

**TWELVE O’CLOCK HIGH**

**INTO THE WIND**

**CHANGING WINDS: 1949**

**FOREWORD**

In the last year of a tumultuous decade, Joe, Harvey, Sandy face great challenges that since they don't break them, make them stronger, but no less mystified by a growing web of strange incidents including another case of attempted murder...against Ceile and Harvey. Joe, still flying for the Airlift, regains his memory of the murder attempt against him...but the memory just adds to unanswerable questions. Harvey's skills as a member of JAG are put to a severe test when he defends Byron Mahoney, an African American officer, against accusations of rape and attempted murder. Sandy, still reeling from events in 1948 must join a strange mission to Poland to find something that seems nearly useless but meets two strange figures. As the year continues, Joe must deal with Pres' disappearance, which at least leads to a meeting with old friend Vorodenko, who has his own hazards to face in Moscow. Airlift finally over, the reunited Joe and Ceile make a decision to adopt...no less than Frank Savage Jr. Heading for home, they stop over in Ireland for a fascinating trip into both of their ancestries, oddly linked. Harvey and Melva's lives are disrupted by twin incidents: Harvey is "forcibly retired," and before he and a nervous Melva return to the States, lose their home to fire. Pres finally reappears but his fate is a grim one...and the year concludes with Sandy and Margaret's sudden decision to marry in January, 1950—as Sandy has been recruited to become a naval aviator.

### **Harvey: An Uncertain Siege - Wiesbaden, Germany, January**

In a hotel room in Frankfurt Germany, two men could have heard a pin drop—it if weren't for a noisy flush of a neighboring room's toilet.

As the gurgle of water died away in the walls, Lt. Col. Harvey Stovall, USAF and JAG, struggled to contain the surprise—and the possible meanings--as the words of USAF Brigadier General Joseph Anson Gallagher, on detached service with Operation Vittles sank into both of them. Joe's handsome face was not matter of fact; expanding revelation was there.

Harvey said, "He was involved..?"

Joe shook his head. "It never came up. Not once. I was never questioned about it. But Sandy was there." He paused. "How do you know this?"

"Sandy told me he was in London at that time—"

"He was? What the hell was he doing in London?"

Harvey paused.

"Skip it," Joe snapped. "It's pretty clear the investigators didn't know it either. Hell, after I woke up enough to start answering, they were too busy questioning me what the lorry looked like and what was I doing there on that street—"

"Was Sandy—"

"He—Sandy--was not driving the lorry." Joe's face was fixed, sharp, sure. "God, Harvey, it's like a door opening. My memory is coming back. It's not crystal clear but suddenly... Harv--this conversation never happened, let's get that straight. Unless it's absolutely necessary."

"Agreed."

"I was on my way to meet with Vorodenko."

"Why were you meeting with him?—if you don't mind me asking."

"Nik was in London having official talks with USAFE but our official paths weren't crossing which was better for both of us. I was hoping he had information about Lt. Harley Wilson...you remember that guy, Harvey?—fool or hero, ended up MIA—" Joe paused, in respect for Mike.

Sadness rushed in before Harvey could stop it. Within a few months after the end of the war in Europe, nearly 11,000 MIAs were reduced to less than 4000 as seized records confirmed their deaths, their remains were found, and, once in a while, a living person announced his identity and showed his dogtags. Harvey had not held out much hope at the time—and later, with what Erika Bridgestone had told him...the mission Mike had been assigned to... "A disaster from the start," could mean many things, and none of them good. The officer who dreamed up the plan—McGraw perhaps, since his name had come up in the area more than once-- might have covered it up to salvage his reputation, or, Harvey had gone on to think, perhaps it had been an act of treachery.

Joe was describing how his inquiry about Harley Wilson was a personal search, impelled by a letter from his sister. She had been informed by the government in July 1946 that according to Public Law 4, 77<sup>th</sup>

Congress, that after “exhaustive investigation” having been conducted, “in view of the fact that over twelve months has expired without the receipt of evidence to consider a presumption of survival, the War Department must terminate such absence by a presumptive finding of death.” Not only did this end the government’s responsibility of pay and benefits, this action might benefit the family, letting them open safety deposit boxes, request benefits from insurance, release wives into widowhood, and perhaps to start accepting the soldier’s death. But the young woman, alone in the world after being widowed by the war, and the death of her surviving parent, had responded to Joe’s personal letter to Harley’s family. She took chances, simply addressing the letter to the Pentagon, with the request, Please forward. He received it in late 1947, at his offices, with Julie—Lt. Lovelace—handing the letter to him...Mrs. Watson wrote a neat, typed request to Joe that revived the memory of that remarkable pilot who threw his own survival away in a bid for immortality. Joe had not addressed this in his wartime letter to Mrs. Watson in Peoria, Illinois. He did tell her how Harley had saved his life, and fully deserved his posthumous medal. He did not tell her that Harley Wilson lingered in his memory as an enigma, the unriddling of which might help explain why the hell it was that humankind—capable of grand gestures, art, building, exploring, discovering—had to fight. Had to find fame. Had to stand out, away, and make people look at him...Joe could see himself in Harley, his younger self...their reflection was not mirror-perfect, but Joe could understand what drove Harley to do what he did. But he didn’t approve and could he help others avoid such seeking? Thus he promised Mrs. Watson, in her second letter to him, passed from mailbag to mailbag, that he would make inquiries; and he called upon Vorodenko for help.

He confirmed and reconfirmed their meeting. “After Juli—Lt. Lovelace left for the night, I received a phone call--Lt. Bronnitsey was waiting for me at the Turtles pub to take me to Vorodenko. I started walking down Turnet Close which is lined with mews—you know, where horses and carriages were kept once. There were some doors, windows—but all shuttered. And there he stood.” Joe rubbed his face as his memory grew clearer and harsher. “He stood in a recessed doorway. Just staring at me. He looked like hell.”

“Komansky?”

“Yeah, Komansky.”

“Was he being dangled as some kind of bait?” Harvey demanded.

“His being there was shocking, not inviting. No accusations about Vorodenko—I don’t believe he was involved and that’s that.”

“Well, and then,” Harvey prompted.

“He had on a robe. Sandy that is. And no shoes on his feet. No trousers.” Joe passed his hand over his mouth and then to the back of his neck. “And he was staring at me. Like a zombie.”

“Yes?”

“I said—‘Sandy’? He didn’t speak. I reached out and, and, put my hand on his arm. And then he went down, like a punctured balloon—and he dragged me down—and then came the lorry and wham. I was gone for four days and when I woke up I couldn’t remember a thing. Maybe that’s how I’m alive.”

“Huh?”

“That doorway we fell into was just enough protection to keep that lorry from killing us both. I took the brunt of it—I guess I protected Komansky--” Joe stared at Harvey’s face, set with concern. “Harv, what do you know about this?”

Harvey related how Sandy had called him almost a year ago to learn about Joe. He had read about his assault in a copy of the *Times*. “Sandy told me he had been in London—when you were injured. But he got sick shortly after he arrived—on December 29--and was taken to the hospital.”

“That explains the robe—but what the hell was he doing in London?—he didn’t get hold of me--”

“Would you want him to?” Harvey continued, carefully. “You didn’t tell him about your daughter.”

The two men drifted to a sad event...and it helped them gather their thoughts. “Yeah. Well, that was at Ceile’s request. You know...Ceile’s a helluva woman. She was heartbroken—and she was also...embarrassed. Maybe...I don’t know if she wanted to spare Sandy some sorrow, or if—well, Ceile didn’t want to admit to him that she had blown it.”

Harvey understood. Ceile was remarkable, but at times teetered on a precipice of her own making—it was no artificial one either...but she could be changeable, sometimes gusting like a windstorm, sometimes as gentle as a spring breeze. She was professionally a stunning success, but she believed she had “personally failed” by losing a baby. Harvey recalled how grief still clung to her at his and Melva’s wedding, but that was only a few weeks afterwards.

“Well...to cop a plea Harv, I guess I took that—sad occasion and Ceile’s request--as a kind of opportunity to separate us—me—from Sandy. Or Sandy from us.”

“Why?”

“I owed it to him. I mean, I made him come back with me as my aide—”

“He never even suggested you ‘made’ him come back. He’d follow you into hell—”

“He did, on more than one occasion...all right...when he returned with me to England—at my request—which maybe he felt like he couldn’t turn down—I got him involved with the henges. When it came time for him to leave, I had to go to bat for him. I staked my stars on him being of no threat to security over certain things so he could resign and get on with his own life, which he deserved—he told me once that he had spent one third of his life in the army and been through a war...and he was only twenty-three. But I know from certain conversations that he’s under scrutiny. It seemed best to stay out of contact with him, though it was my decision. But back to our original topic. What was Sandy doing in London?”

“He was there at Mara’s invitation.”

“Mara?”

Harvey backtracked, relating how Sandy had called him from California to ask about Joe getting hurt, and then asked Harvey to investigate his movements in London—getting sick, the hotel he registered at and then take from and the hospital he was taken to. “He was known to be missing for about five hours and during that time you—both of you were assaulted. He was found back in the hospital, wandering around. Joe, he could have been a plant, a lure—you know, drugged—“

Joe interrupted. “Why did Mara invite him to London?”

“I don’t know--completely. But what else but the henges?”

“What the hell is their connection?” Joe demanded. Joe’s skin had pulled back from his face; the slight bluish bags under his eyes were crowned by eyes intense with curiosity and alarm.

“We need some food,” Harvey said and left and hurried back with food and drink from the nearby commissary. “Joe, how are you, truly?” he then asked, as they unwrapped the hot sandwiches and popped open the bottles of beer.

“I’m okay, Harv.” Harvey did not protest this but he recalled how he once found Joe—on the floor by Savage’s desk after the man had decked his deputy commander when Joe had questioned his fitness to fly. He had also said then “I’m okay,” though his face was bruised and blood was seeping from a nostril. Harvey had simply driven him back to his quarters, holding his tongue about Joe reporting to the base hospital first.

“I’m okay,” Joe repeated, after finishing his sandwich.

“And how is Ceile...?”

“Working on getting pregnant.”

“Hm...?”

“Meaning, she’s finished with flying. She knows it took its toll. So she’s voluntarily ground bound for hospital duty. Seems happy. And,” he said quickly, “we’re talking adoption...okay, on to Sandy.”

“According to certain whispers, Sandy has been involved with some henge project in southern California. Not deliberately. Not official. He’d be in jail now or worse. Do you know Mara’s in California now, married to Posnan--?”

“Heard something of it, yes.”

“I can only tell what I know. Mara brought Sandy to London in early January of last year to personally hand over certain documents to him—if these were not about the henges, then what else?”

“Where are these documents now?”

“You would have to ask him.”

“Why didn’t he—“

“Because he’s feeling like he’s alone in all this, perhaps. But, he’s no fool. If these documents were in any way—critical—you know that he wouldn’t be foolish with them.”

“Damn. I should have told him to stay, or talked him out of resigning.”

“Would it made things any better? Besides...The stars will figure this all out in the end I think. We’re written in them.”

“What?” Joe asked this a bit wearily.

“Us. Meaning, you, me, and Sandy. I always figured though that after June 5, 1944 that we were all joined at the hip somehow... and destined for something.”

Harvey evoked a terrible time and a terrible moment on June 5<sup>th</sup> 1944, when Joe, in what was admittedly a wild reach to salvage the 918<sup>th</sup>’s honor after his leadership had nearly collapsed as pilot after pilot turned their backs on him. He ran out to the flightline, vaulted into his lady’s bosom, crawled up into her deck and was furiously, procedurally, defiantly getting Lily ready to fly even if he had to fly that final mission by himself.

Harvey joined him on the flightdeck. Harvey the adjutant. Who didn’t have to fly. Was too old to fly. Was flying anyway. Then Sandy rose between them. Who was wounded. Who could be considered out of commission. But he got away from his quarters and came anyway and they flew, dammit, they flew...with the other pilots and their planes following them. Fucking great moment. Fucking bad luck as the weary Lily was knocked out of the skies. Harvey and Joe survived their jump and thank God found each other easily and fled for the first port in the storm, a cellar in a farmhouse...and found Sandy hiding behind a door. Together. They had all made it, together. They walked away from Normandy together on June 7 and together were flown home, with Joe’s wife there on the plane..! The three musqueteers, Harvey thought at one point during their ordeal. All for one, one for all.

“I don’t believe in destiny,” Joe started and Harvey interrupted.

“I don’t either. But once in a while you know that fate is a factor. We all got pushed together.”

“That was the war.”

“The war was a bomb dropped in a lake and its enormous ripples are gonna last for a long time. Good ripples and bad ripples. Strange ripples. Like the henges you and Sandy got involved with and which I got involved with too, whether I liked it or not. What should we do?” Harvey finally asked.

“We gotta start making some sense out of this. We’re in a cobweb, maybe waiting for a spider to come and kill us.”

“I think we’d be dead by now if—“

“Unless we’re being used as pathfinders perhaps.” A pathfinder, one helluva a deadly job, was sent ahead of a bombing mission to distract, and radio information back to oncoming bombers.

“Who’s using us?”

“Anybody. Everybody. Dammit, I’m tired of being taken advantage of—“

“The Pentagon wouldn’t see it that way, I bet.”

“Yeah. Oh yeah. Top secret. Top fucking secret. Maybe it’s time for some horsetrading...see this face, Harv?” Joe demanded. “The Pentagon has made me into a darling of the press. Handsome, charming, brave!—a true leader but one of the guys—“

“Don’t sound so sarcastic...but in exchange for cooperation, what could you pry out of the Pentagon?”

“Answers.”

