nobody has investigated if those two men disappeared because of perhaps a UFO.”

“But that all hit in 1947—“

“I learned of an unconfirmed report of a UFO crash in Missouri, in 1941. Has anybody really investigated it? Not really.”

“How will you do that?”

She gave some replies.

When it was time for farewell, they hugged each other. “Take care of yourself,” she said.

“You too.” He held onto her arms for a moment. “I don’t regret a single moment. Except this one.”

“Neither have I,” she said, and with that, saw an elevator arriving, and hurried into it.

She then reopened the elevator doors and said to him, "I'll be in touch—about the Greek."

It took him a moment to remember what she was talking about.

He then wondered if she had received any warnings...to back off.

Yes, she had. And it included words to the effect of bones bleaching in the desert...

**

That morning of what should have been that great day, Sandy, toting his old B-4 bag, left the apartment Feeling as defiant as hell, not giving the usual rat's ass that he should tell Armer about his trip, and was probably being watched, he thumbed a ride, and was carried by five cars to Barstow, Needles, Kingman... A delivery truck took him into the park and he got off in a familiar place.

Standing there, his defiance wore off, leaving him feeling like a peeled potato. His old thigh wound began to hurt and then burn. He wondered why the hell he decided to come here...and he remembered something said long ago of how "The Canyon makes you realize how terribly small we are...our short our time is...at times, how ridiculous our problems."

His problems had grown enormously in the last eight hours, the last eight months, the last eight years it seemed. Even the canyon couldn't dwarf them. But the words were wise, he told himself.

Sitting on a low stone wall that created a fragile barrier between the rim and the abyss, Sandy peered out onto the amazing vista of canyons, escarpments, multicolored layers, shadow and sun, slashed deeply by the Colorado River which was a seemingly small band of water at the bottom. He perched there, thinking and remembering and realizing that it was pretty damned fortunate that he was walking around a free person, with what he had seen, and learned...and what he had learned just yesterday by the most pedestrian of ways, a letter, mailed from Idaho. He checked his mail as he left and found two letters, one from Aurora, on Figueroa stationery, and the other one without a return address. He read and reread Aurora's letter which wished him a fond goodbye and sincere wishes for his good fortune. Finally, while waiting for a ride outside of Needles, he opened

up the other letter. This was from Crusard and it pretty well put Aurora's note of farewell into the shade.

He was still sitting on the stone wall when the mid-afternoon sun softened the canyon and a man in his thirties came up behind him. Sandy turned around at the crunch of his footsteps.

"Not thinking of jumping in, are you?"

"Huh?"

"We passed you this morning and now you're still sitting here. Come on, we got some food back there in the car. The kids are starving so we're gonna fill them up before driving back to Flagstaff."

"I'm fine, and thanks."

"Suit yourself," the man said, but didn't leave. He came closer and looked down into the canyon. "Man, I can tell you, when I jumped into the canyon it was a scary ride down."

"You jumped?"

"From a plane." He sat down on the wall and pointed to the northeast. "Wasn't my idea—me and four other guys were being flown to the coast. The plane had trouble and the pilot told us to bail. Man, that was the first time I had jumped out of a plane for real--and it was night too. Luckily, we all landed within a hoot and holler of each other and when the sun came up we were in the middle of miles and miles of miles and miles. About nine that morning a plane came over and dropped supplies and told us what the hell was going on—we learned later the pilots managed to get the plane straightened out and nursed it to Kingman, and then made it known where we had bailed. Well, here comes the water and coffee and sandwiches and a note." He mimed opening an envelope and then unfolding a letter. "Greetings. You are in the Grand Canyon."

"You're kidding!" Sandy laughed. It felt good. "How'd they get you out?"

"A wrangler from the North Rim packed us out of there on muleback three days later. We were flown to the coast and went on to the Pacific. I later found out two of us five didn't make it home alive." He glanced back at his family. His wife, in a

light cotton dress and sandals, was riding herd on three stairstep age kids.

“Fortunately, she got the news about what had happened after we got out...then all she had to worry about was me getting home from the South Pacific.”

“You must have had at least one of the kids before you left.”

“And one in the oven. Sometimes I wondered why I felt I had to go—really thought about it when I found myself down there! But I did my part. But there were times I wished I had stayed in the canyon. Or, put the whole goddam war in the canyon and let me be.” Silently, he considered the vista and then turned and grinned at the real world as he heard one of his kids bawl “Dad! Daddy!”

“You’re invited,” he repeated.

“No, but thanks,” Sandy said.

“Okay.” He stood up, moved off and turned back. “You’re not gonna jump are you?”

“Too far down and I don’t have a parachute,” Sandy said, jokingly. “Besides, what would I do with this?” He gestured at his battered B-4 bag.

The fellow smiled, waved, and joined his family. Sandy saw him haul a three year old up on his shoulders and jog to where mom was waiting. She greeted him with orders for what he had to do, and with a “yes dear” attitude, turned to his work. “Duane!—watch Millie for heaven’s sake!” she bellowed at him, and he dropped what he was doing including the three year old to scoot after their two year old daughter who complained about being caught. They ate and left.

Thunderheads had grown like pagodas over Sandy’s head, and the sudden wind had rain in it. He grabbed his bag and started thumbing. He was picked up by a park employee just in time. The guy bravely plowed through the gray walls of water that slammed down like there was no tomorrow, and then eased up, and then dissipated...when they reached El Tovar, the emerging sun unfurled three rainbows over the canyon.

He ran into the family, who had stopped to let the storm pass. Before they drove off, the man called to him. “Pal, what you said about ‘too far down and no parachute’ was kinda cute, but no real answer. So—deal with it, will ya?”

Sandy nodded. They drove off, with Millie waving lustily.

Then he strode into the famous old hotel and felt a bit humbled by the bellmen in their red jackets but intrigued with the fragrances coming from the dining room, its tables laid with linen and silver. He registered at the desk, was shown to a small but pleasant room he had reserved for two, now one...he cleaned up, and dug a clean shirt and a tie out of his bag.

He then swung casually into the lounge, took a booth by a window and ordered a gin and tonic. He sipped, and stared at the canyon sinking into dusk. He recalled that "nothing" was the most incredible part of the canyon...the layers of stone that had been washed away by the river was what made it spectacular. It was the abyss itself that created the beauty.

Hm.

In the elegant dining room he sliced into a tender steak, mashed potatoes, and a green salad, followed by a brandy at the bar. Sandy gamely went to bed and woke up at dawn, ordered coffee and stood on his small balcony and watched the canyon fill up with a fresh day. He packed, checked out, and took the jitney for Flagstaff. By afternoon he was on a small plane for Phoenix, then flew on to El Paso.

By late afternoon of the next day, Sandy waited at El Paso's tiny airport for the American flight from San Antonio. It came in only a half hour late, and he peered through the chain link fence as the DC-3 came down over the Sawtooth Mountains, waggled, touched down, propellers whirling to a stop...passengers...finally, his cousin, Elzie, flight bag over her shoulder, deplaned. Her head swung about as he called to her. Joyfully, she waved, shouted something, and came running towards him in her heels, and her bag banging on her hip. They met between the ticket counter and the coffee shop, and hugged each other. "What's the occasion?" She was happy but concerned.

"Does a guy need a reason to see his favorite cousin?"

"Yes, if the guy is supposed to be on his honeymoon. That's what your note said."

He told her about Aurora. She hadn't known Aurora very well as her own departure sort of overlapped with Aurora's coming but had liked her--but thought

she had moved in on Sandy entirely too quickly, but he was lonely. “Oh, too bad...I’m sorry.”

“Yeah,” Sandy agreed but in a moderate voice. She wondered if he were already getting over Aurora. “Are you here for the night?” he asked.

“I pick up the return flight to San Antonio in the morning.”

“Then, come with me.” He grandly flourished for one of the few taxis available. It brought them to the El Cortez, El Paso’s finest hotel. He and Betty were shown to a lovely suite on the third floor; it had two bedrooms, two baths, a sitting room and a balcony that provided a view of the inner courtyard. After the bellboy delivered the luggage he was asked to bring up some glasses and enjoyed the lavish tip Sandy gave him. She came out of her room, capless and stockingless, her bare feet enjoying the cool tile floor. “Drink?” he said, gesturing at bottles of rum, wine, and tequila he had bought that afternoon across the border.

“Wine,” she said. He poured two goblets of red. They clinked glasses. “So, what is this about?” She felt a little uncomfortable.

“Well, I saved all this money for a honeymoon and decided I was gonna blow it—and there is a reason to speak with you personally.”

“About what?”

“About Ray.”

“What...about Ray?” Her face stayed straight and strong.

“I got a very illuminating letter from Dr. Crusard right before I left on my would-be honeymoon.”

“About Ray?”

“Ray is in it. What he told me brought some focus to the last two years—the whole bag of shit isn’t clear yet but a few things got straight. You want to hear it?”

“Sure.” Her hand quivered slightly as she lighted a cigarette and curled up on the sofa.

“I’ve got to start with Ray.”

“Why?”

“Because the story seems to start with him, or at least when I came into it. Here goes. I was amazed when I got accepted into USC—I figured I had help somewhere, from somebody. I was a nobody from Oakland with pretty much a joke diploma from an Amarillo high school. I thought it perhaps the—well, now, I’d bet like hell that Ray, with his pull with Dr. Rink—who knew Crusard—arranged or helped me get accepted into USC.”

“Being a flight engineer didn’t hurt.”

“Still too unlikely without some help. But Ray and others arranged for me to come to USC because when he headed out here—maybe because Ray needed an ally, someone who was already involved.”

“Involved in what?”

“Nazi technology. I saw these—things--in Europe. This technology got a lot of money and slaves—and people died—and whatever the hell it is it didn’t get working in time. Plans or prints of whatever were probably brought over here—maybe stuffed in one man’s head, but at a helluva cost.”

“How was Ray involved?”

“Ray seemed to be a ‘handler’ of this man. A handler helps move an important person from one situation to another. He moved a highly prized Nazi scientist out to the West Coast.”

“How did he become this handler?”

“Dr. Rink had met the scientist in the thirties in Europe before all hell broke loose.”

“Who is this scientist? Don’t tell me if you don’t want to.”

“I won’t. But Ray could speak Serbo-Croat, this guy’s first language...did Ray ever break dates with you?”

His shifting of topics didn’t surprise her. “More than once.” She brought up a small smile. “I wondered if—well, Ray and I fell for each other so suddenly I wondered if he were letting down a former girlfriend...nicely.” She looked at Sandy.

“Ray spoke about a Diane who was a cashier at a late night movie theatre. I never met her. Maybe Ray invented her to explain why he had late night dates—it would explain why he might suddenly leave in the middle of the night. Also he bought a car. He needed it to get out to Bartonair, but he might have also needed one to get some place fast like visiting this guy--Pos—who—was lodged nearby. The man was sick. He was probably sick as hell from the henges.” Sandy recalled his own terrific nausea, so bad it was scary to even remember—and it was nothing compared to how those poor scientists were suffering, the ones he had helped rescue and fly out, back in summer of 1945. “Ray helped him—talked with him—maybe they read newspapers together, played games. Get him to feel better, get him back on his feet, and ready to work.”

“To work with this technology.”

“Yes.” He then kept his thoughts silent. He had plugged this event into what Crusard told him in the letter and came up with this scenario. *Finally, one morning—Posnan told Ray what he knew, and what several people were waiting to hear—where the bells were located. These bells that made the henges operative.*

“How does this explain why Ray died?—that is where you’re heading, right?”

“Yes.” After a moment, he said “Hang on. Here goes.”

Ian Crusard, in 1945, was desperate. Though Barton Aircraft had gotten back on its feet during the war, it was still facing bankruptcy with outraged stockholders on the horizon. That once glamorous guy with answers for problems was old, tired, and nearly corrupt. That actually bothered him, Crusard wrote, somewhat wryly. During the war he had proven an expert in jet technology, and eagerly took up the government opportunity to assess Nazi aircraft, both conventional and experimental, which were being discovered as the Allies overran Germany, and still being discovered in obscure places after war’s end.

In Germany, 1946, he met Claud Walkert, a mutual friend of Rink. Walkert claimed to have finally escaped Nazi custody in 1945, but certain die-hards were still in pursuit of him, for good reason—he had the key to an amazing technology that the Nazis had failed at.

He took the guy on for two reasons. First, Walkert had money. Money of such quantity that Crusard sponsored Walkert's immigration to the United States—which proved easy because, second, Walkert was actually a naturalized American citizen from the late twenties. He had returned to France in 1938 to visit family and disappeared; he had been abducted and worked in laboratories as a high quality slave, but had Swiss bank accounts that went undiscovered. This more than his knowledge made him a partner in Barton Aircraft, rechristened with the sexy new name of Bartonair Systems.