Harvey leaned in. “To what questions? And what would you do with the answers?” He knew the look: Joe’s keen hazel eyes reflected his intelligent reception of Harvey’s question. “Muddy waters aren’t my middle name, but I’ve swum in them a few times. And they’re deadly.”

“You’re right about muddy waters. We need to strategize our moves here. We need to figure out exactly how we’re involved but by ourselves.”

“And keeping it to ourselves?”

Joe didn’t answer, at least immediately. “We reported publicly on the henges back in those hearings. The data then seemed to get into the Pentagon, where all good ideas go to die, but it was fine with me. But it’s not dead, it’s secret, the top stuff. It’s out, and maybe not in friendly hands. We need to find out about Sandy’s involvement with this and if it had to do with me or us nearly being turned into jelly by a car. We need to find out how many other people are involved. We need to find out if so many recent other events are involved...like Percy Vivyan disappearing.” He glanced at Harvey who nodded. Yes, he heard something about that.

“And...we have got to stop the henges. Bury them. Destroy them. Get rid of them.”

“Are they so truly dangerous? Atomic power is more than just the bomb—“

“Oh God, this world doesn’t need one more way to destroy things. The Nazis failed at making the henge into a weapon but somebody could do it, on our side or on their side. No, I’m dedicated to stopping these things, or at least slowing up their discovery.” Joe then grinned at the simplicity of his plan. “One good thing...I get back into contact with Sandy.”

It was like some sunshine had sneaked into the room.

“He’d love it,” Harvey assured him. “You might be able to keep your promise of being his Best Man—I heard at Bryncote you said ‘You’d drop everything in a second to come—if you could.’”

“Isn’t he married by now?—I figured Antonia—“

“Antonia was two ladies ago. There was an Aurora—she was also a reporter and I don’t know why they called it a day. He’s now engaged to a schoolteacher named Margaret—can’t think of the last name. He told me she’s gotta be the one because he proposed to her on her front porch, in front of her parents.”

“Well, good for him. When are they getting married, do you know?”

“He said sometime in 1951.”

“When did he tell you that?”

“In a Christmas card...he’s been in recent contact with me. He’s okay.”

“Good. Harv—would it be a mistake to keep this from Sandy?”

“I think—it might be best for him to bring it up—ask about it...No, maybe we should keep our mouths shut...until we know better how to proceed.”

Joe had to be back at base in an hour. He became businesslike, and made sure to wish Harvey the best on his case—and they both would see that this case would reorient how the Negro soldier was prosecuted. Joe also vowed he would alert his mother to report on the case of Byron Mahoney. And he did and she assigned a reporter to keep tabs on developments in Europe and then in the States.

“Joe,” Harvey said as they walked to the elevator, “Are you really all right?”

“Harvey, old friend—I am at my best when I am flying. The docs can’t figure it out, but it’s true.” They left with salutes—affectionate ones—and a quick hug. Harvey knew that Joe was going to pursue Harley Wilson’s fate and could only say, “Be careful. And let’s just keep quiet about the henges. I don’t know if it’s good plan or a bad one, but let’s not go sticking our noses into...affairs.” After a moment, he asked Harvey, “And what about Sandy?”

“I’ll handle it.”

They said their goodbyes to each other, and parted.

So he was a target, Joe thought, on his way home...whatever home meant these days. His aroused memory roused up something else: that lorry was bearing down on him, deliberately. Somebody was hunting him like a duck at the shooting party in February. Both times Vorodenko figured—but not in alliance with the guys trying to take his head off. Vorodenko had nothing to gain.

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At this point, Harvey almost welcomed the court martial of Lt. Byron Mahoney, due to commence in two days. Not really. But at least its issues—notably racism and violence---could be comprehended, unfortunately for their sheer ugliness and commonness.

But he had to keep investigating, on his own time, this mess. He wondered if he would start treading on toes. Toes that were shod in iron and would stomp back. Trouble is, would he even know when he started treading on toes? And, should he tell Sandy about how he helped save Joe's life in London, a year ago? This was the time to either be silent or speak carefully. He thought that at this time, silence might be better. But one day, the talk among the three had to begin.

And what about Mike...? No, Harvey decided, he would never press that. Avoid that complication...Harvey hated his son's unknown fate being called a complication...

**Pres: In Silence and In Solitude - December 30 1948, Washington D.C.**

“Why should I help you?” Pres asked McGraw. For nearly two hours they had been sharing a bottle of excellent whisky in a hotel room in the district of Tenleytown. A pretty down at heels one, but there was a lock on the door and a clientele that did not wish to see or be seen which matched their own wishes. McGraw had brought Pres in through a grimy back entrance and they climbed the stairs to his room.

Though the surroundings were shabby, and Pres felt weary, the 39 year old brigadier general sat ramrod straight, his voice clipped, and his intense eyes telling the older general that he was no fool despite McGraw’s tempting offers, rationalizing blandishments, and expensive liquor.

“Your family owes me,” finally McGraw said, pouring more tapwater from the room’s sink into his glass.

“Bad blood does not create debts. What do we owe you for?”

“I loved your mother.”

“A lot of people do. She’s very lovable.”

“She loved me until Max took her away from me.”

“I wouldn’t say he took her. They fell in love. They’re still in love.”

David McGraw’s expression clearly indicated “fuck off” to the son of his rival—still his rival, after over forty years. He hated every day working for the man as his adjutant, but held to it, not backing down, not whining, and knowing that Max Gallagher, an up and comer, could take his place. But Max finally washed his hands of him in 1945.

But Preston Gallagher, brigadier general, feted hero and what the hell else, was listening to him rather than telling him to fuck off and leaving.

“Debt or not,” Pres then said, “Be straight with me. What are you offering?”

“Wealth beyond the dreams of the misers.”

Bingo, McGraw saw. Pres’ gray eyes flicked. “I have an inheritance.”

“A big drafty house and a news service? No money, not in cash. And you get to share it with little brother. Wouldn’t you love...to tell the world to go to hell and do what you want, have what you want.” Pres smoked a cigarette, McGraw waited, and waited. And finally said, “Well?” He tried to say the word leisurely; he knew it rasped out.

“So, talk.”

“You talked in that newspaper. Ran down your dad who spent most of his life pursuing glory rather than staying home and being a father. Your wife’s sick and you have snotty noses at home to wipe. Little

brother, who caused you a helluva lotta grief is flying to even greater glory in the Airlift. Don't tell me you wouldn't like to tell them all to go to hell."

"Talk some more. But first, pour some more whisky."

"Do we have a deal?"

"What kind of deal?" McGraw opened his mouth to show gray teeth but Pres spoke first. "Be glad you have a possible partner who asks questions. What's in the plane?"

"I have a buyer."

Pres easily caught his evasion. "Is the buyer bankrolling this little caper?" he asked instead.

"Not at liberty to say."

Pres drained his glass. "Okay, give me one really good reason why I should join you on this 'little caper.'"

"First reason is for me. I need you. You are strong and competent. That article about you was half-shit. Second. Again you'd be so rich you could tell that family of yours, particularly your brother, to go to hell."

Pres drank some more whisky and then smoked and extinguished another cigarette. "All right, but I need to make a phone call. Come with me if you want." They both trekked down the hallway to the landing, to the wall phone. Pres had to click the lever to get an operator, holding the bell-shaped headpiece to his ear and speaking into the socket. "Hi, honey," he finally said. "Betty, you'll want to clobber me but I've been held up. I don't know how long. Honey, you know the Army. Yeah, you do, you were in it too. Tell the folks I'm sorry I won't be there tomorrow night...baby...happy new year. Yeah, well, maybe this year will be better." Pres's face was calm when he hung up. He glanced at McGraw. "We bought time. So, give."

McGraw tried not to grin too much. Over forty years later, revenge. And after the revenge, a helluva lot of money, which he would have...it all. By that time, if everything went right, son Josh would be out of the picture too. He and Josh had traded favors in the last few years, as neither man particularly cared about each other or what people thought about them; but Fink put out stuff for Josh, and he gave it to his Dad who handed back money—money enough to keep the boy and his habits away. It didn't matter anyway. Josh would not see any of the money he had been lured with--by helping the old man by publishing articles on the Gallaghers that could be nicely described as derisory.

A few more shots of whiskey, more information...and Pres's caution began to falter. Yes, he was hooked McGraw thought, seeing a gleam appearing in the man's gray eyes.

"We parachute at these coordinates." McGraw showed him a half-drawn map with dotted lines and x-marks. He had an answer for every question: where would they get the plane? Where would it take off? Whose palms did they have to grease? Who was going to be standing by to help them? What the hell,

no? How would they find—by landmarks. Stashes of supplies were going to be buried for them. Radio silence, but there would be a courier. “And at your age, parachute?” Pres demanded at last.

“I’m in better that shape than that idiot who calls me dad,” McGraw snapped.

Better shape than Josh was highly relative, Pres thought, knowing that Josh was...not well. In many ways. Pres considered McGraw’s fairly compact frame, his eyes, only a little cloudy from drink, and his vigor. Okay. Lessons? Okay again.

“What’s at the coordinates?”

“You’ll learn at the time. But...it’s a plane.”

Pres did not pause. A plane full of loot?--What did he need to do?—this was Pres’ final question.

“Tell your wife and family any lie you wish as long as they will believe you. Tell them you will be back in six days.”

“Roger,” Pres said in a flat voice.

They shook hands; both were clammy. Pres took a taxi to his flat which was empty of wife and sons, who had taken off to Archer’s Run that morning. Pres strolled around, hands in the deep pockets of his woolen Army coat, noting the folded blankets, the lack of Betty’s toothbrush at the sink—her pills in the medicine chest—how many pills was she taking? And how the gin bottle was much lower than it should be. He had helped with that, he recalled. Suddenly, he seized the bottle and drained it, his throat crushing with the alcohol.

At the mantle, he picked a picture of Betty and their two sons. She held Morrill in her arms, and Ben sat next to her. She was smiling but there was a flicker of bitterness in her face. His mother had made the photography appointment and helped Betty get to the Washington DC studio with the boys—where was he? Away. Here he was, getting ready to depart. Maybe forever.

He found stationery in the secretary-desk, and, unable to find a pen used a pencil to write a note to Betty. Not a lie---just a helluva lot of information left out. Six days--maybe. Could he return after this? Pres recalled the word duty. Duty, duty, duty...and how duty, his Dad said more than once, could stink. Could it ever. But this was critical. This was enormous. This was duty of a special sort—the only kind a desperate idiot would be willing to undertake. But that’s who he was. What he was.

“Betty, I love you,” he sighed. “If I don’t come back, it might be for the best.”

He then wrote another note, left the apartment and left it at the hotel down the street. It would be picked up by a courier at a pre-arranged time. The receiver would be thrilled. He stayed at a hotel and the next day, took a taxi to the airport.

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“Pres!” shouted a wonderful voice, even though it edged on a scream.

Headed for the open gate in the chain link fence, and into the gray morning toward a gray plane headed for New York City, Pres involuntarily swiveled to see his wife gesturing to him. “We have time sir,” assured a voice at the gate.

Pres walked back into the terminal building. Betty, her hair swept back in a scarf, and a coat thrown over a shirt and trousers—both glared and pleaded with him. “I went back to the apartment; we had forgotten Ben’s stuffed dog and he couldn’t live without it and I found the note—”

“How did you find me?”

“Damned luck. I headed here—I guess I love you so much I can follow your trail but Pres what in the goddamned hell was that note about?”

“As you said, a vacation would help—”

“Vacation hell, you’re leaving—”

“I might not be,” Pres protested. “Here, sit.”

They did so. Then Betty’s eyes welled up and she put her head in her hands. “Betty, trust me,” he said, his hand massaging her neck.

“Is this some way of showing up Joe?—I know you too—well, Pres, that article—”

“I was tipsy when I said those words.”

“You were sober, I bet,” she said, anger coming up. “Face it Pres, you want out. Out of everything. Your dad—hates you for what you said, and as for your mother—she loves you, but she’s terribly hurt.” Pres’s face crossed with pain. “Pres, I hate the fact that you’re married to a drug addict—”

“You’re not,” he said. “As I am not an alcoholic.”

Outside, the propellers had started. No more time. He kissed her, long and deep. “Betty, give everybody a kiss for me,” he said.

She stared at him as he stood off and walked away. She called back to him. He returned. “Here,” she said, giving him his old flask. He stared at it. “It was returned to you—by Joe’s former aide we understand—that fellow, we met him at the wedding—Kowalski—”

“Komansky.” He clasped it to his bosom and then pocketed it. It was full of brandy. “Honey, watch yourself,” he said. He turned and left into the grayness.

Betty sat and looked at him departing. She did not know that Pres, after entering the plane, had apologized to the stewardess, saying he was on the wrong flight. The one he wanted was for Kansas City. People would be expecting him there.

### **Joe: Redeem Me from My Enemies – Berlin Airlift**

Joe returned to quarters after his visit with Harvey. It had left him both elated and disturbed, and the second feeling took over.

He wrote to Ceile about meeting Harvey...just meeting him. He resisted writing to Sandy. He would speak to Ceile first...and not immediately. After talking with Harvey he had more than a few questions, questions that he should be asking, unofficially.

He thought about writing Max. Telling him what he had learned about his near death last January. No, once more that would be recording what happened, and letting a "third party" know of a strange triangle of mystery between him, Harvey, and Sandy. But he wanted to keep Max and Irene out of these affairs for the moment.

But Ceile had to be in on "these affairs." He and his wife had suffered too much anguish and too much joy in their reunion to start playing games with each other. She was already involved with the henges... But when, and what should she be told?

Perhaps she was knowledgeable already? No. She would not have played games with him, either.

And, at any moment, Joe was nearly prepared for Creighton to appear...he'd welcome the CIC guy to tell him what was going on, yet dreaded getting more involved in what he was calling "whateverthehell"...

Of course, Joe was kept busy in the Airlift. He happily saw off the first batch of boys to go home on rotation. On 13 January, the 205th day of the Airlift, the British and the Americans flew 755 flights carrying in 6,677 tons...five days earlier, on day 200 of the Airlift, Joe came wearily off the plane and saw Berliners being permitted to cross the usual barriers to clap them on the backs, press small handmade presents into their hands. Joe, exhausted, and wanting a smoke and a swallow of brandy... He smiled, nodded, and had to brush away tears as a battered middle aged woman gave him a pair of socks...She put her arms around him. Prior to that wonderful moment, and after it, the winter got as uncooperative as hell. The worst fog in fifty years choked the airports, the skies, and the ground and the joke was that General Winter, which Stalin had relied on to stop the airlift, had handed matters off to Colonel Fog. A grim "Air Lift Laff" comic, which was the "Willy and Joe" of the Berlin ball, showed two pilots approaching the weather shack and saw that the weather officer had hung himself. "Fog must be bad today," one of the weary pilots remarked. Another cartoon showed how the fog was so bad one plane ended up flying over New York City.

But the planes kept coming and coming; and for all the vaunted threats that West Berlin would collapse, East Berlin industry began sinking as it could not get needed supplies from the West. The health of West Berliners improved, and death rates dropped. Though certain senators snarled and protested, the home front mood was positive; the liberal San Francisco Chronicle declared that if the Airlift tripled in expense, it would still be a cheap price to pay to keep West Berlin alive.

Another price: crashes and death. Not surprisingly, TASS taunted the west for its bad pilots, until a plane crashed in East Berlin. Then the idiot pilots, blindly obeying their monstrous masters, were intent on killing innocent children who had been evacuated **FROM** starving West Berlin.

Diplomacy circled about, waiting to land in the figurative fog...and Truman, after Stalin blinked a little, even invited the Soviet despot to come to Washington...and stay at the White House. Nyet, the doctors would not let him. They would talk if the Allies were interested as he was in disarmament and in restoring communication. Blah and blah. Joe read this in the American Herald Examiner, flown in from Paris, and remarked "You know it's NOT what the guy says, it's what he doesn't say....he didn't bring up currency reform"-- the bugaboo that touched off the current fracas.

Glen King, with whom Joe was sharing a drink one cold night, propped up his weary eyelids to mumble, "Home next week, huh?" "Yep, right," Joe said. King looked terrible, and admitted to Joe that in a recent run both he and the co-pilot fell asleep...and woke up over the Baltic Sea!—they headed back and landed, and no questions were asked. No time for discipline man, fly those planes! Both of them were waiting on news about a mutual friend, Kenneth Slaker, who ordered the crew to bail and then stayed in the plane to land it. Reports were that the plane had been located, but Slaker was a ghost at the moment with conflicting reports that he was dead; no he was alive and in East Berlin; and no, he was on the run. Same ol, same ol, the weary but dauntless pilots and crew proclaimed. They were all tired enough to pay only a little attention to affairs in Washington, but some, Joe in particular, read that President Truman was no longer balking on the economic salvation of western Europe and that former General George C. Marshall, aided by senators and generals, advised Congress on the need to "invest" in Europe's future, calling it the "European Recovery Act." Germany had to get on its feet again, war guilt or no, to get Europe back on its feet. One of his signal arguments: the USSR didn't want Germany to rise again, and an expected reaction was that Marshall's plan was a great one. To the Soviets, it was a declaration of impending war. Years later, in Nikita Khrushchev's memoirs, Joe read the former premier's words on the subject: "The Americans, by the Marshall Plan, organized the so-called Cold War." Well, they had helped in the organizing, thought Joe.

All through this, Joe existed in two worlds: first, the Airlift, and second, memories. After Joe recalled seeing Sandy...however briefly, it was as if floodgates opened...but only a trickle, but the trickle increased.

Two weeks after he met with Harvey in Frankfort, Joe stretched into his bunk and closed his eyes. His living quarters was about the size of his bunk; a cabinet was his closet; toilet and sink down the badly lighted hallway. He had a shot at sharing a small apartment near the base, but that came to grief when, unbelievably, a load of coal ended up in the tiny kitchen. A C-54, making a desperate landing, had to lighten its load, and coal was tossed out...some people rejoiced, other people cursed as the sacks found random targets of destruction, but all the coal was claimed by eager hands. Tunner then managed to wrangle Joe a room in the 102-chamber mansion where General Curtis LeMay lived. Joe turned it down for two reasons: he didn't like LeMay though he didn't base it off the man's cigar-chomping; he knew that a case of bells palsy had dragged down the right corner of his mouth and the cigar hid it. He also knew that LeMay's occupation of Von Ribbentrop's foreign mansion was not LeMay lapping up the good

life; it was a gesture to tell Berliners and Germany, “We are in charge.” But LeMay’s hawkishness was out in the open—he had wanted to use nuclear warheads on East Berlin and rooming with the guy even dozens of rooms away might suggest Joe shared such feelings. Besides, as “one of the guys,” and honestly glad of it, Joe wanted no special privileges and the bunk in the tiny room was all he needed when exhausted, as he was now.

Behind him was a packed week. Three more men had been killed in a C-54 crash three miles away from Rhein Main. He knew one of the pilots from Archbury and wrote a letter to his widow. On a happier note, Joe had looked the other way when four soldiers drove into East Berlin to a fuel dump, got the guards drunk and liberated 5000 gallons of fuel! He also dined with General Clay and suggested a way to keep morale up: start a competition between the Celle and Fassberg airfields to prove who was best! Clay agreed.

As Joe lay in his bunk on a rare 24 hours off he for once let exhaustion get him into its grip. But exhaustion was an old companion and sometimes good for bringing thoughts and ideas soaring and circling in his head to ground. Turn off the propellers. Silence.

And it became a good time to start toting things up.

Ceile was safe in London. Her letters, if terse, were loving and supportive. She was safe, and that helped him so much.

Sandy and Harvey, first. But, nothing more to think about at the moment.

Nik Vorodenko. Joe had lodged some discreet inquiries about his old friend, and met with silence. Russia could disappear people in a blink of an eye and he wondered if he had caused it. Before he grew too worried, he heard Nik’s voice: “Don’t worry about me, Jozef. I worry enough!” Should Vorodenko be found to begin with? An American officer seeking a Soviet officer was a recipe for trouble for them both. Besides, Harley Wilson was...not unimportant, just uninvolved. But Joe did want to tell the sister back in Illinois something. Wait and see.

And...the henges. He had been allowed to see them under the direction of Yellich Vellen in 1945. Joe thought back, all the way back, to summer 1943, when, carrying out the first shuttle raid between England and North Africa, the damaged Miss Lily...

It was a sheer accident bringing the hot and overstressed plane down in that welcomed slice of valley shut between two hulking ridges in Yugoslavia.

Was it an accident? Harvey’s remark about them being “written in the stars” had value. He began lining up events, finding gaps, finding dark corners...and maybe finding means of filling them, lighting them up...One helluva dark corner was what he *didn’t* report when they returned to England from their second and deliberate trip to Yugoslavia to rendezvous with a man they had run into by luck.

It all began with the official report: they went down in Yugoslavia. A group of people assisted them getting wire from a Nazi supply dump to get their starter switches in the third propeller running. They

flew out and rejoined their group in North Africa. When making his report back in England, Joe wrote that the group was neither Chetniks—acolytes of King Peter in exile—nor Partisans, the followers of the Marxist Tito.

What he kept in his memory—save for a few other people who were sworn to silence—Yellich Vellen, the seeming leader of a rag tag group of partisans was not interested in them it seemed until Sandy, as his flight engineer remarked later, scattered cigarettes before him. And told the man his name.

Interest did not mean welcome. Joe was then put through a wringer when Yellich and his men used him as bait to lure—and then kill—some inexperienced Wehrmacht boys. When Joe rightfully protested being used so, Vellen told him, bluntly, “You do not know the war I fight.” At the time, Joe took the comment at face value: protection of land, of family, from the invaders. The comment became far denser as he and Yellich circled around the Nazi supply dump they had helped raid to take a meandering trail back to his redoubt. The older man told him the truth—or at least, some truth. As they sat, and smoked cigarettes that he later learned had come from Sandy’s overture, Vellen spoke about who they were, why they were here. Admittedly, not much. Just that he and his daughter were there to “prevent things.” Terrible technology, he finally hedged when Joe demanded more. Technology that should not be in anybody’s hands. He begged Joe not to report on his words, or if he had to, to name no names, not even false ones. Joe had struggled with his conscience and the need for security when he finally requested to see General Creighton...with whom he was still angry for many things but this was war.

Summer 1945. While war still raged in the South Pacific, and Europe shattered, and a chill already besetting the Western Allies and the USSR, Joe received summons to return to the same coordinates in Yugoslavia, with his wife as a kind of medical section. Also along was Sgt. Komansky.

Back in Yugoslavia, at the same coordinates, Joe, his wife, and his sergeant were forced to read a series of signs to track down Yellich Vellen, now identified as Illych Mdraniewicz, actually a brilliant physicist whose earlier work had defined principles of a new kind of...something...that the Nazis had seized upon in one of their wildly conceived quests for superweapons. Some superweapons had actually made it off the drawing board, but not without problems. The jet planes were fast and incredible, but problems with maneuverability and ill-trained pilots undercut their effectiveness. The V2 missiles were deadly enough, but hadn’t done a thing to turn the war’s direction, and only ate up supplies and money that may have been used for “better” purposes. Moreover, they lacked dependable guidance systems. Other weapons were found in shelters, in caves, in underground facilities of astounding size and dimensions but ill-conceived and uncompleted. There were rumors about plans found in safes and on drawing boards, insane stuff. Mdraniewicz reported on a weapon that the Nazis had the wisdom to drop.

Joe’s memory grew both clear and fuzzy. Final orders for his eyes only: (1) Meet with Illych Mdraniewicz (aka Yellich Vellen). (2) Following Mdraniewicz’s directions and locate the eight scientists who had been working on the “henges project” since 1941 and bring them to safety. Hand-scrawled on these orders was a message from Creighton: do what you have to do. Those orders covered a lot of ground, a lot of objectives, a lot of desires, a lot of outcomes. That meant, briefly, situation fluid.

And how fluid it got. The only way that Vellen would let Joe fly the scientists to safety—as least as the older man had stated—was that he had to see the “henge.” He had to make Joe understand this thing was real. Too many wild stories had been circulated about Nazi wonder weapons, about strange labs hidden deep in the Alps, facilities concealed under the polar ice caps. One of the weirdest stories—that was not denied—was Russian troops finding seven Tibetan llamas, still clad in green robes, dead of suicide, in a concealed temple outside of Berlin. Whispers were that they involved in something called Vril, some natural force that could be channeled by uh, sexual means. Some voices said it was just made up crap from Victorian author Bulwer-Lytton, who should have stuck to overheated novels like “The Last Days of Pompeii.” The strange and horrible life of Nazi Germany was wide open for stories, the crazier the better. Joe listened, but knew there were a lot of details missing. But after finding the extermination camps, nothing the Nazis did and were rumored to have done, could be ignored.

So, to Joe, the henge sounded real.

Leaving his wife behind in camp to care for the heavily pregnant Mara, and Sandy to wait for scientists supposedly coming their way, Yellich, who could still move like a mountain goat, carried Joe into what seemed to be a valley of mystery, smokily blue with dragon’s breath...Descending into the river valley, Joe realized he was seeing something that felt beyond destruction. It was death. The gleams of water were dead. The trees were black. The very air held no life.

“Ahead,” Yellich said, finally.

And there it was. It was enormous. “The first. Big. Big is thought good. It was not good.”

He then held his hand on the camera in Joe’s hands. “Please, no.” Joe put the camera down for the moment.

It looked like a pagan temple. About as bloody as one too as Yellich droned about what he spied—from a ledge about a half mile away. He witnessed loss of life from overwork, exposure, starvation, fear and sickness that a shaking Nazi physician finally screamed before killing himself to stop the ringing in his ears. Joe felt himself shivering uncontrollably.

The henge was half-built or maybe half-burnt. Parts had unhinged, teetering the structure to the side. Growth had crawled up its metal pillars, staining the pillars a hideous blend of orange, sick yellow and a virulent green. The muddy tangle of leaves and weeds looked as if they had been born, thrive, and died within hours. The smell was beyond belief and it kept them on the perimeter.

Yellich talked in confession.

Tesla. He wanted to be another Niklaus Tesla, that genius whose ideas massively predated their actual practical invention.

An opportunity. A cousin, a monk in Baku, had found certain documents of interest—he had translated them from Byzantine Greek and they seemed to report on principles of incredible technology. He sent them to his cousin, Illych, the brain, the scientist. Illych knew things were missing from the theory, the

plans. He knew...damned better. But he published it anyway, knowing that steps—to put a word to it—were missing. Fame? Hardly. The book sank without a trace. In the meantime, he had grown in wisdom to know that his work was self-serving, a bid for fame. But simple embarrassment was replaced by fear. An anonymous letter, addressed to him, told him that the technology being described would not be merely inoperable, but dangerous if ever built. At first huffing off the warning, he finally paid attention to the words, and reviewed the principles he theorized. He was unable to state categorically that it would be dangerous, but he began to hope that the work would remain sunk by disinterest, a victim of paper drives, thrown out, lodged on a back shelf in some forgotten bookshop. Fifteen years later he received another anonymous message. The Nazis had discovered his principles and were in the process of bringing it to practical reality with terrible results. “How they knew where the first henge was building I don’t know, but that brought me here. I knew I had to end it.”