"Fascinating," Elzie remarked, somewhat sarcastically. "But what does it mean?"

"For one, Claud Walkert was actually Otto Heinzma."

"What?"

"Heinzma had adopted this poor guy's identity—Walkert probably had been a prisoner and died, and Heinzma took over his identity. As Walkert, Heinzma was able to get back into the States without having a contract from the government, without anybody keeping tabs on him."

She didn't care about that. She said, "Well, Heinzma wanted something from you."

"Yes, what Ray knew."

She was confused but it didn't matter. "Is this why Ray died?"

"No." What he had to tell her was rotten bitter. "This is what Crusard told me in the letter. It's stupid enough to be true. The wind tunnel bombing was actually committed by Walkert--or Heinzma, whoever... to scare shit out of Crusard. Crusard knew he had made a deal with the devil and wanted out. He had learned who Walkert really was, a 'person of interest.'" Sandy poured more wine for himself and realized he was soaked with sweat. "He threatened to go to the authorities and so on and Heinzma called his bluff by planting a bomb in the wind tunnel. Crusard then knew the guy was ready to do anything to protect himself. He chickened out."

"Ray's death was only a goddamned—mistake?"

She set her wine glass down so hard on the small coffee table the stem broke and wine sloshed on her bare feet, looking like blood. She fled to the bathroom, and when she came back, she wore a flounced skirt, a cotton peasant blouse, and sandals, but her face was hard from not crying. He had thrown away the broken glass, sopped up the wine with tissues, and ordered another glass, which had already been delivered. She accepted the fresh goblet.

“It had to be a mistake,” Sandy continued. “Ray knew where Posnan was, and Posnan knew where—things--were. That was info these guys needed. Ray knew it but he died, leaving the information with me and I didn’t understand what it meant...I understand irony now, like something out of a Greek play.”

Elzie sat for a long time, absorbing this. When she finally looked at Sandy, she saw his eyes were full of tears. “What?” she said.

“Perhaps it should have been me. Ray told me to sleep in, to come in later, and I did—not that much later, but maybe—maybe if I refused and gone in when I was supposed to...”

“Oh, no, no, don’t go there. And now I know why Ray died. It stinks but I understand. I’ve got to go on now, like I said I would. Damn you—but I’ll get over it.”

“I understand,” he said. He wiped his eyes.

She dried her own face with her hands and accepted the fresh glass of wine. She then joined him on the small balcony. Twilight was seeping into the courtyard, a cool feeling arose from the palms and lush plants, and some couples were beginning to seat themselves at the tables and order drinks. They looked down at them, admiring their happiness or contentment or just sitting together... A little girl whirled around, looked up—saw them looking at her and she waved. They waved back.

It seemed like the world had died and now was stirring back to life. Normal life.

“Now what?” she asked.

“How...about...dinner.”

“Dinner sounds lovely. I know a great restaurant just over the border.”

They freshened up, walked across the border to Mexico and ate at a nightclub, talked about other things and even danced. The small orchestra played an ironic tune: “They Can’t Take That Away From Me.” Oh yes they can, they both agreed. As they lingered over coffee, and the band had taken a break, Elzie suddenly said, “I really was hoping you two would make it. But—well, you and Aurora have different, ah, priorities. The twain just couldn’t meet.” As they walked back she asked, carefully, “How’s Barbara?”

He had good news, and was pleased she had asked about Barbara, whom she did not know very well. He told her that Barbara was in good spirits—and was actually trying to get back into the Navy, prosthesis and all. “She says she knows what being ‘maimed’ is like and she wants to help others deal with it. I think the Navy would be missing a good thing if they turn her down.”

“Well, good for her. I should do that too. Some war is going to break out soon, probably in Asia. But as for us, personally, you know, Sandy...love might be around the corner for both of us.”

“We’ve both got look for that corner.”

They both thought--later. Right now, they just wanted to give their hearts some rest.

Back in their separate bedrooms, Sandy slept for a few hours and then woke to stare at the ceiling, change positions, count the proverbial sheep, and feeling...disappointed, relieved, and scared at the idea of finding new love. Or finding love. Had he really loved Aurora? Had she just filled in the lonely areas?

He also thought of Mara Vellen...and that bit of Greek she hand-delivered to him, and in the hands of a priest somewhere in Washington...trying to translate it. That was a piece of the puzzle that still could not fit in anywhere. He would have to contact Aurora about that—oh, later.

In the morning he was somberly drinking room service coffee when his cousin came out of her room. She answered the door to accept her pressed uniform from a bellman. They descended and ate breakfast on the patio, and then he took her to the airport. There were so many sad and unsettled things in their lives, but

real life beckoned, particularly when she said “We’ll see each other again. I’ll visit Dad over the holidays.”

“Give him my love.” They sat down. “I sure miss you--and Ray.”

She became businesslike. “Are you flying to Los Angeles on the afternoon flight?”

“No...I’m taking the bus. Just enough money.”

“Let me buy you an airplane ticket. After your hospitality that’s the least I can do.”

“No, I got lots of thinking to do. It’s good stuff for a long bus ride....I’m thinking about—folding my tents and kind of stealing away. Get away. Forget this education.”

“You think you could?”

“I’m almost willing to try.” After a moment, he chuckled slightly. “You know, during the war—you knew who the enemy was. I hardly know anymore who I should be fighting...the Sierras are beautiful. Just plunge into them and become a, well, a sourdough prospector. Whatever that is.”

“Maybe you have a sort of destiny within you.”

He raised his eyebrows.

“I was thinking about it last night. Do you remember...those wonderful weenie roasts we all had on the beach? Sort of a combination of beer—and beauty—we got to talking about things—and we got to talking about—if the world was a divine unfolding of some kind—or just sort of hurled itself along...I remember saying that there was nothing divine in the world’s history—both world wars—any war—proved that wrong. But Ray said...that he thought that we as human beings weren’t just chess pieces pushed about on some celestial chessboard, but there were—moments—when he was sure that—it was as if maybe a hand somewhere was moving us—there were paths of destiny that certain people are directed to make things happen. Maybe you—are that certain person.”

“Oh, come on.”

“Now think about it—I mean—I didn’t know you existed beyond some thought that I might have a cousin somewhere that my dad was looking for. And there we met—at Barth, in Germany. What were the chances? It was destiny.”

“Well, I prefer to think of that as a helluva coincidence—a wonderful coincidence.”

“Maybe.”

“What about you?”

“Hm?”

“Well, you were there too--and we have been together at some remarkable times. Maybe you are the one of destiny....I want to give you the amber back.” He pulled it out of his wallet and laid it on her lap.

She stared at it. “Good luck or bad luck?”

“It’s a beautiful piece of petrified tree sap,” Sandy said. “But considering what I have been through and survived...surely if there is luck embedded in it, it’s good luck.”

They both fell quiet, as time and tides of time, both past and future, washed over them and filled the tiny terminal at El Paso. She took the amber, wrapped it in a handkerchief, and placed it in her purse.

“Flight 18 to San Antonio can board,” crackled over their heads, filling the small terminal.

“Good heavens, I should have been on the plane five minutes ago,” she said standing up and digging into her shoulder bag for a mirror. “And, uh, look up, look around, please?”

“Sure. But you too, okay?”

“Roger. Now you do some practical thinking—about the wife you are looking for. Dad was right about how marriage has to be practical. Romance is important, but when all is said and done, after the wedding, comes marriage. Bye, cousin. God bless and take care of yourself.”

“You too, cousin.”

She left, and he watched while she escorted a few more passengers on board; ground crews closed the door and men rolled away the steps. He watched until the plane taxied, turned into the wind, and lifted off to sail away to San Antonio.

Another person gone. Why did everybody always leave?

He turned back and spotted something white on the tile floor. It was her handkerchief, and inside was the amber. It must have fallen out of her purse...well...it went back into his wallet. Hm, okay.

He told the waiting taxi driver to take him to the bus station. Honeymoon money was shot, and it hadn't all been fun, but some things felt at rest, at least for a while.

As the bus wended its hot way through Las Cruces, Deming, Lordsburg, Tucson, Phoenix, Blythe, Palm Springs and into the cooler Los Angeles basin, he slept, stared out the window, ate when he had to, grew excited about the future, worried about the past, but thought about a bride.

She would like to stay home and build a family—their family.

College-educated--? Yes. Working? If she wished. He knew many women who worked and they liked working. Sandy knew the value of work; it gives you an identity. The first time he began to feel kind of like somebody was when he became a soldier and expectations were placed on him.

Pretty?—well...Good cook, housekeeper—and he knew from experience that was hard work.

Someone who could be on her own at times. He might be disappearing once in a while. She would have to be strong for the kids. Yes, kids. He wanted children. They wanted children.

He stepped off the bus terminal in Los Angeles, recalling how two years earlier he had also stepped off and out in the world, on his own.

Regrets? Yeah, a lot. Go back in time, do it again, what would he do?

Should he have stayed in the Air Force? He had been happy—well, satisfied being an aide but Joe would have been pushed him out. Joe had been kidded him more than once about his typing, and fetching the coffee. What might he be doing?—maybe flying? Years ago, eons ago—he had been considered for OCS, and that might have included pilot training. He had run from it, but it just hadn't been his time.

He yanked up his B-4 bag and strode out into the mellow Los Angeles weather.

After getting home, he drove to the Armers to see if any mail was still coming to him at his old address and there was yet another letter from...the Navy.

Sandy and Margaret: A Season Apart - Pasadena, Fall



On a cool bright late Friday afternoon in late October, Margaret Anne Whitfield, volunteer at a veteran’s clinic two blocks off Colorado in Pasadena, finished her lukewarm coffee in the small breakroom and read an article in *Newsweek*. Nearing five, she had two more hours on her shift.

Before her, on the table, her Russian language textbook sat a little accusingly. She ignored it; her abilities with the Cyrillic alphabet had impressed her instructor, even though she was only auditing her class at USC to prepare for her language exam, a part of her Masters degree in education.

The article caught her eye because it featured a picture of Wonder Woman, the comic book character of an Amazon princess who comes to the United States to aid the war effort. Margaret’s first contact with Wonder Woman came when she was cleaning her classroom after the spring term, and found a comic book lodged in a desk. She had been startled—and a little repelled--by the curvaceous woman who was somewhat covered by scant trunks and a breast plate. Knee high boots and a tiara holding up her black fashionable pompadour finished her ensemble. She also learned Wonder Woman, like Clark Kent, would take off her glasses—and then her WAC uniform--and go from Lt. Diane Prince to...a superheroine.

The article in *Newsweek* was titled “Real Wonder Women.” The article summarized how women had helped win the war by more than just typing and filing; they had served as agents; they had ferried planes; on the first day of the Normandy invasion flight nurses had been on the beaches helping to save

soldiers' lives. Back home, women had labored in factories, took over masculine jobs as varied as farming, welding, and washing down locomotives. Furthermore, after the war ended, a lot of women did not, contrary to what had been propagandized, wish to marry, settle down, and raise a family. Rather, more and more women were going to college, and not just to become teachers and nurses, but doctors, dentists, engineers, scientists; female-owned businesses were picking up. The article ended with the words, "In a little more than fifty years, it will be not only be a new century, but the next millennium. By then, where will women have gone to, done, achieved?"

Margaret stared at the gray-blue walls of the break room, recalling how, when she was growing up, her mother said to her there were only two respectable jobs for women—teaching and nursing. And of the two, teaching was *far* more respectable; as a nurse she would be *alone with men* in their rooms at all hours of the night... Margaret wished, as she often did, that she listened more to herself while growing up. But she liked being a teacher—teacher of literature at John Muir High School, yet knew that her passion wasn't fully there all the time. Once in a while it flared, such as when several girls recently asked if she would read the novels of Charlotte Bronte with them, and they did, skipping a hot lunch for sandwiches and apples in the classroom. But frequently, she knew that students couldn't quite get why poetry should be read, why Shakespeare still resonated, how the human experience was captured in miraculous print...so, if not a teacher, what should she be? She imagined herself in Wonder Woman's patriotic, erotic, quixotic breastplate and trunks.

Conscious that a moment of her life had come...whatever the moment was, she was always aware when her thinking unfolded a bit further it seemed to lead to hard bright blue light that ribboned into the darkness ahead to...

She suddenly rose, put on her clinic smock, and met Morton Dixon, x-ray technician, at the doorway. He smiled at her, toothily, and she smiled back blankly and tried to get past him. His work, he joked, "let him see through people," and he thought it was figuratively true. "Always good to see you some more, rather than just on Saturday afternoons—why you are here?"

"Rosie got sick and asked me to substitute."

"Still reading *Jane Eyre*?" he asked.

“Yes,” she answered.

“I’ve read it too. Just recently.”

“Oh?”

“You know, old Rochester himself was a married man when Jane was dating him, you know? I too have kind of a crazy wife at home myself...”

She was silent. He stood aside to let her through the door, and his hand brushed her behind, which was nice even under three layers of cloth. She ignored it and took her place at the reception desk. She consulted the list and called “Mr. Kuh—Ko-mansky?” Everybody looked up but nobody stood up; a Negro veteran motioned with his eyes at a young man who was sprawled in his chair, his textbook face down on his lap, his head tilted against the wall. She left the desk and shook him gently by the shoulder. “Mr. Komansky?”

Sandy hurled out of a tunnel of sleep with a convulsive jerk—which was more like a propeller roar of arms and legs, flailing as he was falling...and he realized he was on his hands and knees, on the floor.

In front of him was a young woman. Though her face was surprised, she was standing still, and her blue eyes were harpooning down into his raised blue ones.

Margaret hadn’t been a high school teacher for five years without learning to keep her cool, restore order, let somebody know who’s boss...

Sandy then looked about. Everybody in the waiting area was staring at him also.

Damned dream... “Sorry,” he said to the young woman.

The harpoons retracted. Her smile became almost genuine. “Come with me.”

The young man, now the soul of calm, arose, got his feet moving and followed her into an examination room.

She closed the door on him and the doctor. Then she had to get to the ladies. She saw something in his eyes that terrified her...but something she knew, perhaps from that dream of blue light, blue water...

Mort Dixon caught her arm as she tried to enter the woman's toilet. "I saw what happened...you poor kid," he said, twisting his head to bring his mouth down on hers.

She took his face in her hands—and pushed him away so hard he nearly stumbled.

**

Sandy, too tired to be as embarrassed as he could have been, saw a weary doctor who was still patient and kind to the veteran. He himself had served in Italy, he said...and lost a Marine Corps son on Tarawa. He examined the wound, which involved Sandy dropping his pants, leaning over and wincing as the doctor probed the area halfway up the back of his right thigh. Sandy said it was caused by flak—cut an artery—got surgery... The doctor asked questions, including "Have you been under a lot of stress recently?"

"Hell yes," Sandy pulled back from a mental edge gaping like the Grand Canyon. "Are you saying this is all in my mind?"

"In a way," said the doctor. "I can find nothing wrong, not even inflammation. But the way you jumped in the waiting room—yes, I saw that—tells me your nerves have you in their grip."

By now, Sandy had pulled up his trousers, zipped the fly and buckled his belt.

"Can you alleviate the strain?" the doctor asked, both gently and directly.

"No...well, no—ah...no." Not only did he have his education to worry about, then came his growing professional commitments, and then work to keep the wolf from the door, and there might be those guys around any corner...and no Aurora and now Barbara was getting ready to leave.

Maybe he should have accepted Walt Barton's offer of an important line job at Bartonair Systems. The guy, as soon as he could, had invited Sandy to dinner, and thanked him...quietly, fiercely, even when Sandy protested he had little to do with it. No matter, Mr. Barton said. We need bright young guys like you, you saved a lot of my bacon with that design of yours... He politely refused. He wanted nothing to do with that part of his life. Running away again, he then taunted himself. Shut up, just shut up.

He accepted the prescription for sedatives. Leaving, he looked for the young woman to apologize again, and was both disappointed and relieved when he could not find her. He left the clinic and nearly crumpled and threw away the prescription. To hell with it, he thought. Go home, and turn on the gas...get this life over with. Oh, shut up, he then told himself. Besides, you don't have gas, it's all electric. Besides, Barbara had called him with good news: against a lot of odds, she had reactivated her commission in the Navy and had been assigned to the Naval Hospital in San Diego. Of course, it was all pretty tentative; there would be a lot of proving of herself. They were going to have a quick drink this evening in celebration. But thoughts of death circled around him...he thought of the resting places he had seen—the cemetery in Cambridge where General Savage had been laid to rest and he admired...just to lie down and sleep...Scared, he walked until he felt better and went to get his prescription filled.

**

Margaret, finished with her volunteer shift at seven, walked down to Colorado Boulevard, an old copy of *Saturday Evening Post* under her arm. The staff and the volunteers were encouraged to bring in new magazines, and carry out the old, and she had seized on the Post.

She felt pretty shaken up--by both the man who startled her and how she finally let Dixon have it. She unpinned her dark hair and felt it brush her shoulders, eliciting a whistle from a man walking by. She kept her eyes forward, naturally pleased with his admiration, but thinking she had to get home... knowing Dad and Mom were expecting her...for dinner, which, on Friday night, was creamed chicken over biscuits and Brussel sprouts—her mother stuck with a weekly menu and insisted on serving later that night since she was arriving later than usual. She felt she had no right to complain, considering her parents let her live at home for free, while she twisted her small paycheck in various ways—one way included finally buying a second hand car which had given her greater independence. Over the summer, she had started a Masters at USC in education and was attending an evening class this fall semester. She had also joined a tennis club, and taught young immigrant women in South Pasadena how to weave.

The Owl Pharmacy glowed in the late October dusk. She was hungry. Creamed chicken, ugh. Brussel sprouts...double ugh.

She was also aware that something was ticking, or tickling, in her head. Something she had felt before, before...things happened.

Margaret was glad to see that all the stools at the fountain were empty. She sat down at the counter and ordered a grilled tuna fish sandwich and a Coke from the woman who ran the counter almost singlehandedly. The Coke arrived in a paper cone in a metal holder; she chose a straw, opened it, and resisted blowing the paper tube onto the ceiling—she was the only girl in her group growing up who could do it and how her mother had squawked when she performed the feat in front of her--once.

She opened up the magazine while she waited... and found “One Soldier’s Story”—by Susan Nesbit, whose Saturday morning radio program, “Calling our Soldiers,” was always interesting, as soldiers, overseas from the Aleutians to Occupied Germany to Korea had many stories to tell. She often thought how many of their stories could be the basis of a novel...which she wanted to write someday.

Finding a pencil in her purse, she wrote down some notes on a napkin, and then sighed. All these notes she made to herself; they always ended up being dug up and thrown out. Why did she bother? She crumpled the napkin up—but then tucked it into her purse—and turned to the magazine.

Alexander Komansky entered the Owl Drugstore. He came in the back way, turned the prescription in and said he would wait at the counter. He was hungry, but had no real appetite. Sandy then saw in the mirror behind the lunch counter the young woman at the clinic. He must have looked like a crazy man...She didn’t see him; her head was bent over a magazine.

Sandy turned to leave.

Then he didn’t. He always felt as though somebody had tapped him on the shoulder and said, *Stay. Speak to her.*

He walked to the counter, hitched himself on the stool...right next to her. When her head lifted, their eyes met in the mirror, directly over and between the strawberry and chocolate syrup pumps.

“Oh, hi,” she said.

“Hello. I’m sorry I scared you. Bad dream.”

“That’s all right.”

He could see her pulling away from him....reminding him of how he used to pull away from people. Sometimes still did and so dammit, stop it, step up to the plate. “Well, I’m sorry,” he said again, smiled at her, and not receiving one in return, started to get off the stool—and his stomach growled.

“You’re hungry,” she then said.

“Starving, more like it.” His appetite had come up.

The lunch counter lady looked at him. “Uh, uh—what she’s having,” he said.

“Grilled tuna melt,” she said, writing it down on her pad.

“Sounds good,” he said. “Look, I don’t mean to bother you, but I just wanted to say that I’m sorry.”

“That’s all right,” Margaret said—again. She looked at the magazine, and her eyes on a picture of a sergeant, whose handsomeness was undercut by a clenched brow—she looked up. “That’s you!”

“Huh?”

“You! That’s you!” She held up the article.

“‘One Sergeant’s Story’,” he read. “That’s a hotted up vision of me. Don’t believe everything you read.”

“Of course not...but that *is* you.”

“Yeah—you won’t hold it against me will you?”

“Hm?”

“And let me...ask you for a date?”

Her sandwich arrived. She picked up a pickle chip, and then laid it down. She had a thought—what would Wonder Woman do?

“I’m sorry,” Sandy repeated.

“Don’t be. It’s just that—I uh—being asked for a date—“

“By a crazy man.” Sandy felt his inner arm burn.

“You’re not crazy,” she said, pointing to the magazine in her hand. “This article proves it.”

“How about...I...take a walk around the block and you can decide.”

Telling herself mentally, you chickenshit—a word her mother would be shocked to know she knew and occasionally used it--be Wonder Woman--she pushed her sandwich toward him. “Eat first,” she said. “Can I have his?”

“Certainly,” grinned the woman. Margaret realized she had been listening and watching--hard not to do, considering they were in the same six square feet of space.

He grinned, ate the sandwich in a few bites and hopped off the stool. “I’ll come back,” he said.

“I won’t leave.”

The woman looked around at them from the grill. Sandy said to her, “Would you accept our pledges that we will do as we said?”

“Sure.”

He left.

Margaret Anne Whitfield saw the woman looking at her. “I’ll wait,” she said.

“Good. He’ll come back.”

She dug into the article and thoughtlessly took bites of her own sandwich when it arrived. She became so involved...and felt herself traveling down a riverway of blue mist...no, not there...that she was surprised—and relieved—at a rush of air at her elbow and Alexander Komansky sat down beside her. They both broke into grins, real grins not just lips and flesh pulling into a smile. His eyes had turned into soft blue orbs of light.

He was what had been ticking or tickling in her head. He was the thing that was going to happen.

“Well?”

Put on your breastplate, she thought. “For a date?—yes. And, uh, when?”

“Not tonight. I’m, uh, busy. And tired. Tomorrow night?”

“Okay—there’s a good movie at the Regal in Pasadena—they show older movies, foreign movies.”

“Good. Great.” He got a napkin and wrote down directions to her house and her phone number. .

They paid the counter woman. “If you two make it—I’ll give you black and whites, on the house.”

Margaret took the bus home, was ten minutes late for which she apologized to her mother, ate her meal without really tasting it, washed the dishes, graded quizzes, studied her Russian and went to bed and for once, didn’t have one thought of a young man, from years ago. That event had tickled in her head too.

**

“Alexander Komansky?” her mother demanded the next evening. Margaret was washing the dinner dishes. “That’s *quite* a name.”

“I think it’s interesting,” her daughter said, drying plates and putting them away still a bit damp, which her mother regarded as a near sin. She hung up the dish towel and went upstairs to change. She moved slowly and deliberately, one moment happy and gleeful, the next moment nervous.

“Is he Russian?” asked Elona Ethel Whitfield of her husband, reading the *Saturday Evening Post* article at the kitchen table.

“Polish,” answered her husband, Arnold Marion Whitfield. “His parents.”

“Aren’t the Polish Communists now?”

“Ellie, for sunshine’s sake,” said her husband patiently, “both his parents came from Poland a long time ago. Now you need to read this and quit being spooked at the fact that she’s interested in somebody.”

“I’ll read it later,” she said, and he knew she wouldn’t. This used to irritate him, now he just accepted her answer. “Well, it would be good to get her head out of books—the neighbors are asking me why she was studying *Russian*—“

“She needs a language for her Masters. No law against Russian.”

Margaret, checking her stocking seams at the mirror at the top of the stairs, where every morning of duty her father checked his uniform, heard this and wondered why her mother always seemed anxious about rather than proud of her education.

Alexander Komanksy called at exactly 6:45.

To Margaret, he looked tall and divinely handsome. He came into the house to meet her mother and father. Her dad was smiling; her mother trying to as they shook his hand and said their goodbyes. Margaret sat on her side of the front seat, quite calm—but wondered how to start the conversation. She hated stupid chatter and apparently he did too, because his first question was “I know you teach, but what and where?” She told him that she taught English at John Muir High. “And, please, don’t worry about dangling any modifiers in front of me.”

He returned in kind. “As long as you don’t split any infinitives—which I am not sure what it is or why it’s bad but I had a writing prof who went ape over them.”

“Well, don’t worry—after you teach Shakespeare, anything goes. The Bard was the number one criminal with the English language.”

As they stopped and waited at an intersection, he smiled at her. She smiled back, and she was not pretending. At the Regal, they learned there were 45 minutes before for the showing of the second feature. He proposed having a cup of coffee and she said, “Okay, but at a counter at a drugstore.” They did so, and sat on stools and drank coffee. He asked her why she wanted to sit at the counter.

“When you sit down across a table with a near...stranger and trying to talk and look pleasant—well, where do your eyes go?—like this you don’t have to look each other, at least straight on.”

Their eyes met in the mirror, and she could tell he liked her answer. “That’s true...first dates are pretty awful, aren’t they?...or they can be.”

“I’ve had enough of them. I find them scary.”

“I’d like to tell you don’t be scared and you won’t be, but life isn’t that easy.”

“You know it,” she said. Then, as she asked her students on the first day of classes, “Tell me something interesting about yourself.”