“You did this?” Joe said.

“No. They did it.”

“Who are they?”

“Either the ones who wrote those letters my cousin found, or were attached to them somehow.” He kept talking, like a millrace, his English breaking down. “Mara never saw. As I watch, wonder how to destroy this thing my ego and greed made possible, watched and watched. But one day I see others who joined.”

“What do you mean?”

“They had joined in. They were not forced. I realized that they were quietly destroying it.”

“Who were they?”

Yellich didn’t answer. “One of them found me, and talked with me. No unkind words, just resignation that their technology had been found and used, badly, evilly. He assured me they would destroy it.”

“Who were ‘they’?” Joe asked again.

“I don’t know. Meaning, they did not give themselves a name.” He paused, but was not being dramatic.

“I don’t think they were of this earth.”

“Ah?” Joe said. He could think of nothing else to say. Finally, “You could explain that?”

“That is all I will say. Except—” He flung his withered hand out. “If they were from somewhere out there, they have been here in our world a long time.”

“Where are they now?”

“Their bodies are in that...heap. They killed themselves to destroy it.”

Joe could not believe it...yet believed, to a point. The war had revealed ugliness; yet it also revealed astounding things—human courage, sudden leaps of knowledge, revolutions in technology. And mysteries. Like the Lorelei, he recalled, and the lovely lady, Angel Babe, which he always felt had kissed him before she torched herself.

But not of this world?...

They had to leave to find an unpoisoned place to rest, eat, and prepare for the long journey up out of the valley. They camped that night on a ledge and Yellich tended the fire while Joe slugged through dark, horrible dreams and woke up to demand, “Now what the hell do I report?—I didn’t take any photos. A bunch of idiots are gonna scream like the devil about all this money and effort for something that doesn’t exist anymore—and even worse idiots,” he glumly added, “are gonna be furious that such a killing machine was destroyed.”

“Don’t tell them,” Yellich said. “And you can take a photo of another henge that we can find easily.”

“They built others?”

“Some as decoys, or prototypes. One is actually near the camp. Two years before the end of the war a team conducted some experiments with it using some kind of a device that looked like a bell.”

“Success?” Joe asked.

“I don’t know.”

Joe finally asked a simple question: “How were these things—what kind of weapon was it going to be?”

“It would have been a powerful one if they had perfected it.”

Joe asked carefully, “Who are ‘they’?”

“Not the Nazis,” he said, leaving Joe to make what he could of that answer.

Finally, the question: “Why are you showing me—us—this?”

The answer was glum: “While I think all leaders are crazy I think your leaders are less crazy. That you had the bomb and used it only twice—” Yellich stopped. “You could have used it more. You didn’t. Maybe you are the ones to find them all and make them work or stop them working...”

“How many others?”

“Not sure. But there are others.”

Joe tried again. “What sort of weapon? Do you know, guess?”

“The Nazis intended them for a weapon, but I don’t know their plans.”

They packed up and got going though dawn was still a few hours away. Joe ended up taking photos of the intact henge that Sandy had stumbled into and this proved Yellich's words of "there being others." Joe knew his superiors was expecting something. He gave them the photos of the one henge that Sandy had stumbled into and suffered some bad effects. He was glad yet worried he had withheld information about there being others.

God, Joe thought in his quarters, practically setting his nose on fire as he lighted another cigarette. He sat there, finally hearing the noise of the airlift endlessly rolling above his head, and what a normal, sensible sound it made.

Next, the photographs were taken back to SHAEF. The henge that was photographed was addressed in a Congressional hearing convened in London at the Langham by a couple of senators who figured they were accomplishing something important by accusations of every stripe. The henge looked uninteresting enough not to rouse any particular mystery and words were released to the effect that it was a piece of Nazi technology that had failed. Joe kept his mouth shut. It was easy because it was true, the henge had failed—by being destroyed.

And then silence as the photographs were taken into the depths of the Pentagon. This indicated either a lack of interest—or great interest that had to be kept secret.

But the henges resurfaced, at least twice. He saw one in Norway, and Vorodenko spoke of one spotted in the Russian hinterlands. The one other official contact he had with the henges was when he and Komansky, soon after were sent back to Germany for other purposes, but a sudden turn of events led to seeing another henge in the Black Forest. Komansky had to take over the hunt because Joe was called back to St. Laurent sur Mer for an emergency. Sandy took photographs of the henge and duly handed them over. Again, they disappeared into the Pentagon. Were they tucked away in some safe, some classified closet...or were they in the hands...which had a brain behind them.

Joe rolled on his side to get away from that channel...and his diverted thoughts pushed him to Percy Vivyan... Percy was still missing; not a word, not a sighting. He last saw him at the barrows on his property. He said he would see Joe later, at Bryncote. But a note arrived for his wife, declaring that he was leaving her.

That led to...Lady Beryl's necklace, found underneath Harvey and Melva's hen house and returned to Percy. It was called the "Turkish necklace"—Turkey, site of Constantinople, formerly Byzantium, the source of the language that Baku documents were in. The instructions that first led Yellich Vellen to propound the principles of the henge. Talking about Percy...he had found a fragment of a sword and there seemed some rumor that if the sword, deliberately broken, could be reunited...

Joe wondered...if somehow all these things were connected...

KNOCK KNOCK.

Joe flew to his feet. He opened the door. A corporal said there was a phone call for him.

Joe shouldered on his jacket to be taken into a private office and was handed a phone. The corporal then excused himself. Joe heard the familiar hiss of a scrambled transmission. “Hello, hello?—Joe?”

“Yes, this is Joe...Dad? Dad, how good to hear from you—“

“Joe. No time for small talk....do you know where Pres is?”

“Who?”

“Pres, your brother Pres. He can’t be found. He’s more than AWOL, he’s disappeared.”

“What?—my God, how long?”

“Just before the new year. He flew to Kansas City and the trail seem to die there. It’s being kept quiet and I’m taking a helluva chance telling you, but we’re at a dead end.”

Numbly, Joe finally said, “Dad, I have no idea. But I’ll learn--“

“Don’t do anything rash, but anything...your mother’s sick with worry. I’m not much better.”

“Write me, dad, write me...” The line went dead. Joe sat in the chair, his calm arising from long practice. Pres had been missing for over a month now. He stood up, and found a window and stared into snow, whipping clouds of gray gunk, buildings and runways appearing and disappearing as the snow bobbed down and around. He lighted cigarette after cigarette and wondered what the hell to do next.

Pres’s words to him at Magadar came up in his head. “Hold, my guys hold.”

He would have to hold for Pres. But hold took on many meanings. Quiet inquiries. Favors called in, perhaps. Ear to the ground.

Flights, flights, flights. He flew, gladly. He flew wearily. They did the usual gags, ignored Soviet fighters still goofing around, grabbed some sleep and some laughs. He wrote to Ceile, and despite everything became increasingly interested in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization which had developed concomitantly with the Marshall Plan. He grew excited when he read Eisenhower’s words about the new organization: it would seek peace, “a fundamental right of all people.” God, the chiefs of staff sure knew what they were doing when they selected him to lead!--But it was becoming clear the economic recovery plans would operate better when backed up with a military presence.

The Treaty’s formal signing, set for April 4, 1949, was approaching, and Joe could see his future work in this new step of international alliance, framed by the United Nations, sharpened by failures of other such leagues, and desperately needed as atomic weaponry was both the supreme weapon and a terrifying burden. There needed to be an alliance of the nations to counter Russia military threat, which had not declined to the near collapse of the western democracies as they disarmed...or looked to the United States with its bomb to keep the USSR from overrunning even more countries than the dozen it had annexed, with millions of people. In effect, armed forces of the West were weak, uncoordinated, and drastically short of conventional equipment. A military alliance was not to be created for invasion,

rather for balance of power...and not only civilian leaders were needed, military officers as well. In 1948 conferences were held, important leaders talked, treaties were created and signed. The ink was scarcely dry on the Treaty of Brussels—signed by Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom—when the Soviets started the Blockade. Though countered by the Airlift, clearly, there was a need for a larger treaty, one that would coordinate with North America to resist further aggression. On June 11 1948, the contested Vandenberg Resolution was passed by the United States Senate, declaring that the United States would contribute to the maintenance of peace...by remaining armed and ready, and therefore qualified to enter into an Atlantic Alliance. The Soviet Union had its say, declaring that the treaty was merely entrapping European countries into furthering the aims of the Anglo-Saxon powers...Joe could only smile at the usual USSR screeching, and wondered what lines, even if thin ones, existed between the allying powers and cooler heads in the Soviet Union, who could make Stalin listen, even if he pretended not to. The boss had one such line, if he would listen: Vorodenko.

One day, Joe received a note, typed, but with a scrawled signature.

Ike wrote him a personal note, asking about his interest in serving with NATO. Within a half hour, Joe replied, with a Yes...if he could finish out the Airlift.

“I get to wage peace,” Joe thought. The next thought: what would Ceile say? But he knew she would approve...she told him once how, on the ground in Europe, seeing bleak destruction, crushed villages, and children’s faces as they wandered through a war they had nothing to do with, she thought, “this can’t happen again, this can’t.”

But Pres was never far from his thoughts. Max wrote him of Pres’s last known days at home. The data they could find: Pres’s aide said he received a phone call that sent him from his office at the Pentagon, to which he never returned. He left a note for Betty at their home, stating he would be home in six days. Betty managed to catch and talk with him at the airport before he flew to New York. An investigation hazarded that Pres actually left that plane and climbed on another plane to Kansas City and left a cold trail.

Max was managing to keep a lid on the situation with the Army due to high personal regard the heavy brass had for him. But that could hold up forever. Betty was being strong for the kids, but that would not hold up forever either.

Joe wrote back, bluntly: where was Dave Creighton? Joe had dropped a few words and made a few phone calls trying to seek the man, track him down. Nothing. It was odd to have affairs in reverse. Normally, Creighton seemed to be dogging his shoe prints to eventually swing in front of him. Joe kept glancing around hopefully...but he did not appear. But when and if he did—what then?

### **Harvey: An Uncertain Siege - Wiesbaden, winter**

Three days after New Years, Guy Adsley joined Harvey and they commenced their defense in earnest. They met with Mahoney in the prison he was held in. But first, there were other matters.

The first thing Harvey did after Mahoney was escorted in and seated was to hand over a photograph of his daughter and his wife. "God, she's lovely," the young Negro man said, gazing at the slightly blurry image of a baby sleeping in a simple crib. He folded it in hands and kissed it, and then looked at Harvey. "What can you do for me?" he asked.

"Our best," Harvey said, though he knew the best might not be enough.

They had both read and re-read the reports of the case: on December 12, a seventeen year old girl Traudl Helmut, was coming home from her grandmother's house. Her grandmother had been chronically ill for months and only when Traudl had settled her in bed did she leave for home at 11:45. Her route took her through a park, feebly lighted. A warm front colliding with freezing temperatures produced the winter thunderstorm that flashed and rumbled. When she walked past what was left of a lake terrace for picnicking she was suddenly attacked. Lightning flashes showed him to be a tall Negro, in an Army jacket.

He dragged her down under the terrace and raped her. Then he struck her repeatedly until she lost consciousness. Then he tried to drown her. The cold water revived her and she started fighting back. He then tried to hold her head underwater and then he suddenly quit, leaving her to crawl out of the freezing water. Bleeding, limping, and shivering she walked away from the park and at the first lighted window, she banged on the door. The Mainzer family took her in and Mr. Mainzer alerted her mother, a war widow. The police were called in, and in the morning, the police brought the complaint to the commandant of the base. All Negro soldiers on the base were summoned to his office.

Gertraud Helmut identified Captain Byron Mahoney as her assailant. Mahoney was taken into custody immediately. The Soviet press got hold of the story and did an expected split dance: the rotten Americans who assailed local girls...and how an American Negro would not receive justice.

"I have the so-called official version, including your report." Harvey said. "Tell me what happened."

Captain Mahoney spoke carefully and quietly and his story matched what Harvey investigated. He and his engineering battalion were working long hours repairing, demolishing, and rebuilding runways and aprons as the airlift created more landings, unloadings and takeoffs. His immediate superior, Lt. Colonel George Roland, also a Negro, and on pretty good terms with General Davis in the Pentagon, was always encouraging Mahoney for two reasons: to beat out the other engineering battalions working on the other runways critical to the airlift, and to show the world—more important, the US Army--that Negro soldiers were hardworking, responsible, well behaved. "They're good boys and they obeyed," Mahoney said. "But we couldn't obey one of the rules—not to fraternize with the Germans."

“That rule sounds good to the brass hats way behind the lines as well as being pretty moot,” Harvey said. “When the Candy Bombing made the news, I think a lot of people realized there were a lot of hungry and innocent kids in Berlin.”

“Well, we couldn’t help with that, not in Wiesbaden, although we did give up our chocolate rations every so often,” he said. “And I gotta admit we were kind of jealous. Well...to illustrate that no good deed goes unpunished...one night in early November our mess sergeant Dion Barrows told me an interesting story--he heard some noise outside our mess about two in the morning. He went to investigate—and he found two nuns—in full regalia—going through our garbage. It happened the next night. He followed them as far as he dared—and asked a few questions and found that an order of the Poor Clares was taking care of orphans in their convent. They were going through our trash to find more food for those kids. Well—we decided—that is, I and my boys—that those kids weren’t going to eat our trash. We got enough German together to write a note and we fastened it to a box of food. We told them that we would always have a box of food for them—that our boys worked hard and needed food but we would save food for them. Well, we got a note back from them in perfect English—“Thank you for your kindness. Please tell us what to do.” We wrote back that we would leave food for them at our door, and that someone would always be watching to make sure that the nuns would get it. Well, after a couple of weeks, we could see that some people were getting wise to us, so we changed our plan and so we told them that we would leave the food at another place. Nearer to town but farther away for us. That we would keep watch.”

“And,” Harvey prompted.

“When I said we, I mean ‘we.’ I volunteered for the watch. All the guys did. It was my turn, and yeah, I took the food, left it, made sure the sisters picked it up—and then one of the planes taking off blew a tire and skidded. It wasn’t a bad crash, but it caught fire and the fire began spreading and everybody went crazy and pretty soon I realized I had to sneak around to get back to quarters. It took me three hours between 2300 and 200.”

Harvey asked him to trace the route on a map provided. He did so, and Harvey and Guy saw that he was in the general vicinity of the rape’s location—not once, but several times as he sought a way back.

“That’s a lot of time to account for. Did anybody see you?”

“No sir, but I was trying to avoid being seen, dammit. Just should have turned myself and took my medicine—but I figured we’d be ordered to stop giving the food to the kids.”

“You have related what you and your men were doing?”

“Yes sir. We had to.”

“The sisters were spoken with?”

“Yes sir. They also owned up to what we were doing for them.”

“Neither party saw the other. Of course they couldn’t swear to your whereabouts in those three hours.”

“Exactly sir.” Captain Mahoney had been calm and dignified despite his prison uniform. His forehead suddenly contracted. “God help me, Colonel I could hang for this.”

Harvey changed the subject. “Ugly question, but is there any possibility that one of your own men could have done this? Was everybody accounted for?”

“Every man participated in putting out the fire and policing the area. And my boys were honest. They said they hadn’t seen me. I wasn’t there.” He paused. “I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

“Did they vouch for your actions?”

“Yes. But they couldn’t vouch for my whereabouts in those missing three hours either and I don’t want them to because it would be a lie. Colonel, sir...I feel like I don’t have a leg to stand on.”

This, his second admission of fear—to which Harvey could only say “Captain Mahoney, I believe in you and I will fight like the devil to defend you.” Then, being honest, he said, “But it is bad.”

Mahoney placed the picture of his daughter into his shirt pocket, over his heart.

“Were you ever allowed to speak directly with Fraulein Helmut?”

“No. I could tell though—that she was pretty well cracked up but she was...sincere...when she accused me. I mean—she meant what she said...not like those two ...dames...in the Scottsboro case.”

Harvey recalled the infamous case, which polarized northern and southern beliefs in what American justice should be for Negroes. The case was notorious: nine black teenagers were accused in Alabama of raping two white women on a train in 1931. The NAACP and the Communist party hurled themselves into a landmark case that grappled with racism and the right to a fair trial—which was further endangered by lynch mobs that fortunately never got their way. But the boys then faced all-white juries, rushed trials and yelling crowds. Even when the two women recanted their stories, two juries and two judges still convicted them. “Do you mean,” Harvey said, “that you believe that a Negro soldier...raped her?”

“I have a cousin who was raped when she was 12. That look—of violation. I saw that in Fraulein Helmut’s eyes.” Mahoney then ran his large graceful hands over his head and down his neck. “And why would she say it was a Negro soldier unless—it had been?”

“We’ll get you off.”

“There’s a saying—‘military justice is to justice what mess hall chow is to fine cuisine.’”

That saying haunted Harvey for years...and drove him to do things that in some ways professionally damaged him, but this damage led to better things.

Then started field work which Harvey usually enjoyed but didn't so much this time. Moreover, he could not find anything to help Mahoney. Everything seemed stacked deeply up against him. Yes, it was believed that the men in the battalion were delivering food to the nuns. They all admitted to it and were not charged or punished in any way though there was the inevitable letter of reprimand. The nuns, dressed in their mended gray habits of the Poor Clares, affirmed the food deliveries by "soldats negres." No, they never saw the blessed food deliverers...and they prayed for the fine young men who helped feed their hungry charges. Harvey, with his usual grace, thanked the nuns and withdrew.

Next, he obtained an interview with Traudl Helmut. He found her to be a self-possessed young woman despite the horror inflicted on her and the resulting case of pneumonia which had left her hollow-eyed and coughing. She was waiting, her mother said, for results of pregnancy tests. They both sat with Harvey in the small dining room of their flat, in a building that had not suffered one scratch during the war. Harvey interviewed her about the event, and she related it in a kind of distant way. Her mother was similarly distant. Harvey was curious about their calm, but—one of Melva's patients was a woman impregnated by a rape but calmly refused to get rid of it. Naming no names, Melva spoke of the woman, 37 years old, who had spent most of her life nursing sick parents. When rushing home one afternoon she was caught on a footpath by a boy she swore was only 17 years old. People whispered that she had lured the boy in some way. She didn't deny it. No easy cases, no easy answers.

But he believed in Captain Byron Mahoney's innocence. Moreover, the crash and resulting fire were well documented, and the lanes by which Mahoney would usually return were blocked by rescue vehicles and crews, and curiosity seekers. His story of winding around and trying to get back onto the base made sense, but dammit, there were no people who could confirm where he was when the rape occurred. That was what mattered.

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"Show us where you went, and what you did."

Byron Mahoney was not immune to the biting crisp air of a rare sunny day in January; he breathed deeply of the fresh air, his manacled hands clasped and his guard wary.

It had taken a lot of muscle, and a few phone calls to people who mattered (including Irene Anson Gallagher) to get him out and be taken to the scene of the crime to trace out his route during the three hours he struggled to return to the base after the plane's crash. Stovall and Adsley retraced it at night, giving themselves a three hour window. At 2300 hours, they tottered into the officer's club at Tegel and thawed out with brandy by the coal stove. "His movements make perfect sense in terms of the location of the fire and the security that got scrambled together...Harvey," Guy Adsley said, the first time he had actually called Stovall by his first name, "I don't believe this guy is guilty, but how can we prove it?—after all, there is the fraulein, whose story doesn't change."

"Mahoney himself believes the rape happened. But it wasn't him." Harvey knew he was saying the obvious, but what else could he say...

“Every Negro serviceman could be accounted for...well, the ones who could not be absolutely accounted for didn't fit the description of a tall black man.”

“I know, dammit, I know.”

The last thing Harvey did, out of sheer desperation, was to knock on as many doors as he could along the route that Mahoney traced for him. Accompanied by a civilian bi-lingual clerk-typist from Frankfort, who volunteered for the work, he and Guy talked with as many people as they could, sometimes calling to them from open windows. Despite being the war being over four years and having cordial relations with the base personnel, they were wary. Some of them admitted to being on the roofs of their building, watching the flaming plane on the runway.

“The only thing to do,” Guy pondered, “is to shake her story—shake her.”

“She has an excellent reputation—no liaisons—taking care of her grandmother, for God's sake. She's not making any profit from this. She even lost a possible fiancée, according to a neighbor.”

“Maybe she was pregnant by him and trying to find an excuse.”

“But it's been confirmed she isn't pregnant...”

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The court martial took place on February 1, 1949, in Allied Headquarters. Eight hours later, Captain Byron Mahoney was convicted of rape and attempted murder. He was sentenced to death by hanging, which did not surprise Lt. Col. Stovall. The court martial, Harvey admitted, was no sham, but it lacked justice as in the innocent being convicted. Every good moment in the pursuit of justice seemed flushed down the toilet with Mahoney's conviction.

However, Shepton Malley in London had finished its grim mission and so Mahoney would be taken to the States for his execution.

A larger however: his case would be automatically reviewed by the Air Force Court of Appeals which might mitigate or reduce his sentence. Harvey also told Mahoney that he would file an appeal with a civilian court—which might not be granted, but it would keep his case alive.

Harvey managed to share a word with Mahoney at the airport before the man was flown home on a series of flights to the States—to Leavenworth, to death row. He assured the young man that they would help with his wife and child, left in England. The Negro press in the United States had already commenced questioning the conviction, and it was said that President Truman asked for updates.

After Harvey returned to England some sunshine broke in when he learned from Deitwiler that Fraulein Helmut and her mother were pleading with the Judge Advocate for mercy—imprisonment, not execution. Her life had been spared, so should his be spared. Harvey well knew that their pleas would probably not budge his superiors, but their requests for mercy would not be ignored, he would make

sure of that. He wrote to the two women, and encouraged them to write to the NAACP, to the President, to Congressmen, to the generals of the American army.

Roxanne, whose identity as Mahoney's wife had been concealed, broke down in despair when she heard this...and once more asked Harvey about how she could get to the States.

Harvey and Melva together advised her not to try—her husband's status as a convicted rapist in Leavenworth would prevent her immigration as a war bride. "You're doomed to disappointment," Harvey had to tell her. "Furthermore...he is filing for divorce."

He said this gently as Melva sat by the young woman. Roxanne was immediately distracted by Mary Diane's wail and left...to come back with the baby in her arms. Mary Diane's squalling seemed appropriate as three people dealt with heartbreak, injustice, and just plain old despair. By the time they parted, with Molly helping the distraught Roxanne across the frozen paving stones to the cottage, which she was staying in for free, Harvey and Melva were dealing straight shots of whiskey. They went to bed in a sleepy state, and were flung awake with the sound of bullet crashing through their recently repaired window. Another blast sent them into their robes and slippers to run down to the cottage where Molly and Roxanne were huddled together, sheltering Mary and Jackie. The two shattered windows told a story, but it was far from a clear one.

Curiously, within three days after the double incident, the Stallers lodged a suit, demanding custody of Jackie, claiming that Molly was an unfit mother.

"That—filthy—what does he want with Jackie?—what the hell does he want?" Notably, Molly accused her father, not her mother.

"Molly, calm down," Melva soothed. "We'll find a barrister for you—a solicitor. Harvey can help." Damn that council, she thought, who were still dawdling over her proposal, which was even backed up by offers of funding from Mrs. Sydney Archer.

### **Sandy: A Sequence of Shadow – Los Angeles**

At 3:00 am, the morning of February 1, Sandy Komansky hurried to his work at the dairy co-op, after stepping off a bus. Money was tight and he saved it by avoiding driving. He was glad for this work alone; no other odd stunting going on with Crusard or in the Wind Tunnel. As always, he steered his mind away from Crusard—and other things. The dairy co-op, which was growing as a wave of babies—dubbed the “Baby Boom”—called for more milk for the kiddies. It was kind of nice making sure the milk got delivered on time, and no worries at the moment about competition, which was beginning to simmer among the grads at Cal Tech. He had hated it at the Boys Home when everyday was a competition for the best food, the best clothing, the best bed, the best anything, which was not that good to begin with. The only thing, he recalled that had no competition was the piano in the small chapel, and that had led him to pick the keys. The matron of the establishment actually taught him his scales and some simple pieces that he could practice only once in a while for fear of getting taunted. Competition poisoned people, like good ol’ Vern Chapman who had singled him out for shit after Sandy was chosen by Savage to be his flight engineer. Chapman was still in Leavenworth he understood, and frankly hoped he would rot there. Sandy had never spoken of it, but Chapman had managed to get a threatening letter smuggled to him—one day, Komansky, it had read, I’m going to get you... Sandy forcefully threw the memory away as he threw the letter and the cheap melodramatic threat away. But it lingered...

He turned down Carter Street which ran parallel to the railroad spur that brought the fresh milk in for processing and bottling and distributing. The darkest part of the walk, it reminded him of a movie he had seen with Margaret about a week before—*Out of the Past*, with Robert Mitchum, a dark-spirited film with a near incomprehensible plot of mobsters, deadly dames, double crosses, triple crosses, shadows and wisecracks, and the iron burden of fate as a hapless private eye runs afoul of a big boss and his woman and can’t escape...

“Good morning.”

Not stopping, he offered “G’morning” to the female voice coming from the shadows and kept walking. He had been accosted before, in the wee hours. “Alexander Komansky?” the voice said.

He stopped at the voice, which he had last heard at Croydon, over a year ago. “Okay.” They silently crossed the street a half block down to a joint, its neon sign reading “Stu’s.” They walked into a room so full of ancient smoke their eyes stung. Billiard balls clicked together by some guy with his back to them. The tired bartender motioned them to a booth.

They sat down, and the woman unbuttoned her jacket. She took off her glasses. Though worn down by sadness, the beauty of the face could still be recognized.

“Hello Mara.” The only life Sandy saw in her eyes was nervousness, sparked as the sudden clack of balls on the pool table. He looked up. The shooter moved back, took aim, and clattered the balls again. The bartender came for their order.

Sandy ordered for them: wine. “What vintage, sport?”

“Whatever you have that’s red.”

“Make it three.” When he left, she smiled at him. “I don’t usually see men at three in the morning.”

“No, of course not.”

“Soon I will be missed.”

“By whom?”

“My husband.” Maybe he should excuse himself for the toilet and leave out the back way. But they were old comrades in arms, in a way. Mara got up and started for the juke box. As she blocked the table, there was a rush of air and there sat another figure. The lone pool player had joined him and sat back in the booth’s shadows. The juke box whirred and out poured an ironic tune: “We’ll Be Together Again.”

Tib. “Not exactly thrilled to see me, right?”

“No,” Sandy admitted. “Even though it’s good to see you again.” Which was...at Joe and Ceile’s Thanksgiving bash, in 1945, which followed on the heels of their work together in the Black Forest. Cripes, Tib was responsible for saving his and Heidi’s life! He had then heard some stories about Tib, and before he could stop himself, asked, “This coming down from Creighton?”