“Well...I like tending roses.” He explained how at the apartment he lived in until little over a year earlier, his landlady grew beautiful roses. Before departing on vacation, she and her husband asked him to take care of her garden, and he got kind of interested. “So, I know what a peduncle is,” he said, naming a part of the rose’s anatomy.

When he asked her the question, she said, “I weave.”

She explained that her father had inherited a family loom, and she was so fascinated with the device, that her parents repaired it for her; a nice Russian lady gave her lessons, and she learned a lot of Russian as well. “I know what a heddle is,” she explained, naming a part of a loom’s anatomy. “In Russian too--‘tkatskly stanok.’”

The movie they did not expect to see was a delight. Made in 1945 England, *Vacation from Marriage* was neither a comedy nor a tragedy, but an amusing look at a mousy London couple, both forced out of their mousehole by the war. A bank clerk joins the Royal Navy, and loses his moustache (which he grew to make himself look older), and eventually grows into an experienced salt and even heroic as he rowed for five days to bring survivors to safety. Once prone to seasickness, he develops the appetite of a horse. The plain little wife joins the Royal Navy herself and with her cabin-mate’s encouragement uses lipstick and fixes her hair. She proves heroic by piloting a boat during an air raid to deliver a critical message to a senior officer. Once prone to colds, she outgrows them. They both prove appealing to others: a nurse falls in love with the husband in a faraway hospital as he recovers from his ordeal; the cabin-mate’s brother, a naval architect, falls in love with the wife...and they both heroically renounce their extra-marital alliances when they finally get to rendezvous with their spouse after three years. As they journey to meet each other they both claim they were the one who kept the other going...but finally cannot bear to return to that mouse they were married to and renounce their renunciations. The husband, at their flat, finds a note to meet him at the nearby bus stop. He drops his coat and his bag and goes in search of her. In still blacked-out London, they meet and soon admit they no longer want to be married to the other. Civilly, they go for a drink in a lighted pub and upon their

first good look at other they look so devastatingly different—attractive, confident people of the world—they are astonished with each other. After this passes, anger sets in as they re-evaluate their renounced renunciation, and both tell each other some truths...and finally storm into the night. Waiting on a taxi, they realize that the shops they went to--the newsstand, the butcher, the greengrocer—have all disappeared. She returns to their flat and he swans off, free from the past—and becomes lost. He has no sense of direction except “forward”—to what? He goes forward—and nearly gets run down by a taxi. He sheepishly returns to their flat to get his coat and bag. He finds her, in her nightgown, looking out on London, its ruins being revealed by the sunrise—a sight they never had before as other buildings blocked their vision. He opens the window to let in fresh air...and they go into each other’s arms.

“That was great,” Sandy said as they left the theatre.

“I loved it,” she said.

“You know—I saw it—I mean, London was a—symbol—of their marriage. And it was going to rebuild and they were going to rebuild too.” They walked along. “Did I use ‘symbol’ right?” he asked. “I used it stupidly in a comp class once, and the professor let me know not to goof around with the word.”

“You used it fine.” They walked on some more, not knowing where they were going. “Do you like Shakespeare?”

“I appreciate him,” said Sandy.

“I’d like to go to England someday.”

“Yeah.”

“I know you—and so many men—went through a lot of hell in England.”

“Well, more like hell over Europe. But I’d like to go back to England as a visitor, not a soldier. The roses there...I never noticed them until after the war ended. And the people were great. A lot of people hated the Yank soldiers who piled in for the invasion but when you were on an airbase, after a while, you became part of the village. People prayed for us when we left and cheered when we returned.”

They waited for the light at an intersection. In the distance was the Owl Pharmacy. "Let's get those free black and whites," Sandy said.

"She said, 'if we make it,'" Margaret pointed out.

"Let's go anyway."

The woman behind the counter said, "Oh no, but come back in two weeks."

"We will." They perched on the stools and ate ice cream. They both studied a calendar and saw that two weeks in the future was November 13.

She then said, "I kind of feel like that woman in the movie—you know, the little mouse of a wife—I wish I had done what she did—join the navy."

"Did you want to?"

"I thought about the navy because I liked their uniforms. Silly reason."

"I tried to join the navy first but its office was closed. What happened with you?"

"Well, I let it be known at home what I was thinking about, and my mother wouldn't hear of it—Dad was more supportive, but I could tell he was a bit worried too—single child and all..."

"I was a single child too though I had an older brother or sister who had died."

"Me too," he said.

"Another way I 'served' was nearly to marry a young soldier."

"Something happened...?"

"Don Dakins. We planned to marry and then decided to wait until he got home—he then died in a training accident, at a camp in the south. That was six years ago."

He took her home. Lights glowed upstairs but a flicking curtain revealed they were being watched but he didn't mind. Before they left his car, he said "Can I see you tomorrow?"

"Do you mind a policeman's picnic?"

"Your father's a cop—a police officer?"

“Pasadena’s pride. You’re not scared of cops, are you?” she asked, lightly.

“Not anymore.” This was almost honest. They would meet at 10:00 at Eaton Canyon Park. Margaret always volunteered to shepherd the kids over an easy hiking trail while their parents ate and talked. As soon as they parted, he hurried off to his shift, and at four in the morning, finally got into bed but wondered if he would wake up in time...he ended up sleeping very little.

She went to bed that night, exhilarated. The next morning, while tying her thick dark hair back in a scarf, she realized that she hadn’t had that dream—the one that came visiting when she got under stress...not all the time, but it could come visiting...no, stress, just joy, she sang to herself the next morning, as she frosted the spice cake with penuche icing and helped her dad pack the car.

Sandy worked his shift at the dairy and drove to Eaton Canyon Park, and read his textbooks until other cars began pulling in. Still a little wary of being among police—and here there were great gaggles of them, and so who the hell was patrolling Pasadena--he walked about, looking innocent, and then shouted “Margaret!”

“Sandy!”

Her parents, unloading the picnic basket and the cake, watched as she dashed over the springy grass to take his outstretched hands. They had never seen their daughter act in such a way, not even during her first engagement.

They joined her parents. They then both helped with the kids, ate lunch with her parents and their friends. Finally, they took a walk into the folds of the canyon, holding hands.

Pretty well oblivious to nothing but themselves, Sandy and Margaret strolled along the brook and on her suggestion, sat down, pulled off their shoes and socks, and dunked their feet. She winced at the ice cold water, and then leaned back, enjoying the soaring eucalyptus trees, the winding path of the sky visible above the cliffs, her full tummy...and the guy she was with...who had similarly denuded and dunked his feet and had also lain back enjoying the music of wind, leaves, and birds. She considered him. It was odd, knowing so much about a guy—from the magazine article. And how little she knew about Don, dammit...She flipped her feet out of the water, and wrapped her arms around her legs.

“Whoa,” said Sandy, waking up from a brief doze.

“I’m fine,” she said.

“No, you’re not,” he answered. His eyes were intense and they softened. “But tell me later.”

Two weeks later, Saturday afternoon, November 13...Margaret Whitfield sat in front of her dressing table mirror, with the twin Woolworth lamps lighted, for the first time in years. Sandy was coming to dinner, and it had been two weeks since the woman at the Owl Pharmacy made her challenge.

She hadn’t really looked at herself in years. She had rarely glanced at herself in bathroom mirrors as she put on make-up or fixed her hair. She knew she was pretty, but had other reasons to avoid meeting herself in the eye of that unforgiving surface.

Now she stared at herself in the mirror. A heart-shaped face—maybe. She thought her eyes her best feature—blue gray with just a touch more blue, and her lashes were thick. Pretty, if plain nose. The mouth was all right—thank goodness her parents had put her through braces; that had been quite an expense in the depression. Her smile, when she flashed it—which she did in the mirror—seemed good. He liked her hair—dark, thick—and frizzy in humidity. She liked his hair, brown and soft.

Several miles away, Sandy also peered at himself in the mirror as he shaved for a second time that day and marveled that he could find somebody like Margaret waiting for him and it felt so...right. In England, when the whole earth felt like a cold oozing sponge, and you didn’t want to shoot craps, or trade dirty stories, one dry and inexpensive way to pass time at the NCO’s club was to put puzzles together. There were times when you swore you had the right piece—color, shape, etc., and it was close but it didn’t quite fit, but you refused to admit it—and then you found the right one, perfect.

That night he sat at their lace tablecloth-draped dinner table, and demonstrated perfect table manners. But his brow was clenched, which Ray had once told that he looked like a cobra getting ready to strike.

Mrs. Whitfield clunked his dessert plate in front of him. “Something wrong?”

He saw Margaret's own forehead clench with embarrassment.

"The wife's a bit protective," Mr. Whitfield said after she carried empty dessert plates to the kitchen, and Margaret went after her to start the coffee. "Dad, take Sandy to the porch," she said.

"Yes mam," he said. In the last two weeks, he enjoyed his daughter's spunk being once more on plain display. Something less than grief crossed with guilt had concealed it for quite some time. Margaret brought them all coffee, and they ignored the clanks and bangs coming from kitchen sink. "Please forgive Mrs. Whitfield," he said. "But you see, she fears losing our golden child."

"Oh Dad," Margaret said, but not coyly, joining them. She sat down in one of the wicker chairs.

"As in precious," Sandy said.

"There were several miscarriages—and we had a little boy who died on his first birthday...another miscarriage—and then, hallelujah, a little girl was born—this wonderful girl—pardon me, young woman. Then, no more children. You can see why my wife tends to overreact...a bit."

"I can understand," Sandy said.

"Can you son?"

"No," Sandy said, honestly. "But—I intend to."

"Good...good," he said, a little awkwardly. But there were times he had to admit he didn't understand his wife's fears either. After another awkward several minutes, he said, "Do you want my permission to propose? You don't need it, though I like being asked."

In her chair, with Sandy perched on the arm, Margaret swam through a few old memories, and gladly returned to the right shore. "Dad, let's get Mom out here."

He called and she came out, her eyes darting with alarm.

"Then I ask," Sandy whispered. He had intended this moment to be at a nice restaurant, with candles on the table and all that kind of stuff, but the moment came, and he accepted it. Later he realized of all corny things, he proposed to his wife on the front porch in front of her parents.

“Then I accept.” They kissed. “Let’s go get those black and whites.”

**

With a big toothy grin revealing two gold caps, the woman behind the lunch counter served up the two black and whites to the young people who consumed them without tasting them. Despite their joy and their utter sense of rapture with each other, Margaret finally asked the woman, “Are you here all time?—we just figured you would be here, and you were.”

“I have a place good for sleeping, but not much for anything else.” When they were obviously interested in her story, she said, “Lost a man in the war.”

“I’m sorry....where?”

“Cantigny.”

“That was World War I,” Margaret said.

“So it was. How do you know that?”

“My dad was there—he doesn’t talk too much about it.”

“You know, I think my dad was there too,” Sandy remarked. He recalled Uncle Tym relating his dad’s life to him, when he paid Sandy a visit during the summer. He learned that Mateusz gotten his American citizenship by serving in the Army, and the name of a place he fought at sounded like “Canteen.”

She took coffee to two swing shifters, who then ordered hamburgers. While she prepared the grill, she answered another question. “Never married again.

Sometimes memories are good enough. Plus I got a son, up in Seattle. He served in the Air Force, but never went overseas...thank God.”

Margaret asked, gently, “What was your secret for happiness?”

“The right man. Not easy to find, and it was hard losing him. And we were honest with each other—never tried to be anything we weren’t. Including on occasion, happy with each other. And how saying ‘I’m sorry,’ can do a lot. But saying sorry only when you mean it.”

More customers came in, and they gave their thanks, and left, Margaret thinking that women wore many kind of breastplates. She still wasn't comfortable with the one she had donned, but intended to wear it until it was.

He drove her home and as they sat in his car and talked—and necked—she finally said, “I feel like I’ve been waiting for you all my life, and now here you are.”

They looked at each, not really understanding the bond between them, but as their lips came together again, understanding really did not matter.

But it mattered that he was due at the dairy in an hour and they very reluctantly parted.

**

At 2:30 am, Arnold and Elona Whitfield awoke to a familiar cry, which they had not heard in a long time. Arnold always went to their daughter. He quietly assumed robe and slippers, passed out of his bedroom to hers, knocked and opened the door.

Margaret sat crosslegged on the bed. Her frilly bedside lamp was on. She was both calm and upset; her eyes were wide and taut. “Same old dream, baby?”

“Yes...” The dream visited her most often when she was over-tired, anxious about something, or in the dumps. She knew she was anxious about...well, getting married, for heaven’s sake!—Her life, which she had grown accustomed to, had changed and change could be alarming. She pressed her sweat-soaked temples with her hands—and then clamped her hands on her hair—

“Honey, no,” Arnold said. She had started pulling her hair like that after the accident...

She released her hands. When she first started teaching, and was nervous, she had thoughtlessly pulled so much of her hair, she had to wear scarves to conceal her damaged scalp. She knew she would stop, now. Sandy liked her hair.

“While I’m dreaming, it’s so vivid—I can remember—then wake up, and not a trace of memory, except that—sitting by that damned brook, hearing you coming through the woods calling to me. And all I can do is look at the blue water...blue mist...that wants to carry me away to a mountain, far far in the distance...” She

didn't tell her father something that made her fearful...when she and Sandy first locked blue eyes on each other in the waiting room...she saw the curling seductive misting blue that she had seen, many times, in that damned dream...

"Have you told Sandy?"

"We'll tell our dreams to each other when we're ready." She stood up and went to the window, pushing aside the net curtains to glare down through the jacaranda tree branches on the peaceful street lamps. Their orbs of golden light stretched like a necklace down the street she had grown up on and was intending to leave—not tomorrow or next week, but she would be leaving and it made her a bit fearful. "Dad, I know—I think I know—you've told me everything about that event—the Bible camp bus flipping over, four injured—the rest shaken up—and me, found 15 hours later by a brook, with hardly a scratch on me save a scrape on my shoulder and my forehead, and no memory of what had happened. Dad, is there anything you haven't told me?"

"Ye—e-e-sss."

"What?"

"Reverend Lacuna claimed he didn't know what happened with the bus. But a few years ago, when I bumped into him, he told me that he was beginning to recall things—and that he saw wild lights in the forest, and these lights ran parallel with the bus and then one—just exploded in front of him. And another thing...before you got into the bus when it was leaving the camp you told him something was going to happen."

"What?"

"That's what he told me. Do you remember saying anything like that...?"

"Heavens, no." Her tone told him not to pursue it. But maybe she had felt that same ticking, that tickling...

"Who knows, maybe Sandy will help you remember," her dad said.

"You really like him, don't you?"

"Damned good man. Your mother will come around."

“If she doesn’t, she gets left behind,” Margaret said, firmly. But she recalled, nearly six years ago, when her mother scolded her after her failed elopement with Don...words to the effect that “You can’t leave me alone with your father.” What did that mean? His father had always been the soul of kindness to his wife, though he grew testy at times with her playing the radio constantly, and being unable to follow directions, the same menu every week.

“Good for you, baby.” Before he left, he asked, “You two set a date?”

“Yes. No. Meaning in 1951—after finishing his Masters.”

“So will you,” he reminded her, proud that his daughter had attended college, which he started and then was unable to complete. “Can you wait?”

“Sure!”

“If you can’t,” her father said, “get him to use a condom.”

Margaret, not at all surprised at his advice, nodded. After he left, she lay down again, but left the light on. She didn’t tell her father that her dream had actually gone on for a few more moments, with the blue mist transforming into a river...a river of high stone walls...

**

Sandy’s graduate work went well, his professors liked him and encouraged him; the work was more concentrated and exacting, but rewarding—he guessed, ducking the fact that he really wanted to work in aeronautics, not with electro-magnetism. His mentors, Dr. Nowell and Dr. Sloyd, were polite and unobtrusive. His master’s project had been handed to him: devising a theory to channel electro-magnetism as a propellant.

Of course, he heard the henges in this. But that was the only thing he heard. Nobody asked him about the henge he had seen in the Sierras. Hell, nobody even asked him about Crusard. For a while, he cruised along happily and then silence became worrying. And he admitted to being curious as hell about these “glockes” in South America, in Mercedes. The henge needed a bell—to do what? But the henges were in the right hands—he hoped. Maybe if he knew what they were supposed to do he wouldn’t be terrified of them. Should he ask?—who? No. So his thoughts danced, circled, coiled, broke apart, and re-formed. For a time, he

would glance over his shoulders; other times, he just floated along, thinking life was wonderful, glad he turned down the Navy's offer of an appointment and pilot training. But surprises came along, as they always did.

As fall advanced, the lovers were cautious and realistic. Sandy wished that he and Margaret could live together, but that would cause logistical problems, as well as disapproval at home and probably at her school. Sandy sensed that Margaret, as much as she loved him, was cautious and he let her be—after having his heart banged up several times, he could stand to be cautious too. Besides, she was working on her Masters too, and sometimes they could not see each other alone for five or six days. Sandy became good friends with Arnold, and they talked about sports, the current events in Berlin, and the war—he told a few stories when prompted, but didn't linger on them. Arnold—and Elona--extended an open invitation for dinner, which Sandy wisely took up not too frequently and tiptoed around their politics until he learned they were both shocked—and happy—about President Truman being re-elected on November 5 after what seemed to be shoo-in vote for Thomas Dewey. Sandy was happy too about Truman, because he figured that now, with the world in a helluva post-war muddle, it was not time to start changing leadership. Truman had fouled up more than once, but who would not have in this era of craziness? There were no rules or guidelines to follow in the postwar era of the biggest and the worst war the world had ever seen which had commenced with cavalry charges...and ended with the bomb.

Sandy came for supper one Sunday and then he and Margaret tended to the dishes. Elona repeated to her husband, "He has no family." They were seated in the living room, in matching chairs, and Arnold was scanning the newspaper.

"Al Capone had family and it did him a helluva lotta good," Arnold said in return. "He's Polish," she brought up again. "They're Communists now."

"The dog's a Boston bull terrier," he pointed out. "Does she eat baked beans?"

"That's ridiculous," she said, but knew she had been gamely vanquished. As if in apology, he said "She sure does love you." Felicity rested in the space between their feet as they sat in chairs, flanking the old radio. She had taken to Elona, out of propinquity probably. But Arnold sensed that the wise little dog simply waited for the woman to tumble to her charms.

Felicity's gentle campaign against the eternally taut Elona began when Sandy, a few weeks earlier, had opened his door at a knock and found Gene Armer: "Thank God you're in—the wife and I are practically on the next plane and you're about the only person I could turn to—"

"For what?" Sandy said.

"I've been transferred and there's no alternative like 'no thank you.'

"Can I, uh, help--?"

"Everything will be taken care of, but Felicity can't come with us."

"Ah."

"I got her dog food and her bed and her toys in the car—be back in a moment—"

He left and returned to Sandy saying, "I can't keep dogs here."

"Can you find someone else then?" he said, placing Felicity in his arms.

"No—uh—yes," Sandy said.

"Thanks. Well—I gotta get home—we leave day after tomorrow, and tomorrow's already gone."

"Mr. Armer," Sandy said before the man got to the door. "I said this before—but thank you. Thank you so goddam—much for everything."

"You thanked me already--taking the opportunity I gave you. Joining the army and fighting a war didn't guarantee you'd come out okay but you did and how. You keep it up."

Sandy fought to keep Armer in his life a few more minutes; another friend was going. "I met good people. And I listened to them, finally with my heart, not anger."

"Thank 'em for me. They done good." A handshake became a brief hug, with Felicity getting a little squashed. "By, baby." He left. Felicity didn't whine, but she curled up and waited for him to return, which he never did, at least not to that apartment. Sandy ministered to her; he understood abandonment. The next afternoon, he grabbed a precious ninety minutes and brought Felicity to Margaret's high school and boldly carried her into the classroom where she was

grading papers and preparing for the next day. He told her the story as Margaret cradled the dog in her lap. Sandy followed Margaret's car home and waited with Felicity while Margaret entered the house...and finally came out, a triumphant look on her pretty face. "Operation Wet Nose is now launched," she said.

"Much blood?" Sandy asked, candidly.

"Add sweat to that."

"Sweetie, it's not my place but..."

"What the hell is wrong with my mother. I don't know. I used to care, but not so much anymore. But I do. She finally broke down and cried when I said that Felicity was going to be welcomed in this house and that I would take care of her."

"Crying?"

"She protested she didn't know how to take care of a dog and I said, I'd get her a book, she could read it, and then she started crying."

They first took Felicity on a walk; she eagerly sniffed at a brand new gauntlet of smells. When they came up the brick walk to the door, Arnold came out. "Dad, what are you doing home?" Margaret asked.

"Your mother tracked me down courtesy of our dispatch to help her deal with an emergency at the house. So, this is the crisis, huh? Come here, cutie." He scooped up Felicity, held her against his chest and gently rubbed her brisket. "Well, whose little girl are you gonna be, huh?"

"Dad, thanks for siding with me." They went in to deal with Mrs. Whitfield who was still sniffing into one of her lace handkerchiefs, used when she was truly desperate; it was a gesture she had copied from movies. Arnold was soon on his way, winking at the couple. Sandy had to leave soon and kissed Margaret and left with a guilty conscience, leaving Margaret with perhaps a fall out—he saw Margaret raking her hands through her hair—and then stopping, when she saw him.

But Felicity was to prove her worth.

**

Their first Thanksgiving together was a bust, but the lovers didn't mind particularly. Sandy had Guard duty which meant he had a legitimate reason for not confronting the Whitfield family en masse, over plates of turkey and dressing in San Bernardino. As for Margaret, she missed him, but also cherished the feeling of them being completely private still, without the eyes of relatives curiously regarding him.

Friday, the day after, was different. Sandy arrived at the Whitfield house near 11:00 at night. Though sound asleep, Margaret came awake instantly at the sound of his car, and was coming downstairs in robe and slippers when he knocked. His lips were about the first thing in as he smacked her on the mouth, and she reciprocated, and was not surprised when she heard other feet on the stairs. Elona paused midway down to hear her daughter say "Really?—when?—I've got school through the 18th—"

"Then we can fly out the 19th. Then home by Christmas Day."

Elona had heard enough. "Where are you flying?"

"We've been invited to be on 'Calling our Soldiers!'—the radio program and all expenses paid--"

"What's this?" inquired Arnold, coming down the stairs.

"Actually, a television program sir—Susan Nesbit invited us to come to New York and be on her first program of her radio series—I mean it's being turned into a tv show."

"New York!" Elona gasped. But it was a happy one. "Oh—I've always wanted to see New York—"

"We've been invited, not you," Margaret said in a kind but determined voice.

"No matter...I can pay my way, I've saved money—"

"Elly, they're going by themselves," Arnold said.

"But they need a chaperone—"

"No, we don't Mama."

Elona held onto her tears and her tongue when her husband said she was an adult now. Dammit, she wanted to see New York...but it was just as well; her secret might escape if she was with them.

Getting ready to go New York was a squeak for them both as they wrapped up their classes, finished assignments, and Margaret, though an excellent seamstress, bought a new outfit: gray wool suit with a trimming of teal, shoes to match...and no hat. The May Company saleslady stood ready with the wafer of teal velvet, and raised her eyebrows when the young woman said, with finality, "No hat," and when her mother protested, she said, nicely, "Sorry, no hat." She modelled her dress for Sandy who loved it and agreed, "No hats." He hated 'em too. Sandy then handed her a page of questions. "Susan's idea--we can get some answers ready." Margaret read them over and one snagged her attention: "'Do we have nicknames for each other?' ...I don't know if I like that question."

"Then we'll tell her." And New York, Sandy thought. Close to Connecticut. Archer's Run, and the Gallagher ancestral home, forever in his heart. They were closest thing he thought of as being home. Though he seemed no longer welcomed...he had learned about poor Brynn through Harvey, and neither Joe nor Ceile had written him.

So, but, and...it was time to return things to people: for one, Susan's silver watch. She had given it to him, or rather, had given it to Joe who made him accept. He never felt he deserved it, and wondered what the hell it meant beyond what she said about "needing time." No, time was no longer a factor with them. He took it out of the strongbox where it sat next to his Silver Star.

The silver dollar he had been gifted with stayed where it was. He would never let go of it.

Below lay the document Mara had given him and Aurora had copied and carried off--had it been translated?

As for Pres's silver flask, which had occupied a place of honor in his memories and in his two abodes, he was determined to return it in good condition. Funny, the flask also had come into his hands by means of Joe too. He had left it with Sandy because he, Joe, was returning to St. Laurent sur Mer and Sandy needed something in the field. The flask deflected a bullet—saved his life—and was

crumpled but whole. Pres had told him to keep it, but Pres had been through a bad time—shot, and was being taken from England from France, and kind of on the outs with his family, and was on painkillers when Sandy tried to hand the flask over.

He found a silversmith. The man was impressed—with its history, whatever that was. After minutely examining the flask, under a powerful magnifying glass, he told Sandy that the flask had been welded together out of fragments—done so finely that the minute seams had not weakened the flask in anyway—the bad dent in it should have shattered it into its original fragments. But, he could gently tap out the dent and get the flask into its original condition—its second original condition... The cost took the money Sandy intended to buy an engagement ring with, but Margaret was rather ambivalent about one, so he spent it on the Gallagher family...When he returned for the flask, the silversmith called his attention to another unknown quality: the flask's false bottom, a tiny panel that slid. The markings within seemed to be a pattern of stars.