“Yes. I report to Creighton.”

Mara returned to the booth. She looked little better than the last time he saw her though her resignation had a certain serenity. “It’s about the henges,” Tib said.

Silence filled Sandy like an anvil being dropped in water. Then, “Look, you got the bells, now what?”

“The bells aren’t operable anyway. At least not yet.”

“Hell, what am I supposed to do about that?”

“Nothing. But here is something you can do.”

He handed Sandy a typed sheet of paper. It was an order, but a request. A firm but a vague one. “Find the house on White Field Street. Andauntonia’. Receive what is given.” Below this was a message in a language Sandy did not recognize. He realized it was a translation of the message in English.

“Andauntonia is now the city of Zagreb,” Mara said.

“I’m supposed to go to Zagreb?” He hooked a glance at Mara. A little over a year earlier, she had sent him to London. She had not looked happy then and did not look happy now. “Why can’t you—or you, Tib?”

“Because you’re the Heir Commenes,” Mara said.

Tib then said, "You're not going alone. You will have a partner to assist you. Not me. Keep a close mouth about the henges. Your associate does not need to know about them. I will be in touch."

Then they left. They vanished so abruptly Sandy could not say he was engaged dammit, and in grad school...or even a sarcastic "give me regards to Creighton" and double goddamit he couldn't be ordered around any more. But there it was...those henges.

And, he realized, that must have been the translation of the message that Mara gave to him and he copied out and gave to Aurora, about a year ago.

After a moment he finished all the wine, and rose up, and left...to the dairy. Nothing else to do.

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Two days later, the fleet was out at 4:30 and Sandy grabbed some breakfast and a helluva lot of coffee at a diner. Took his two morning classes, and an engineering lab. He got home, was reaching for the phone to call Margaret—and heard a rustle at the door. Like some—movie—an envelope was slid under it. Sandy waited for the deliverer to go away before picking it up. He smelled Creighton in this.

Inside were orders: Report to Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Indiana. His professors would be notified of his absence. Airplane ticket arranged for you at the United Airlines counter.

And he had to go. He wouldn't dare not to go. Because he was a lousy chip in a kaleidoscope that he hoped to escape someday. Not today. He thought about calling Harvey – no—Joe—no. He had to give up on Joe and Ceile.

But he had to tell Margaret something.

He got some sleep, using the old trick during the war: go the hell to sleep. He got up at his usual hour, worked at the dairy, figuring it might be his last day there—maybe forever. Thriftily, he drove there, to use his gas. Rather than breakfast he went immediately to a small public library on his way to Cal Tech to find out more about this Alexis Commenes—whom he first learned about in December 1946 when his uncle told him of their supposed descent from the Byzantine dynasty. He hauled the heavy Encyclopedia Britannica out on the oaken table and thumbed through the tissue thin pages. Alexius Commenius...also spelled Komnenos, as well as in other ways-- and when taken to Poland, Sandy realized, had clunked up to "Komansky." The man was born in 1057 in Byzantium, then Constantinople, now Istanbul since 1930. Commenes was the emperor of Byzantium at the time of the First Crusade, and founded the Commenian dynasty...and partially restored the strength of the empire by defeating both the Normans who circumnavigated the Atlantic coasts into the Mediterranean and from Turkish encroachments from the east. Alexis built up armies and naval forces. He compromised with the landed magnates for their alliance. The account reported on his skillful handling of the incursion of the First Crusade, and how he had to take extraordinary measures as northern and central Europe seemed to unleash itself on Byzantium, expecting hospitality for themselves, soldiers to save the Holy Land from the Paynim hordes. Alexis Commenes handled the loot-hungry knights by playing on their greed—by entertaining them, and gifting them with rich baubles, and many of them went on their way like sated children. The account

ended with the Commenes dynasty falling from power, quite suddenly, in the next century, to the Angeloi.

He crammed some food down his neck and then drove to Margaret's high school and she was happy but wary as he signaled to her from the door of the lunch room. She rose from the teacher's table, deposited her tray at the cleaning window and met him in the breezeway outside the cafeteria. He told her he was going away, for five days, a week. "Where?" she asked. He told her, "I'm sure this has to do with certain things that I got involved in—when in the Army..."

"Okay." She said this as the inevitable bell rang the ten minute warning of class. She couldn't wait to hear or demand more; she had to leave, and so did he, after the briefest of smacks on the mouth; the next moment, students swarmed out of the lunch room. They parted—but their eyes encouraged the other one to be brave. Be without fear. She intended to live up to it. But she dreaded what her mother would think, say, when her fiancée would seem to drop out of sight. Deep into that night, she scribbled in her journal, trying not to dramatize, but trying to deal with...an unusual man with unusual events in his life, and possibly on his—their—horizon.

Sandy grimly packed, took care of a few things and then went to the airport. Ticket—to New York City. Not Wright Patterson. Oh, brother... Announcements...here we go up the steps....and he sat down next to Blair Hurlbert.

"How are you, son?" When Sandy didn't answer, he added, "You should be glad to see me—"

"How the hell did you get mixed up with this?"

"I've been hired."

"Hm?"

"It seemed a good deal to a Ph.D. who didn't want to teach and the fields of endeavor that Uncle Ave conquered don't seem to be around at the time, at least not for me. Also, I speak or can make do with the lingo in the part of Europe we're going into."

Sandy decided he didn't want to know anymore but he wondered how Creighton hired this character, and how?

"How's Moire?" he finally asked.

"Somewhere in Minnesota with her folks. I don't know what the hell happens, but when you marry a girl she turns into a wife. Got another kid on the way I will probably not see much of."

The orphan kid in Sandy wanted to slug the man.

The propellers suddenly squealed to life. "Well, here we go," said Blair. The plane rolled...turned...and took off into the air. As always, Sandy felt his feet contracting in his shoes as faceless pilots, way up in a cockpit, hauled the bird into the air, without his assistance. He longed suddenly to be back between Joe

and Bob Fowler, who flanked him with their skills and their calm, their crush caps practically stapled to their heads by their earphones.

Blair ordered drinks for them both and entertained Sandy chapter and verse about the years 1947 and 1948—the Truman Doctrine was created to stop the spread of Communism and handed over four hundred million dollars to Turkey and Greece...and the line between the former Allies grew stronger, and Bernard Baruch, financial advisor to Truman named it well—a Cold War. The Cold War became frost-bitten when Communists seized control of Hungary, which enlarged the so-called Soviet bloc. The USSR protested the people had spoken by ballot to be made into Soviets.... To help keep things warm in Europe, after one of their coldest winters in decades, George C. Marshall, now the Secretary of State had grown so discouraged with Soviet intransigence...he proposed the Marshall Plan, which was waiting for Congressional approval...and it had to go through because Central Europe, including Germany, had to stand up to the USSR, and keep other countries from turning, out of desperation, to Communism, which believers were selling itself as the only hope of the future. In France, the Communists were making themselves busy, with strikes; those idiots caused a train to be derailed and 21 innocent people died...in the meantime, Truman had signed the National Security Act into a law, which had formalized the central intelligence group that had grown out of the OSS, into the Central Intelligence Agency. This meant that the US was going into the world, rather than withdrawing as it had after the first war. The Department of War had been made into the Department of the Army and was now a branch of the Department of Defense. Bad things followed on good things...India gained its independence but at the expense of union; Pakistan, where the more pro-British Islamic population had gone, flared up in a border incident at Kashmir, and caused the Indo-Pakistan war...with the expected amount of bloodshed. Britain was also withdrawing its forces from Palestine—danger ahead even if the United Nations had stepped in to partition the Arab and Jewish regions, which created the state of Israel. Great for the Jews whose suffering over the centuries had been exacerbated, to put it mildly, in the last ten years, but real estate and ancient territories weren't the same and the Arabs were gonna fight like hell... Race relations in the United States were changing—maybe improving, one could hope—but returning black soldiers were still eating shit, but the armed forces were integrating—and the Navy had transcended their policy of only using black sailors for mess duties to recruit and train their first black pilot. Blair's dissertation was on the relationship between the USSR and India, which, he said, would be of primary importance because the USSR, despite the power vacuum left by the British, could not just move into India as it did with its neighboring states, but would have to actually extend a cordial hand, and India, eager to establish its own relationships, might get in too deep, in any case, it all spelled a new issue for the western powers that saw India as a buffer between the USSR and China...and there was poor old Poland...as always, caught...having to sell its crops to the USSR which reciprocated kindly by refusing to let them engage in any other trade, and indeed, made them buy their substandard farm equipment...

They changed planes in New York. This one bound for London.

“What's in London?” Sandy asked after the plane finished its climb, circled, and started heading for Gander, Newfoundland.

“Another plane for Vienna.” Blair folded down his newspaper. “Well, here comes breakfast.” Nothing else to do but eat, then visit the john—and shave with a kit Blair handed to him. The plane bumped through some turbulence but Sandy scraped his face as though steady on the ground. After refueling in Gander, they headed towards and landed in England, at Croydon. Sandy tipped his head at the sodden March skies, the clouds that drifted down to rub on the greenly gray landscape—tarmacs swimming in rain, brittle with old ice—heard the various twang of the English tongue from baggage handlers to pilots, and, once seated in a BOAC passenger lounge he tasted the strong black tea which he had come to miss.

They soon departed on a commercial flight. In three hours they were circling Vienna and landed near the infamous city on the edge of the west and the east, which had held back Ottoman forces in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, given birth to glorious music, incredible fashion, spying in the stellar regions of desperation, and the sexology of Sigmund Freud, who had invented psychoanalysis which Blair confidently pronounced as a crock. In terms of the war, Vienna had a mixed reputation. Home to Adolph Hitler in his pre-World War I bohemian days, Austria had been annexed—or yanked close--by Nazi Germany in the Anschluss. Although Vienna was notably cool toward Hitler, it had looked the other way when its Jews were persecuted. Around Vienna were the twelve sub-camps of the infamous Mauthausen-Gusen Concentration camp. Despite being POWs, selected American and British air force officers were sent to Mauthausen to suffer punishment for Allied raids...and their deaths, in a granite quarry, were horrific. Vienna had escaped bombing for most of the war, but finally Allied bombers coming out of Italy gave it what for—and the Soviet troops reaching Vienna in April 1945 contributed to the destruction. The international city was divided into five zones by the Allies and its history and location made it into a whirling 24 hour a day nest of displaced people, spies, and ambassadors and the elite culture of Europe in its best and worst practices.

Their plane landed at Tuln airport, and after enduring an hour of passport checking, they hired a taxi to carry them into Vienna. Blair said, “You don’t get to Vienna every day, pal—let’s enjoy it.” Far from being tired the guy was positively dancing on air. They passed by a long line of cars, and they later learned that every car was being stopped by Soviet guards in their distinctive gray tunics—the driver and passengers questioned—in a search for Red Army deserters. As they drove into the city they found ruined buildings flanked by undamaged ones; barriers bristled over bombsites. The streets were busy but everybody looked grim. Sandy realized how accustomed he had grown to untouched quiet streets, whole buildings, and an everyday bright feeling of life and hope.

They went into the British zone where most of the good hotels were located. More document checking. Their taxi deposited them at Grand Hotel Wien, a 19<sup>th</sup> century monstrosity of a place that smelled of age and treachery...which was pretty dramatic, Sandy thought, but that pretty much spelled out Vienna, Blair said. He was going out to sample some night life; Sandy went to bed, listening to the sputtering radiator and was awakened to a knock and a fancy fellow pushing in a tray and pouring thin coffee at his bedside. Sandy was unsure about tipping, and settled the issue by going to the bathroom.

Blair was not there. As the coffee stirred him awake, Sandy wondered with alarm what the hell to do—maybe this was his chance to escape? The phone rang.

Blair came in, reeking from being with a woman--and took the call. "Here." He listened, wrote something down on a pad of paper he pulled from his jacket, said, "Done," cradled the ornate headpiece and announced, "The plane to Zagreb flies at 1400 hours. Relax, will ya? There's no escaping this you know."

"You and what army?"

He poured a cup of coffee for himself. "As long as we're using stale old challenges, yep, there is a kind of army involved in this. Not the Red one, nor our side."

"Whose then?"

"Why don't you tell me--."

Sandy knocked the coffee cup out of his hand. A feeble gesture but it was something.

"Sandy, uh—getting you to where you need to go—look, my head's kind of on the block, you know? The first job I did turned shit and these guys don't tolerate failure much. Please, *please*."

"You may not know what you're getting into." He was not sure himself, though he trusted Tib....and Creighton, by extension.

The fear in Sandy's voice caused Blair a moment's embarrassment. He liked Komansky, maybe even respected him as being strong enough to be contented with study, work, and one girl, at least one at a time. "Look calm down and don't worry about me. We'll soon get you home to Mary—"

"Margaret. I told her..."

"If she really loves you, she will understand your delay. At least—accept it."

"There are limits of acceptance."

Within two hours they were en route to Zagreb—accomplished in an old plane, a remnant of Yugoslavia's single commercial airline that cranked up again after the war. After some hair-raising dips and bounces they deplaned in Lucko. Fortunately, Blair and the passport official, whoever he was, could both speak a kind of fractured French, and Blair, with his experiences in the Soviet Union, feared no one...much. He spoke nicely; he gestured violently—he even wiped his eyes while pointing to Sandy who kept his own eyes blank. The official stamped their passports and jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Are we free?" Sandy hissed to Blair as they stood shoulder to shoulder in a dismal urinal and relieved themselves...with great relief. "We're sure to have people on our tails," Blair said. "But all we're doing is checking out some family business. That's what I told the guy. At least I think."