**

Their United Airlines plane rose into the Los Angeles sky, December 19, in the wee hours—with Margaret's hand clutching his. This was not a romantic gesture; she admitted to being terrified because this was her first flight into the old wild blue...yonder...Swiftly, he opened up the little bag and held it for her...her white face gradually became its usual hue, but she continued to hold onto his hand...after their third take off, from Chicago to New York, she was still holding on, but she was growing more comfortable. "You should learn how to fly. Best way of getting over the jitters."

She heard his wisdom. "Shakespeare's like that too. Get to know the guy, he's lots of fun. I'll do it. Not immediately." She was thrilled with the torrents of clouds, the lands below in tidy grids, snow covered or winter-amber, rivers winding like lovely serpents to lakes that seemed like calm, friendly eyes. Halfway there, she took out a small leather bound notebook and began writing. When she saw him looking at her, she grinned: "I've been keeping a diary since a week after we met. And a trip like this, I need to remember all details."

They landed at Idyllwild after twelve hours of flight with three stops. Susan Nesbit was there: with husband, and with flowers for Margaret. Susan, Sandy was happy

to learn, was walking, though slowly. They were driven into Manhattan, with Margaret not disguising her amazement at what she was seeing. "I've never been out of California," she admitted to Susan.

They took a private elevator to the Edwards' modest but elegant penthouse, perched atop a fifteen story building in mid-town Manhattan. Sandy and Margaret were unsettled by such grandeur, but Edward Jerrold Edward, Susan's husband, was welcoming. After seeing their luggage conducted to their separate rooms, Edward Jerrold Edward—"Please, call me Eddie"--rather than the butler served cocktails on the glassed in pool terrace. Sandy, after several nervous sips, used the toilet and when he came out, opened the wrong door and peered into a paneled room, two sides taken up with bookcases, and the other taken up with mounted rifles and pistols.

He found Margaret and Susan in conversation. Margaret, seeing Sandy, held out her hand to him, and he took it. "Your fiancée is charming," Susan said. "The interview will go wonderfully tomorrow."

They had a lovely dinner, and despite being tired, and the hour late, they took up Susan's invitation to have a swim in the heated pool. Eddie excused himself but Susan joined them after finding proper dress for them. They returned to their rooms, with Margaret shivering slightly; she smiled when he put his hand on the doorknob of her room—kissed her, with "Good night, sweetie," opened it, let her through, and then closed it.

In his own room Sandy found Edward J. Edward--waiting. It was one of those moments where he thought, "Be Joe Gallagher...at least try." Edward was in pajamas, robe and slippers, and seemed unperturbed despite his determined questioning of his guest: Why did he have a gun in his luggage? Edward showed Sandy the Walther he bought months earlier. He was holding it by a pencil.

"You checked my belongings?" Sandy demanded.

"The butler did." Edward then spoke of kidnapping threats against the children. "So, the gun?"

"That—it seems none of your business, sir."

“In my home, it is. Oddly enough, we both seem to like the same type of gun.” He pulled out, nonthreateningly, a Walther from the pocket of his robe.

There was a quick knock on the door. “Sandy?” The door opened on Margaret. “I wonder if my brown bag got in here by mistake...” She fell silent when she saw the gun—actually two guns—in Edward’s two hands.

“Uh, Mister, uh Eddie here—”

“Needs to tell me why your fiancée brought a gun into this house.”

“I have carried a gun a long time,” Sandy said, simply.

When Edward looked at her to confirm or deny, Margaret held out her hand.

“May I see it please?”

Edward hesitated a moment. “Of course...”

She took the Walther, opened the magazine, snapped it shut, and handed it back to him.

He took it back and seemingly unsettled, put it in his pocket and out Sandy’s Walther in his other robe pocket..

“My father’s an officer. He taught me about guns. I checked if it were loaded.”

“Is it?”

“No. And there is my bag.”

Sandy fetched it for her. “It’s okay,” he said. He closed the door on. “Sir—”

“I know that my wife is still in love with you—she looked forward to seeing you like a kid looks forward to Christmas. And now that I have met you, I can understand why.” He then took the Walther from the pocket of his robe and placed it in Sandy’s suitcase with another murmured apology.

“I am not in love with your wife, sir,” Sandy then said.

“Ever?”

“No sir.” He said this truthfully, because others... made him understand what being in love felt like; with Susan he had been flattered if puzzled as to why this attractive sophisticated woman wanted him so much—and they gave into their

desires...He thought about telling the concerned husband he couldn't really figure out why Susan seemed to adore him—but wisely refrained.

“Well,” Edward said, “I am in love with Susan—despite her telling people that we married in order for me to adopt the two girls. Of course, Susan was vital in my concerns—as an aged widower, my requests to adopt the girls were frowned on, and having a wife would help. But I loved Susan moments after I met her at a Red Cross function here in New York. She was still in so much pain she couldn't pursue her journalism as she would have wished to, but as a volunteer she talked to the boys, helped them with their letters, wrote up some of their stories. I know marrying me made life easier for her, and she's been very good with the little girls. And our little boy.”

“You have a boy sir?”

“An adoption this time, at Susan's behest. The boy was born less than a month ago, in Canada. He was conceived in February of this year, during the time that Susan visited you, to complete her interviews with you.” His statement demanded an answer.

“I understand that your wife cannot have children due to her injuries.” That, Sandy, thought, was only half the answer he wanted; baby or no baby, had Susan been unfaithful with him?

“Well, time will tell,” he said. “The children take after their parents somehow.” Edward said good night, and closed the door on him. Sandy locked the door—and then unlocked it—and then tapped on Margaret's door. She let him in. “Well, my little pistol-packin' mama,” he said, trying to be light, but his words clinked against Margaret's face.

“Dad had to bring his gun home on occasion,” she said. “He wanted me to understand guns, not be scared or intrigued.” After a moment, she asked, “What was that about?”

“A concerned father—and husband,” Sandy said. “Over-concerned—”

“About you and Susan?” Sandy had been honest about him and Susan. They had had a very brief affair, in London, before he left the service. Practically three years ago. “He seemed to be threatening you.”

“Over nothing.”

“Ha,” she said, but quietly. She sat on her bed, expecting an explanation.

Sandy tried to line things up. Yes, Susan and he had been in Los Angeles at that time, and no, nothing happened. Moreover, she could not conceive. And, how the hell could she have hidden a pregnancy from her husband?—unless, she stayed away from home, kept separate bedrooms... “Well, sweetie,” he concluded, “I think the rich are different—in that they have money and deal with the kind of threats you and I don’t. But, uh, I’m locking my door tonight. You too.”

“Sandy, why did you bring a gun?”

“I feel safer with it.”

**

The next morning there was tap on his door, and Sandy warily opened it. To his relief, there stood Margaret, dressed, hair pinned up, face made up and looking a bit nervous. Dressed except for his tie, he let her in and she perched carefully on the unmade bed while he proceeded to tie it in front of the mirror. “Last night still bothers me,” she said, bluntly.

“You never told me you were handy around guns.”

“Well, the subject never came up.”

True. “Can you shoot?”

“I’m no Annie Oakley, but yes. During the war Dad took me to a range and taught me how to shoot—there were strange things going on at the time—riots, the so-called ‘Battle of Los Angeles’ in early 1942—riots--the ghost blimp—“

“The what?”

“A blimp lost its crew and finally came down in Daly City. You never heard of it?”

“Yeah—of course. He taught you how to shoot for that?”

“That—there were other odd things going on at the time too—the so-called ‘battle of Los Angeles’ which the newspaper never did fully explain. Dad also thought or felt that there were prowlers in our neighborhood. Oh, let’s drop the topic.”

“Okay,” Sandy said, knotting his tie. He turned around to her. “My little pistol-packin’ mama.”

“Good God, is that the nickname that Susan wants to know about?”

“No, and sorry.”

“Why are you carrying a gun? Your answer last night—made sense, but it didn’t convince me.”

“So, you know when I’m holding back?” This was not flippantly said.

“For a man who was honest about his former—relationship with our hostess—yes, you’re holding back.”

“Sweetie,” Sandy said, “someday I may tell you. I don’t like keeping secrets, but secrets, by being secrets—need to be kept a secret. Okay?”

Margaret lifted her chin. “Okay,” she agreed. “And I will write that down in my diary.” More like partners than lovers, they appeared for breakfast in the dining area. Margaret started to rake her hand through her hair, but stopped herself.

Sandy re-marked boundaries when he determinedly, politely, returned Susan’s watch to her over breakfast. “You have children now,” he said. If Susan had anything to say, her words were clipped off when Eddie entered with a pleasant good morning. She put the watch aside, and that seemed over.

After breakfast, Sandy and Margaret greeted Maria and Elenka, who had already been put in bed by their nanny when they arrived the evening before. The girls were glad to see him again. Elenka wanted to show off her piano playing,

Then they met the sleeping Thomas Edward, brought in by the nanny. “I didn’t know you had a third child,” Margaret said.

“Adopted,” Susan smiled. “I found him in Canada.”

“Lovely blue eyes,” Eddie remarked, glancing into Sandy’s own blue ones.

At ten o’clock they went to the television studio, located on Madison Avenue. They were brought into a surprisingly small room, brightly lighted, and with cables snaking about the floor. They sat in three chairs and waited while all hell swirled about them.

They had been nervous about their television appearance and now were growing terrified. Susan told them the night before that televisions were selling at triple the rate of radios now—millions...not all of them were going to be on though! Her transmission went into New York, Washington DC, and the New England states on the Dumont network.

Airtime. Sandy and Margaret shrank back into the darkness. The director then counted down, ending with three on his fingers, then two, then one... Susan easily looked into the camera, welcomed the viewers to her new weekly show, and “my first guests are Alexander Komansky and his fiancée Margaret Whitfield. Mr. Komansky, formerly Sergeant and then Lieutenant Komansky, was the subject of the article I wrote and was published in *Saturday Evening Post*. In the event of his engagement—their engagement—I have invited them to be guests on our first television broadcast.” After asking them expected questions about how they met, she asked, “Sandy, tell us about your studies...” Sandy’s hand went for his throat to press the button for the I-phone; he took it away and spoke—foolishly, he thought, but he tried to be brief, knowing that whoever was listening didn’t want chapter and verse about his college courses. Susan swiftly picked up on the subject of aeronautics and asked if he were working with jet-powered aircraft, very different from the propeller driven planes he had flown in during war time. He parried some questions about the future, including rockets.

Susan then asked Margaret about her work of teaching, first asking if it were true that Jackie Robinson, who had recently broken the color line in baseball, had attended John Muir High School in Pasadena. “Why yes,” she said, pleased that she could speak about her school’s star pupil, though he had graduated from Muir before she was hired. Susan asked her about the importance of literature in these days of atomic bombs, rockets, and the like. Margaret answered, simply and sincerely: “Simply, people love stories. They always have. Through storytelling, whether Little Red Riding Hood, or Hamlet, people see themselves, admire heroes, understand villains.”

By the time Susan completed the interview, and wished her watchers goodbye, both Sandy and Margaret were both paralyzed and pleased with themselves. When the lights went down, and people began uncoiling wires and cables Sandy excused himself. When Susan and Margaret went to find him, they located him

near the men's room, leaning against the cool wall and fanning himself. "I stink at this I guess," he joked. "You stink?" Margaret asked. "That camera is just like a cyclops." Susan assured them that they had been fine and taking their arms, started them towards the elevators but Sandy was then called to the phone—"Who?" he asked the young woman, who was holding out the receiver to him.

"I don't know sir," she said.

He took it. "Hello?"

"Hello, Sandy! How are you dear?"

After a moment: "Mrs. Gallagher!—Oh my god—are you in New York?"

"In Washington. We understood you were going to be on this television show and we tuned in!"

"Will you be home in the next few days?—we're going to the Run—"

"No, we're arriving after Christmas and Pres and his family are coming..." She offered to call Cal Hopkins and have him open the house for them.

"Thanks, but it's too much bother. We have hotel rooms in Bassingbury." Sandy then motioned to Margaret—"Mrs. Gallagher—Joe's mother-- wants to talk with you—"

Margaret pressed the phone to her ear. "Hello, Mrs. Gallagher, Sandy has talked about you."

"Margaret, I'm so happy to meet you—over television and the telephone!" They chatted and then Margaret, feeling a bit flustered, passed the receiver back to Sandy. He said his goodbyes, and found his eyes were wet. She hadn't forgotten about him. He still had a connection with the Gallagher family, of some kind. He realized he had been so excited he had forgotten to tell her about the flask he was returning.

They were delivered to Grand Central for their train to Connecticut. Susan, joined by her husband, thanked and wished them goodbye as their platform for departure came up on the board. "Whew," Sandy said when they found their car and settled into their seats.