"You understand the lingo here?"

"Not completely but I can fake it. Come on, we'll be okay."

The taxi carried them into Zagreb, an old city at the base of mountains crowned with snow. Refreshingly, Zagreb was still fairly intact; the twin spires of cathedral serenely rose into the sky. Some Allied airstrikes were made in late 1944 with little damage. But Zagreb had been poisoned not only by its fascist invaders but by the Utase, that Balkan-bred hell-spawn that had killed people in the Soviet Union before it allied with the Nazis, and rounded up Jews, Gypsies and Slavs, and murdered them in camps, in the forests surrounding Zagreb, and in prisons. The city had seen its share of horror and violence.

The city seemed both serene and on edge; lovers walked the cracked sidewalks; a military vehicle rumbled down the street of their hotel off the main plaza.

Their hotel rooms were pretty clean; the toilet, down the hall, was a hole in the floor. Oh well. They adjourned to the main room which featured a bar and tables and some customers. They bought a carafe of wine by pointing at what they wanted, and then sat down to reconnoiter. Blair unfolded a map of the city and they stared at it; so, now what?

A sibilant voice floated down through the throaty Serbo-Croat about them. "Evening, gentlemen. May I sit down?" He gave himself permission.

Sandy looked up to see a lean face, with a triangular nose. His head was thatched with dead-leaf hair—brown, rapidly graying. "Who are you?" he asked.

"Arthur Bratson Calman, at your service." He sat down. "Tib was unable to notify you in time that I was to help you negotiate Zagreb."

Blair looked at him, openly, confidently.

"So, what are we three jack the lads up to?" Calman said, sitting down with them.

"This lad...wants some credentials," Sandy said.

"Righto," he said, his accent mocking his accent.

In the dim light, Sandy inspected the British passport: Arthur Bratson Calman. Blair looked at the materials and nodded, easily, maybe a little too easily. Sandy also looked at his papers identifying him as an employee of the British Ministry of Information. "You freelancing as a tour guide?"

Blair was excited. He loved this cloak and dagger shit. "We're to go this address," he said, showing Calman the name of the street.

Calman unfolded a map. Sandy and Blair waited—and waited—while Calman searched and searched...and finally, placed his finger on a spot in the map. "Istocna Vrata Zena."

"What does that mean?"

"Far as I know," said Blair, "'street of the white field.'"

"Now?"

“Yes, now. Not you,” he then said to Blair.

“Okay,” he agreed.

Komansky and Calman ventured into the lighted but still dark streets. A lone streetcar clanged up; they climbed on, Calman paid the woman fare-taker and they trundled away. A few lighted windows appeared in the buildings, and then the tram entered into parts of the city that had no or little electricity. “Here we are,” said Calman. They climbed off and started down an alleyway and then another to find themselves on a fairly broad street...with their quiet footsteps joined by others. “Steady on, old chap,” Calman murmured. “When I say stop, stop and stay—and then you get yourself home.”

As they passed a corner, Calman murmured “Stop, stay.... Then Calman and Sandy took a sharp right and then a left. Sandy heard Blair, left behind, utter “Hey!”

After several blocks of dark houses. they crossed a bridge over a narrow canal and then Calman coughed when a hand-lettered “Istocna Vrata Zena” appeared on a wall. The wall was part of a house, or make that mansion, although far from elegant. And very, very old.

Shouts from the inside, delivered in Serbo-Croat, were obviously threatening. Calman did not balk; he knocked until light gleamed through the small window next to the door and a middle aged woman, in a thick robe, an old lamp illuminating her face, cracked the behemoth of a door open.

Serbo-Croat flew from the person opening the door. The Englishman nodded at Sandy. The woman peered over the smoky chimney of her lamp. “Alexander Komansky,” he said, clearly and distinctly. Then, “Commenes.”

They were let in. The woman left the lamp on an old table, and Calman dialed up the light. They stood and waited listening to conversation beyond the door... and then a very young woman appeared.

She extended her hand. Sandy, not sure what to do, gave her the envelope with his own orders.

She drew a knife. Both men tensed.

She then slit the envelope open and read the message within. She spoke and Calman translated, roughly. “Show her some identification.” Sandy produced his passport. She handed it back and spoke again. She left. While she was gone Calman said he believed she had said, “After centuries. You came.” She returned....and handed him...what seemed to be another envelope.

“This--?” Sandy demanded. Calman shushed him, and spoke a few words in Serbo-Croat, probably thanks and goodbye. She then waved her hands in a “no” gesture, and led them to a dark kitchen and to a back door. Sandy recalled briefly, nervously, how he and Joe once, in Sweden were sent to the café backway—rather than through the front, where Nazi agents waited.

They walked down a paved path wedged between two high walls until they came into a large square of sorts with a dry fountain. A sleeting snow hissed around them. They spent the rest of the long cold night

ducking into recessed doorways for protection and to avoid other strollers who had to the local police, the way they were walking, watching, waiting.

Blair was waiting for them when they came into the common room at the hotel, frantic for coffee and for the flames in the fireplace. A young woman, garbed in apron and scarf, came in with their coffee, notably serving Blair first. She dimpled at his thank you, spoken in Serbo-Croat. Sandy figured she had kept him distracted during part of the night. “Godalmighty, where you two been?” he asked, without making a single reference to them leaving him behind.

“Having a lark,” Calman said.

“What’d find out?” Blair demanded. Sandy pulled out an envelope. “Just that?”

“Yeah, just this.” The envelope had a piece of folded paper in it, brittle to the touch. Handling it with care, Sandy laid it on the table. It was a map, hand-drawn. Blair read the words, written in brown ink. “This missive directs us to Poland. To a place called Polebiate—however it’s pronounced—a castle, it seems, in southern Poland.”

Sandy blurted his next words. “We planned to start home today—or tomorrow—God, I’m gonna flunk if they let me back in the classroom...how the hell are we gonna get there?”

“I have money,” said Blair. A bit unwisely, he pulled out and opened a wallet...stuffed with money.

“Big fucking deal...I gotta pee.” Sandy left and thought about disappearing. Yeah, sure, hardly any money, in a strange town. He returned to the table and found a plate of potato pancakes—which made memories jump up; his mother had served them too, once in a while—but always on Christmas Eve, when she spread hay in the corners of their tenement room and served a red soup that he didn’t like except for its color... He reached for one and bit into it; the crust melted in his mouth. It came to him...that this was a part of his heritage. A heritage he damned near lost when he lost his parents...and kind of restored to him by his Uncle Tym.

But this stuff...this current stuff...yeah, it seemed part of his heritage too, somehow.

Henges. Somehow, apparently, and without known reason, his heritage was tied up with these damned henges.

Calman then spoke to him. “Travel here will only get worse. Russia wants Poland not just to sell them farming implements but to erect a barrier between them and Germany—which some seem to believe is going to be rearmed by the Western Allies and sent barreling down the wastes right into their backyard. You need to go now. We need to go now.”

“Yeah, of course,” echoed Blair.

He still fought. “And what the hell happens if all we find another message telling us to go where? Tashkent? Vladivostock? Hell, you don’t even know what all this is about—“

“There’s something important—critical—at the end of this.” Calman’s voice was pleading.

“Come on, a plane ride and we’re there,” Blair said. “And I can get some help...and I speak Polish. Not perfectly, but I can get along.”

Sandy was left to his coffee and worry as Blair used the phone. He went to his unoccupied room and slept from exhaustion. Early in the morning, around three, Blair knocked him up, got his stuff into his suitcase and hustled him out to a waiting taxi—in which Calman already sat. Sandy could see that Blair knew he had been trumped.

While they waited at the dim drafty airport for somebody or something to decide their plane could load and take off, Sandy hauled out his notebook and started writing. Writing at times made sense of things...during his narrative he mused on how he was returning to the land that his father and his uncle left, for the United States, to find some success, some failure.

On the noisy plane bound for Krakow, Blair importantly related how Poland was in one helluva of a sorry mess—which was not news. Poland had been divided by Nazi Germany and the USSR in their days of alliance; the German invasion of Poland, on 1 September 1939, was the tipping point of war. The Soviets, being given the chance, precipitated a massacre of Polish army officers at Katyn, who were disinterred—under Soviet auspices in 1945—and it was made to look as though the Nazis had slain them. And then Poland became the first real political issue between the Allies and the USSR as Stalin in the last days of the war in Europe made sure that Poland was not going to gain its independence after liberation from Germany. Its government in London exile was snubbed and ignored; and advancing politburo members set up a Communist government in the city of Lwow, or Lviv, claiming it was temporary, but the handwriting was on the wall. Pleas and requests from Churchill and Roosevelt, shortly before the latter died, were either met by silence, rationalizations or plain rudeness. Poland’s attempts to engage with the Marshall Plan got the country a threatening rebuke from the USSR.

“Ave sure fought for Poland while he was in Moscow,” Blair said. “And he never could get down to the truth—whether Stalin was dancing around, or if his advisors were telling him stories, which he finally accepted as the done deal. But it came down to how Stalin regarded Poland as Slavic, and the USSR needed a buffer and he thought the Poland in exile group in London nothing but shit. One thing seemed pretty clear; that the Red Army could have gotten into Warsaw and helped those poor souls in the uprising. Oh, it was claimed that the Red Army had outrun its supply lines, and the bridges over the Vistula were destroyed so they couldn’t get their tanks over the river and without tanks they couldn’t fight. And I was with Ave when Molotov shrugged the whole thing off—he said that there wasn’t anybody in the world as stubborn as the Polish, whatever the hell that meant in terms of the situation.”

“How so?” Sandy had looked down on Poland from the skies more than once before, including watching the lovely Ilka Zradna bravely parachute down, while Joe Gallagher also watched. A guy with some eyes in his head could tell the two were crazy over each other...but she loved Poland more. Loving a country—he had never really thought about loving the good ol’ USA until Pearl Harbor roused his feelings of protectiveness, and although protecting it hadn’t been a barrel of laughs, he had taken pride in the work of defending his homeland, conducted over European skies...what a strange war. He seemed

to be getting into an even stranger one now, one that couldn't define the enemies and the friends. But he was returning to his homeland...at least his parents' homeland.

Blair chatted on, glad to be the focus of attention, however temporary. "Well, the bigwigs were so damned independent that they didn't trust any kind of government. That was something...that the guys understood in Philadelphia when they wrote the Constitution. Maybe they didn't trust a central government either, but without some kind of governing body, no matter how distrusted it might be—it had to be, in order to bring order into chaos. You get privileges in exchange giving things up. Apparently the Poles who might have changed things at one time couldn't agree and their country, or what passes for a country just keeps slipping and sliding like a jelly on a plate—or maybe more like an accordion, being squeezed and then pulled back..." It was quite a history lesson and pretty damned depressing for the present and the future...and here they were, three guys in search of something in a country always in some sort of mess from internal conflicts backed up by external wrangling over its critical territory that linked western and eastern Europe.

They landed at the airport near Krakow in the late morning and their passports were checked, pored over, mumbled about, stamped, reinvestigated by some hard-eyed officials. Blair told them to wait, and Calman was willing, as was Sandy. Despite being pretty drab, the airport was new and the runways in good shape, due, Blair said, to Moscow wanting quick and easy access to the cities of one their chief "satellite" states. Two Aeroflot planes touched down to accompaniment of droning announcements. Heavily coated people, showing gray drab faces, went past them. Blair was not there but came running up. "Our ride's here!" They hurried out and found a 1938 Cadillac humming at the curb—with a grinning face at the passenger window. "Welcome to Poland, gentlemen!"

"Stanton Griffs himself!" said Blair.

They slid into the luxurious car of the American ambassador and felt themselves dissolving in the warmth. The gray-haired and very calm Griffs offered coffee from a Thermos and they gratefully filled mugs placed in their hands. "Here's the man," Blair said to the ambassador, gesturing at Sandy. "The cause for all these adventures."

Griffs regarded him with a smile and said, "Somehow this hooligan had a hand in it too, right? There are some sandwiches in the hamper."

They all dug in and when Sandy was filled up and warmer, and glad for some kind of progress, he looked at the scenery streaming past the car windows. Poland and was cold and gray with snow and highly uninteresting. Griffs and Blair talked importantly as the car traveled down a cold gray highway. Then Blair unfolded a map.

Eventually they pulled into a side road, and after a few miles it became part mud and part ice. They were told to get out, start walking, and they would find an inn—get a room, clean up, eat. He learned that Griffs was returning to Krakow and then to Warsaw.

They found the inn. Sandy went looking for a bath, and found one in a small room, with a kettle of water simmering on a brazier, a wash basin, a flimsy towel. Soap? Sandy glad he brought a Viennese cake with him. He soaped down, rinsed as he could, and started to shave. Calman joined him. Sandy's Army experience got him accustomed to showering and everything else with the guys, but he never liked it. While he shaved, Calman similarly cleaned up and joined him at the mirror for his own shave. Sandy dressed hurriedly, and as he was buttoning his shirt, he wondered what it was about Calman's body—it seemed misshapened somehow. It was not sure how. He finished with his shirt and got into his jacket.

Blair was gone when he came into the main room. Calman had ordered food. He was hungry, but the food, mainly potatoes, went down tastelessly while he waited for Blair to return. Calman, as if Sandy didn't exist, picked up a Polish newspaper, sat down close to the coal stove and started scanning the pages. He didn't even seem perturbed when two officers came in, warmed themselves, looked at their passports again, and left.

"You wait well," Sandy finally remarked.