“Whew, ditto,” Margaret said. They automatically joined hands. After a moment, she said, “That lady is awfully in love with you, you know...” “Forget it,” Sandy answered, not thinking of Susan as much as her husband. He couldn’t say the man was threatening him—perhaps warning him?

They both relaxed the further they got away from New York. They had drinks and dinner in the dining car. “My treat,” Margaret said as they peered at the menu...a hamburger cost \$2.00!

“Hm?”

“I make a salary too.”

Sandy nodded.

The scenery rolled by, dingy stops, woods, rivers, towns...gray and soft in early winter light. “What’s the smile about?” Margaret asked. “Is it my stunning beauty?” Flushed with a bottle of wine which went well with the criminally expensive filet mignons, they clinked glasses. “Oh, I feel like I’m in a movie,” she said. “How do you feel?”

“I feel like I’m going home,” Sandy admitted. Irene’s phone call had roused buried memories of nearly three months at home...or what felt like home.

“Not Oakland?” Margaret said. She had yet to meet Uncle Tym...who had sent her a lovely if somewhat misspelled note of congratulations on their engagement.

“The Gallagher home. It was an inn once, built by their ancestors, and then became the family home. Joe’s mother bought me there, when she kind of adopted me at Walter Reed...looking back, I was half dead, maybe more than half.” Over the clickety-clack of the train wheels, Sandy fondled memories, both good and bad, that commenced well before the healing womb of the Gallagher family had warmed and protected him. For so long he had been a hardheaded idiot—who didn’t trust anybody, and though he had buddies, had no friends, the kind of friends you read about in books. He had left a lot of people behind without a backward glance, not a thought, not a care. They didn’t deserve it, or maybe he felt he didn’t deserve them.

Until he met General Frank Savage and then, later, Lt. Colonel Joe Gallaher. During the time he served Savage, he was scared of the man, kind of dismissive of

being his flight engineer as he roused the envy of other flight engineers, and tried not to give a rat's ass when the man died, particularly since he alone survived him and eight other men. Gallagher changed that situation; nobody could just walk off from an event like that without paying some price; fortunately, Joe had offered him great things for some plain old loyalty. That had been hard as hell to get to, but once he did, damned good. "I'd throw myself in front of a truck for him," Sandy said.

He talked more about Joe Gallagher. Margaret, who had been listening lovingly, now listened intently, for this was an important person in her fiancée's life, but she really knew little about him. Their first meeting was warped, ugly. Sandy spoke about how he held Joe to blame for the CO's plane going down. No way that could have been helped, and Joe himself went through hell over it, bad hell, but stuck it out—and made him, Sandy, stick it out with him—despite how he had provoked the man into laying hands on him, and he tried to take advantage of that stupid move. "I was going to report him. He might lose rank. And I loved it. That much of a louse. I mean, we're talking cockroach."

Margaret, hearing about lives and acts in a world not very well known to her, was spellbound. This was stuff for a novel, she thought.

"If there is one moment in my life that things changed," Sandy said, "it's when Joe refused to take shit from me—he reported himself!--and made me fly with him."

Their plane developed trouble. They had to drop out. Then the pirate ship came for them...

"And then?"

He finished the story, but it was not the end of their own peculiar story, which rolled out for another 15 months of the air war, and then later, in the confused peace. Together they saw places, and did some incredible things, sometimes willingly, sometimes on order. "He always had my six," Sandy said. "I didn't always have his but I tried." He then talked of the Gallagher family...their deep roots in the region, their allegiance to their community—their sense of service to others.

Maybe, he thought, he should have stayed with Joe rather than flipping off to college. No, it was better that he had left...

“I’m looking forward to meeting them,” she said, but she felt overwhelmed by them, particularly when she learned that Mrs. Gallagher owned the news service Anson—and her husband and Joe’s father and brother were generals. She was glad they weren’t at home.

The train slowed, and stopped and they climbed down on a wet cold platform. After taking a taxi, they registered at the Hotel Derwent, and Sandy said, up front, “Two rooms please.” She smiled.

The next morning, after late breakfast, they put on coats and mufflers and overshoes they had had a hard time finding in Los Angeles and boarded the bus to Archbury. Sandy found there were two taxis in Archbury now!—he nervously told the driver the address: the Gallagher home on the Post Road east of from Archer’s Run. “I don’t think the family’s in, sir,” the taxi driver said.

“That’s all right.” The car pulled into the gravel drive and eased up to the flagstone terrace. Though locked, the bright green door seemed welcoming, overcoming the shuttered windows and the gray trees caked with snow. “It’s beautiful inside,” he said, helping her out. “I felt at times that I was living on some movie set...I just wanted to show it to you.”

After a few minutes, while the meter clicked, they returned to the car and started the drive back. “Would you like a house like that?” she asked.

“Only if there’s meaning in it,” he said.

“And a staff of four,” she joked. “Keeping a place up like that must be quite a chore.”

“It was!—but that was best three months of my life—to that point,” he added.

“What about that?” She meant the wrapped box Sandy had carried with him.

“Is there still a Monahon’s jewelry store?” Sandy asked the taxi driver.

“Yeah, under different management.”

Sandy asked him to drop them at the town square. They walked into the small jewelry store, releasing the inevitable bell over the door and a voice called, “Be right out.”

When the thirtyish man came out, he laughed and said, “The four spoons guy!” When Sandy simply stared at him, he said, “I was tending counter part time at the diner back in ’45—I remember you took that lousy coffee with four spoons of sugar.”

“Benny!” Sandy recalled. “You own the place?”

“Me and the savings and loan. When I wasn’t pouring the joe I was getting to know diamonds and gold carats and the kind of thing from my uncle who was selling me the store—what are you doing here?”

Would he please hold onto this package and deliver it safely to Preston Gallagher at Dusky Boughs? “Certainly.” He accepted the package. Small talk convinced Margaret that he wished to speak with Sandy alone. “I need some coffee at the café over there; I’m cold,” she said, and left for the diner.

“Kinda odd, but we had somebody here in town asking about you—just last summer.”

“Who?” Sandy asked.

“Nobody knew. A tall guy, with a moustache.”

“What did he want to know?”

“About your time here—those weeks or months back in 1945. Comings and goings. I told them. I could tell you don’t dick around with faces like that—but all’s I could tell him is that you kept pretty close to Mrs. Gallagher while you were here. He asked about Isolde.”

So much for discretion, but people knew they were seeing each other...“Uh, what then?”

“I guess he questioned her but...well, she’s here in town still. Married three weeks ago, too, to a teacher at the college—big things going on there since it became more than a teacher’s college. Some new colleges are being set up...I’ll see this gets into the right hands. Wanta write a note?”

He did, scribbling out his thanks, and explanations as to why he was returning it. He signed it “AJ Komansky.” He left, shaking Benny’s hand, and then glanced down through the glass countertop and saw something perfect.

Sandy then calmly entered the diner, where the coffee was as hot and as mediocre as ever. He had a cup of coffee with her...and she could see he was nervous, almost furtive. She told him she had learned about a nice restaurant in Bassingbury. They took the bus back to Bassingbury and after they returned she said he wanted to walk about the town. She wanted to go with him, but could see that he wanted to be alone.

She tried to nap but ended up pacing until Sandy tapped on her door; time for dinner. He still seemed furtive but he had a pleased grin on his face. She did not know for years that during the walk he worried about the secret part of his life—so secret even he didn't know... wondered if he should just run away, leaving a message...no, maybe it wasn't so bad...he had the perfect gift for her. No, he would not run away. He had done it before, physically, mentally, emotionally. She was the woman. He could face it both for them...yeah, well. He could not turn his back...even to protect her.

They walked to a recently opened restaurant, in a former mill straddling the run. They were an hour early for the dinner service, but the owner and chef let them in and they warmed their hands and feet at the great stone fireplace in the lounge. Thinking they looked so happy...the chef, recently married himself, gave them wine to help them pass the time, and Sandy handed her a small velvet box.

"I saw it at the jewelry store," he said. She opened the box to reveal a necklace. "I know you said you didn't need an engagement ring, and I was glad because I couldn't afford one, but I decided I had to afford this." On a slender chain of silver hung a tiny jeweled daisy. A bit of amber formed the heart of the flower; the petals were made of ivory. To her glance, he shrugged a bit. "A few dollars down, and more in the future. But it seemed right." He fastened it around her neck. They went to the nearest mirror, in the entryway of the restaurant. "I learned that Margaret is daisy in Spanish." Their heads pressed together as they looked into the mirror, and he kissed her on the cheek. "I love you, Daisy."

They stood face to face, their arms locked around each other. "Is that my nickname now?"

"If you want it to be."

"Doesn't seem fair that I get a nickname and you don't."

“Sandy’s a nickname.”

“Do you know a Polish word that’s special?”

“How about ‘ho-ney’? It means sweetheart.”

“It sounds like ‘honey’.”

“To me, it sounds like ‘horny’.”

“Speaking of which,” she chuckled, as he moved against her.

“Sir, mam, your table is ready,” said the waiter, carefully.

They followed him and sat down, and ate a nice meal that they later had no clear memory of.

Returning to the hotel, their overshoes wet and their faces warm, they went upstairs together and entered his room and without any fuss or fear, they made love for the first time—after he visually assured her that he had condoms. It was awkward at times; he worried about hurting her and he did. More experienced than she—and he recalled later, how a lot of his experience had been learned with Susan in that three-day interlude—he gave her a few tips...after she fully relaxed in his arms, it became easier and then delightful.

All ended well and they kissed and slept.

He came awake to see her in a chair by the window.

“Sweetheart—Daisy?” he asked, coming out of the warm bed. She was probably going to ask him what was going on; pistols in New York, something furtive going on with a jewelry store owner...

“I’m not crying over us,” she said.

“What then?”

“Don and I in a hotel room...up in the mountains...and I had no desire to be there. I didn’t love him. He was a nice boy, but I didn’t love him. But Don was leaving for war soon, and I thought I had to be a grown up woman at these times. Oh, I was an idiot.”

Sandy only wanted to reassure her. “You were 19.”

“All I wanted to do was take ten showers and never see him again. He proposed to me. Like an idiot, I said yes. But he wanted to marry before he left for training. He proposed eloping. Like an idiot, I said yes, again. When we were waiting our turn at the JP I said I was going to the bathroom and then took off. Got a taxi and went home. That poor boy followed me, and when I refused to see him, he admitted the thing to my parents. My parents made me talk with him.”

“And?”

“He was so damned nice. He said that we could wait; we could write while he was away and then marry when he returned, and I said yes, yes, anything to make him go away. To my credit, I did answer a couple of his letters...and then three months later I got a letter from his parents...he had died in a freak training accident. I wrote back. Didn't tell them I had miscarried their son's child ten days earlier.”

“A baby.”

“I didn't even know I was pregnant until I miscarried. Poor Don. I couldn't love him. Why not? He was a nice boy. I was only relieved about losing the baby, that poor little thing. What's the matter with me?”

“You were a kid. It was war time.”

“No.” She was suddenly quite firm. “I'm scared of loving people.”

“Why?”

“I'm not sure. But loving people scares me.”

When she was silent he said, “Daisy, I get scared like that too.”

She slid from the chair to nestle in his arms, warm and protective and she hoped they would stay that way forever. “I'll help you with your fears, and you'll help with mine,” she said.

“What scares you about love?”

“My parents never seemed to give a good account of it, but it's not just them...and I'm scared that now that I found you I'll lose you.”

“I know that feeling too.”

“Sandy...ho-ney—me having...losing a baby---it's all right?”

“Are *you* all right?—meaning—can you have another baby?”

“According to a doctor...that I saw recently...yes.”

“That’s all that matters.” After a moment, he picked her up, carried her to the bed, and held onto her as she grew quiet. She then said, “Sandy, not a word about this to my mother. She doesn’t know. Dad yes...but not her...”

In the morning, he coaxed her into the shower with him...she blushed a bit but after a few moments, they enjoyed themselves. After that, little secrecy remained between them... All went well in their journey back to New York for their plane.

In early January of 1949, he received a note from Mrs. Gallagher, thanking him for the flask and that it did get into Pres’ hands.

Preston Gallagher: In Silence and Solitude - Washington DC, December 28

In his Pentagon office, both tidy and untidy enough to show that this was a general who put in his day's work, Brigadier General Preston Gallagher finished a paragraph in a report he was writing on efforts to integrate, or at least desegregate the Army. Pres always set heavily on this point: unlike the Air Force and the Navy, which were already proceeding with integration by war's end, the Army let it be known that despite Presidential order, it did not believe in the efficacy of integration: the policy of segregation did not mean inequality. The Fahy Committee, appointed to study the issue and make recommendations, despite it being the holiday week between Christmas and New Years, was meeting. Notably meeting in the Pentagon too, which was meant to make a point to the resisting members of the Army—and the Marine Corps too—that integration was here. Pres also knew that to interested Negro parties, the Pentagon meeting place, seemed another way to keep integration, and lack thereof, in the hands of the elites.

Pres had not minded his current assignment, though it lacked the dash of the Albanian mission—which was both a heroic moment in his career, and a black mark on his record as President Truman had not approved of the affair. But Pres was proud to step up to the task and was—and had been—in a cordial relationship with General Benjamin O. Davis, the first Negro general. In the late thirties and pre-Pearl Harbor days, Captain Pres Gallagher had been one of the few white officers who did not balk, complain, and try to get transferred from leading Negro units, which was policy: Negro soldiers were thought to lack the quality of leadership, and were led by white officers. Bred in a household that did not retire from or ignore color issues, Pres not only led the Negro soldiers, he made a point of talking with them, getting to know them, learning how they felt. Not surprisingly, they had mixed emotions: they wanted to defend their homeland, but knew damned well the irony of defending the “land of the free” when they were barred from ordering a cup of coffee at a Woolworths' lunch counter. Some wanted to have completely segregated units with Negro officers; some knew that white officers were the way to go—if the white officer would respect them enough to speak up for them. And on the other side, white officers were always telling Pres that the Negro soldiers were not half the men the Negro press reported them to be; the newspapers were the troublemakers, stirring up

troubles that the “real Negro soldier” didn’t want. When Pres started learning more about unofficial Army and government policies, he learned that big figures like Henry Stimson, Secretary of the Army, would provide lip service to Roosevelt’s pressure to widen civil rights to this ten per cent of the American population, and secure better treatment for the Negro soldier but the man, in private, thought differently.

Pres was ordered to other duties in early 1941, wishing he could have accomplished more...and groaned at how Negro soldiers were given inferior training and then laughed at for being poor at their work, and yet, if they complained, saying if they were going fight for their country, than they were going to fight for democracy at home too. God, Pres thought, lighting a cigarette, and making himself forget about the bottle of brandy in his drawer to sweeten his coffee...and some pills to dull the pain of the not quite healed “wound of Albania.” Albania...good and bad. Good for rescuing, bad for him, eventually. Though lionized as a hero, he was privately chastised; he should have stayed in camp and let his men undertake the raid, not leading it. Meeting Ilka had been both good and bad too—and in that little time had kind of fallen in love with her himself, and had worried about her and the child she bore Joe.

And part of his current assignment was probably in punishment for his words...an anti-military newspaper had published some of his remarks about his family. His little brother, Pres had opined, was too old to be showing off in the airlift, and his father was an example of how career military men missed out on duties due to their family. Zingo, he thought, concentrating on the good points of his remarks being published rather than on his Dad’s disappointment and his mother’s concern.

Yeah, Joe flying was good for morale and made great copy, but what about “his boys”?—who were getting shit copy for doing their duty and damned well, dammit... Pres reared up from his chair to stare out his window down into the five sided heart of the Pentagon. At least he had a window. Washington’s pale cold skies seemed to shiver over the mighty building that had Pres trapped like a fly in amber, while Joe got do what he loved most in life: flying, even in a rat race like the Berlin Airlift.

He turned back to his desk, determined to complete certain tasks as New Year's Eve beckoned. Getting ready to deal with possibly chilly parents kept his mind off his home life, strained as Betty could not quite physically recover from the birth of their second son, Morrill Joseph, named after Betty's dad—both names. She was beset by migraines and nausea, and spent days and nights in a dark room. Betty's half-sister Miriam had come, and though he tried to like Miriam, she was not that likable, nor good with the children.

And sometimes, Pres had taken out some frustration...on the furniture, at least. But damn, that was still no way to act. And Betty had urged him... to take a vacation from her. "Joe and Ceile had time apart and they got through a bad time," she pointed out, understanding from Ceile's letter that divorce had been kind of on the table for the golden boy and his airborne golden girl.

"Would I have to be almost killed for you to return to me?" he asked her after his second Scotch. Apologies followed the next morning, with Pres asking to comb out Betty's soft brown hair. She agreed and enjoyed it but could certain words be forgotten? Would she start nagging him about drinking?—hell, he had nagged himself about his drinking, but it sure dulled a lot of feeling.

His thoughts felt like a tornado. He turned to his report and worked for two hours, concluding that "Records and history indicate that efficiency has not been the result of the Army's segregation policy. Clearly, the Gillem report has not been implemented and that, contrary to Army claims, segregation by its nature precludes equal treatment and opportunity. Man to man segregation must cease and the proper goal of the Fahy committee is to determine procedures by which the Army can integrate its forces without violence..."

The phone rang and he didn't hear it.

"Sir?" his aide asked, sticking his head in. "Yes Captain," Pres said and picked up the head piece—maybe this was the phone call he had been waiting for. A postcard two days before Christmas...he had called Betty at Dusky Boughs and told her, this was duty, he couldn't make it...

"General Pres Gallagher?"

"Yes. Who is this?"

“Can you come and get me at the train station?”

“Who...is this?” Pres asked.

“Dave McGraw.”

“Sure.”

Pres made a phone call. He then buttoned his jacket; shouldered on his winter uniform coat, and was striding out as his aide called for an unmarked sedan—and then he returned to ask the captain to call his wife and tell her he would be late. He instructed the aide to get his report typed up and taken directly to the Fahy Committee.

Now what? God knew. But he was up to it. He had been waiting...

Harvey: An Uncertain Siege - Wiesbaden, West Germany, January 1949

Early Christmas morning, Molly Staller, who had stayed in the cottage during the last few weeks of Roxanne's pregnancy awakened Harvey and Melva around two in the morning. "The baby is coming," she announced importantly. Melva calmly dressed and walked through a light snow to the cottage and after an hour confirmed that it was true labor and at six in the morning of Christmas Day, a lovely girl baby was born. Harvey stayed in the house, drinking tea, reviewing cases but anxious. In the afternoon, Harvey was invited to the cottage and presented Roxanne with a basket of fruit, which Sandy had sent as a Christmas gift. "No gold, frankincense and myrrh," he said.

"This is far better," Roxanne said, eagerly if wearily peeling an orange.

"What silly gifts!" Melva laughed. "If the wise men were really wise they would have brought diapers, somebody to wash them, and a hot dish for the new parents to eat."

"Do you have a name?" Harvey asked.

"Mary Diane."

On December 26, Boxing Day, Harvey was sifting through his correspondence in his study and reviewing two new cases, when the phone rang. Deitwiler. Without a question about how his Christmas had been, he told him that he, Harvey, was being sent to Frankfort am Main again, on an extremely special mission: an American Negro captain, in command of an American engineering battalion at Wiesbaden in the western zone, had been arrested for rape and attempted murder: Captain Byron Mahoney.

Harvey talked about this with his wife and they both went to the cottage where Roxanne Mahoney breast fed her baby and wept, quietly. "It's not true," she whispered. "It's not."

"I know it's not true," Stovall said. "Roxanne, I swear to you, I'm going to get him off." She finished nursing and awkwardly laid Diane in her crib and then broke down and cried. "He'll do right by your man," Molly announced. "You just wait and see."

Roxanne reported on her words to Harvey when he visited before departing for Germany. Harvey nodded, but knew Roxanne was wise enough to hear the truth. "I will do my best for Captain Mahoney," he said. When he left, he sighed, knowing that the New Year, always looked to as a beacon of hope for the new, was going to change in some old ways. Harvey mentally squared his shoulders as he left Troyroys and commenced on his journey to Frankfort am Main.

Harvey's flight was interesting in more ways than one: not only was he seeing the airlift close up, the C-47 he rode in was stuffed with a fraction of 10,000 holiday gifts being sent to children in Berlin; their lateness was not to be worried about. When they landed, a swirl of tired airmen clustered around to see if Bob Hope was coming off the plane; the hard-traveling entertainer was bringing his "Christmas Caravan" to airlift personnel at various bases. Harvey was met and saluted by a WAC lieutenant who drove him to the city. Harvey recalled Nuremberg as they drove past sections that had been lightly struck, other sections in ruins, and other areas in near perfect condition.

Before he was checked in and found his quarters, he was taken to the stockade where he was to meet Mahoney. He sat in the utilitarian room, which was at least warm, flinching when the radiator hissed.

When he arrived, on December 30, he learned that Mahoney could not be interviewed until January 2. He was disappointed...but suddenly sent a telegram to J.A. Gallagher, serving in the Airlift and quartered in Wiesbaden. Could he come for a visit? To Harvey's pleasure, he could, but only a few hours.

Now, on a wet overcast day, January 3, 1949, he waited in the lobby of the Munster House, where he had quarters, and then a good friend finally came through the central doors. This was the first time he had seen Joe in almost a year; the last time was the dinner party.

"Joe," Harvey said as his old friend came in, taking off his service cap, now bedecked with the Air Force symbol. They wrapped their arms around each other, and then joking about PDA, walked into the elevators and then to Harvey's room.

"Well, tell me about the airlift," Harvey then said. Joe arched his eyebrows over weary eyes at the question but he was soon pouring forth. "Well, it ain't no picnic..." Joe talked about the fog, which had started in November, may be more

effective than Stalin in bringing West Berlin to its knees, as plane after plane either could not take off, or had to circle and return. Three planes had crashed in the stuff. Joe launched into some funny stories about the lift, including how the number one problem was flour—no matter how well sacked, the stuff got everywhere...and that salt was so corrosive, the British brought it in water-landing planes but had to stop recently because the landing lake was iced over. Coal was also godawful, and a cartoon, “Air Lift Laffs” showed the eyes, ears, nose throat doctor for the coal-carriers was a chimneysweep. Things were improving in that pilots were no longer found sleeping on their feet. But still, the weather was the real problem now; what the Migs couldn’t do, low hanging clouds did. He spoke with admiration of how the airlift, which had scrambled into existence in June 1948, was now landing a plane every three minutes, and the local people, who wanted work, had taken over the unloading and could do so speedily and the remaining Air Force crews got into competition with them. One funny thing...the crews needed snacks and the going and coming—and the lingering—caused delays and this was solved by on-site Jeeps converted into snack wagons staffed by pretty young frauleins! The ladies were off limits, but the crews happily got snacks from their pretty hands, even in freezing weather. He also talked about the candy bomber, Gail Halvorsen, just a friendly guy, who promised some hungry, friendly German kids—who had nothing to do with the regime which had brought their country to its knees—some more candy after he shared his gum with them. As his plane was taking off, he would waggle the wings, and pitch out candy. More kids came and more and more... The candy bombing maybe got too much publicity but it was a joyful note in a grim, growling existence. “The kids call the guy Uncle Wiggly Wings,” Joe said. “Even the pilots who grump about the candy drops want to be the ones who thought it up!” Another story that Glen King had told him: when the airlift started, King had walked into a bar for a beer, and the German citizens, recalling allied bombings, all left. Within two weeks, when he walked into the same bar, the German citizens stood in respect and shook his weary hand, one after another.

They also talked about the stuff going on in salons, corridors, telephones, letters...including how the US was examining not only its only military preparedness, but examining the armies of France and England. But this was

below the more optimistic talk about organizing European defense but the defense did not lie in guns, but in unity. People were working on it.

“So what’s the gag, Harvey?” he then asked, and both recalled how an angry Gallagher had climbed into a B-17 cockpit and flung the same question at Harvey, determined to become a pilot in the Eighth.

“Well, just seeing you again is no gag,” Harvey said. “You kind of disappeared again after we saw you in March.” He proceeded carefully. “We heard a few rumors about things going on in Bryncote,” and said no more. “The one good thing about the airlift is that news started coming down through channels that you had volunteered to fly missions.”

“Yeah. Well, I was pretty surprised when they let me. I’m currently—I figure—to be a nice victim of PRO. I figure...by being kept in the public eye, I might be less a target for a successful assassin.”

“Then it was determined to be an assassination attempt?”

“No. But it hasn’t been ruled out, either. Harve, I heard a few things about you, too—“

“Scuttlebutt says the higher ups are sitting on a name and a motive.”

“I don’t know.” To Harvey’s surprise, Joe suddenly whipped out a cigarette and lighted it, swiftly, and definitely. He snapped the Zippo cover shut and exhaled a cloud of smoke. “Yeah, I took it up again. Gonna quit when...well, when I quit again. Ceile won’t have it any other way.”

“I understand,” Harvey said, hearing the words “I bet,” in his head. But the couple he had seen in March was united with new wisdom and maturity. But he had something to tell him and decided to do it. “Joe...did you know that Sandy was in London on the night you got struck by that lorry?”

Joe stared at him...and stared until the burning cigarette nipped his fingers. He hurriedly put it down and spent some time grinding the butt into the ashtray. His face, though set, betrayed surprise—alarm...

“Was he involved?” Harvey said, wonderingly.

“Why, yes,” Joe finally said. The cards fanned out again. “Yes...he was...involved.”