"Waiting was once the only thing I could do," he said. "And if you think I wait well, you're quite wrong. There's a volcano going on inside me right now---the one thing I do well is to conceal it." He stretched and closed his eyes.

"Were you a prisoner?" Sandy asked—"I mean, a POW?" He recalled how Wally Bolen was simultaneously cracked and whole after his escape from imprisonment—and how he and Wally had parted friends, but Wally wanted no more to do with that part of his life, and so...another friend gone.

"In a way." He latched his fingers on the top of his head. "On my return to England from Australia in 1942, our ship was hit by a Jap sub, with many injured on board, including me. We made Hawaii, and after months I returned to England for recuperation. Then I learned I had contracted tuberculosis. All in all, about three years of...waiting."

"Is that why you don't seem scared of anything?" Sandy asked.

"When you wait as long as I have...Carpe diem."

"What does that mean?"

"Seize the day."

"What were you doing in Australia?" Sandy asked this in way of conversation, and it was not answered when the door opened to admit Blair, crusted with snow. "Skis outside," he said.

"For what?" inquired Calman.

"For castle Polebiate. It's only about thirty miles away, to the north."

"What the hell about a car?" Sandy said.

“Cars need a road and horses need feeding,” Blair said, sitting down, and finishing off Sandy’s plate of food.

“But I don’t know how to ski,” Sandy pointed out.

“Cross-country. Teach you in ten minutes.”

Calman ordered food prepared, rented rucksacks, and Blair taught Sandy about skiing in the flat fields around the inn. A natural athlete, Sandy pretty soon got the hang of it. They came back, breathless and hungry to find Calman in conversation with a couple of officials. Still seated in the chair by the stove, he gestured for them to meet the local constabulary.

Sandy walked forward, nodding, Blair following him. He spoke to the officers. Sandy picked up his name...and “Stanach Zjednoczonych” which he knew meant United States.

“I think they want to know when you or your family migrated,” Blair asked.

“Uh, father in 1912,” Sandy came up with. Blair translated this as best he could. They dutifully produced their passports. The two police officers, their faces almost hidden by their caps and mufflers, conferred between themselves, called to the hotel keeper who answered politely but unenthusiastically. Then they and Blair had a conversation. They left. Sandy let out his breath. “What were you talking about?”

“That we were off on a skiing trip for a few days to look for your family village. We’re both your pals. Better to be honest. They’ll probably send the word out along the route to keep an eye on us.”

“Did you tell them we were headed for Polebiate Castle?”

“Told them that your family had connections with the place and you wanted to see it.”

“Any response to that?”

“Not to get your hopes up—Poland suffered more than a few Tatar invasions and those guy liked to destroy just to destroy.”

Skis attached to their feet, poles in hand, they shoved off at 3:00 into twilight which lingered until five, and just in time they found an inn, the only sign of life in a rubbled village. It had once been a private home and the family who ran it were defiant, welcoming and fearful. They ate, slept, rose early and after a breakfast of strong coffee and bread they started out in good hopes of reaching Polebiate by mid-day. The land was rising as they approached the Tatra, a mountain range in the Carpathians, the latter separating Poland from Czechoslovakia. In later afternoon, as twilight was shutting down, gray clouds came down, blowing wind...which peeled the dry March snow off the land.

It was so flat...that Sandy finally said, “This is a runway.” Rather than being paved it had been graveled.

The runway, if that was what it was, terminated in a wall that seemed half demolished. In the beam of Calman’s flashlight they found an opening. It smelled like a stable. They broke up shelves built along the

wall, lighted a fire, ate and then slept. The storm ended somewhere in the night, and Sandy crawled to his feet, relieved himself into a pile of debris in the corner, and then ventured outside.

"I'm sure there's a good reason for it." Calman was already there.

"For what?"

"The runway. Perhaps for an important plane or for an important person on a plane."

"You have a way of giving half answers," Sandy remarked. "Don't get me wrong, you've been helpful. But you've fobbed Blair off more than once, and if he doesn't get it, I do."

"You'd be safer without him," Calman said.

That ended the conversation. The morning sun, which finally shook out of clouds at ten in the morning, revealed the Tatra mountains--not the highest in the world, but tall and commanding enough, drawing up the foothills into gray peaks and crags some five thousand feet high.

They also got a better look at the wall which girdled a structure—there were two towers, connected with a slab like wall. It had been repaired, many times apparently, but was now a ruin, eroded and ugly.

"Polebiate," announced Calman.

Blair laughed. "Some white field. That's what Polebiate means, I think."

"That's odd," Calman said. "I think that is what Istocna Vrena means, the street we went to. White field."

Before Sandy had time to process this, they heard the sound of a gun being cocked. They turned around slowly to see an elderly man, quite capably holding a large revolver in his right hand.

Blair, at his word, joined them. They didn't put their hands up, but they respectfully regarded their captor, if that is who he was.

The elderly man lowered the revolver, but watched them with small intense eyes. He spoke. Blair listened to his reedy voice. "He's inviting us to breakfast." The elderly man then took them around the left tower and down a flight of steps.

He welcomed them into his basement home. It had no windows. A beautiful golden cross decorated a worn wall. He was hospitable, though not exactly welcoming. He did not ask names. They shared their food with him, as he did with his own, ladled out of the pot over a hearth fire. Calman spoke their thanks. Sandy then stood up and looked at stick like figures scratched into one of the stones of the man's home. Two figures were within a triangle.

All four of them still uneasily regarded each other. Blair commenced introductions.

"Komansky?" the old man then demanded. It came out "Commenis-sky."

Sandy nodded.

Sandy extracted the envelope from his rucksack and gave it to him. The man read it and regarded Komansky much as Yellich had first regarded him, back in 1943.

Their host then made and served coffee in beautiful little cups, very old, and they had been cared for. It almost seemed like a ritual. Sandy tried to be gracious at this act, but it portended a lot of ill.

That was answered as the man spoke. Blair translated as best he could the story of Ioseph Commenes.

Half brother—perhaps cousin—to Alexis Commenes, Emperor of Byzantium in the 11th century, Ioseph and his family had been sent far away from the glorious city of Constantinople, perched on the Bosphorous. He had been tasked with carrying certain treasures away from the Crusaders. Attended by a wealthy household, a wife and three daughters, and one prized son, Ioseph arrived in Poland. He built this castle to dwell in—and dwelled there with his family, and was never recalled. Perhaps the emperor had forgotten him, or died before giving the order for him to return, or it became critical he stay there as Crusaders continued to come, their mailed fists greedy for anything. Sandy nodded, recalling the encyclopedia entry that reported how Commenes had fobbed off many Crusaders by little if rich presents—and that the Crusaders might have carried off anything that looked valuable, like a henge, yes, even a henge.

Blair carefully translated Sandy's questions. "How—what happened to the Commenes? If they were so powerful then how did my family in Poland, as I understand, end up as—Komanskys--coal miners as I understand?" Blair then translated the answer, struggling to keep up with the long story. "Time changes everything. The Commenes in Byzantium ended their dynasty in the late twelfth century with the coming of the Angeloi. As for the Commenes here—very little in Poland has survived intact. Epidemics, wars within and wars without...the last notable Commenisky served Queen Jadwiga in the fourteenth century. But time drags everything under like the ocean tides. There was a story that twin brothers—in some unknown time—were taken hostage by the occupying power, whatever it was, and they died before they could pass the family history on to their wives and children. The remains of the family went on to meet their fate as impoverished nobility, then desperate shopkeepers and then finally laborers who ate by the sweat of their brows, without a shred of memory or understanding that they were descended from god-like beings who dressed in gold and had their images depicted in priceless mosaics." Blair was perspiring at the end of this conversation.

Then, softly, the old man spoke again. Blair translated with some drama. "The one who was destined to come...has come."

Sandy wanted to laugh: Oh man, he thought getting the Silver Star was over the top! If not laugh, then run. He never had a good feeling about this, and now the feeling was worse. What was he expected to do with a treasure?—if one existed. And, but...the henges. Somehow they were involved in this.

He spoke and Blair translated. "It is not here. Go with him. We all go with him."

For over two hours they walked up a rising path, using staffs the old man thrust into their hands. The path, marked by stakes driven so deeply they were scarcely visible, led them over a broad expanse of icy ground, studded with mounds of rock covered with snow. He carried them further and further up into a deep cleft, carved by spring run-off. The cleft was so deep they lost sight of the mountain still rising up at least two thousand more feet.

“There.” The old man stopped, handed the torch to Sandy, and, down on his ancient knees, was removing stones. They helped him, taking the stones from his hand and laying them aside.

A slender door appeared. The old man produced a key, struggled with the heavy lock, and succeeded in pushing the door open. He gestured for Blair to light the torch. He backed in, carrying the torch behind him.

First Sandy, then Blair, then Calman, turning themselves sideways, one way and the other, pushed in. In the light of the torch, what they saw did not resemble Aladdin’s cave of wonders. It was a cavern, with rough ground. It was big but not huge.

From a recessed spot on the floor the elderly man drew out something that looked like a box.

The old man opened the box, and took out another box. Without ceremony, the old man gave the box to Sandy. It had warped open. But the items inside were wrapped in a heavy, exquisite silk. Incredibly, it was dry, the silk seeming as fresh as the day the thing was hidden.

The man’s age-spotted hands folded the silk back to reveal....a sword’s hilt. Silver, beautifully etched with tendrils of vines and leaves...

“Is that all?” Blair asked. “Jesus.” He walked to the opening to get some air, revealing some claustrophobia. “Come back here,” Calman said. “And help us understand.”

The man began speaking...slowly, and then more rapidly, and then he grew flushed and breathless as he poured out his story. It seemed to grow more violent. Blair tried to slow him down and finally gave up. Then the old man, flushed and excited, said a complicated word in Polish and then struggled...”Arras! You see...Arras!”

“Hey,” said Calman, at the aperture. “We have company.”

Sandy crowded next to him. Down below, two figures were laboring up the trail.

There was no time for questions. No back way, get the hell out of the front way and... The elderly man spoke rapidly in Polish and gestured, but he too came with them.

They huddled on the rocky ledge. Calman trained his field glasses on the two small figures that walked up the path of river rocks. They seemed wary, but not in a hurry...and they did not openly brandish any firepower.

The old man spoke in a harsh whisper, and pointed. Blair translated. "He says to get further up this rock face and then down the other side, I think. Something, I guess... will take you back within sight of the castle and wait for him."

"Go on," Calman urged, standing with the old man.

"Aren't you coming with us?" Sandy demanded.

"Somebody needs to know who they are," he hissed.

Blair was already halfway up the southern rock face. "Get the fuck moving!" he called down. Sandy did so. They got over the crest fairly easily but a chasm gaped open, to the east, if he got his directions straight. It was no Grand Canyon, but bad enough and the slope demanded careful footing. Below descended ground studded with snow-covered lumps. "Let's go," Blair said. "What the hell else is there to do?"

They cautiously started their descent. Sandy suddenly slipped and slid down. He flailed at what he could and finally came to a stop on a mound of snow. He clung to it, grabbing for breath, not helped when Blair scabbled crabwise to him to place his hand over his mouth. "Quiet, they're up there."

Even from their distance, they could hear voices. Then came the noise of a shot—and though the snow muffled the sounds, there seemed many voices, several more shots—and then a roar of snow which bucketed down from the cliff face. Like a river, the snow gushed down and slammed up over the crest to spill down on them.

They scrambled around to hide on the other side of the mound.

Silence.

Nobody looked over the crest. Silence. Then a gun shot. The noise shredded about them.

After an endless amount of time, in which silence resumed, but a silence they could not trust--they moved. "Hey," Sandy said, his teeth unclenching to talk. "This is hollow." He rapped the mound. There was a hollow noise.

"So, and let's get the hell outta here," said Blair.

They started moving like crabs and rested about halfway down, hiding behind another mound. Sandy put his hand down on a rounded ledge of snow. His hand sunk into the soft stuff, and then encountered something smooth and hard and hollow.

Sandy's gloved hands brushed away a coat of snow. There was a coating of ice over what was below.

It was a portion of a nacelle. He knew its shape, the very rivets. He glanced about noting all the other mounds and odd shapes, concealed by snow. "Gimme your glasses," he demanded of Blair. Blair, scarcely breathing, handed them over. He peered through them, adjusted and peered again.

Faraway and above, quietly resting on some ledge, was a portion of a plane's tail, he was sure.

"What is it? We could die here while you're sightseeing—"

"A plane crashed here," Sandy said. "We're in a debris field. A B-17."

"Probably lost or out of fuel and we got no fucking time to mourn."

They went on, digging their feet into anything that would hold. Praise God, they arrived safely into a rocky draw of ground. Climbing up onto a ledge, they spotted the ancient castle. They reached after the short, frigid twilight fell into darkness. They paused long enough to get their skis and rucksacks. Passports were precious than gold. He placed the sword's hilt into his sack. All this trouble. All this shit, for what, some antique--

"What happened to Calman?" Blair grunted as they tied their skis on, and prepared for launch. "Maybe he led us into the tra—"

"And got us out," Sandy snapped. "That gunshot might be all we need to know."

They moved on as they could in the darkness. Two hours later they approached a village. At the sight of semi-intact houses and smoking chimneys, golden light splashing here and there on the snow, they paused, cleaned themselves up as they could, and calmly opened the door, not daring to knock. A family stared at two wild looking men, half frozen. Through frozen lips, Blair said the tongue-twister for United States.

"Pomocy," Sandy said, intoning the word for help. "Please. Prosz."

Somebody left. They were invited toward the ceramic stove. Soon a priest entered. A middle-aged man, he told Blair and Sandy he had served in Canada in the 1920s, and his English was rusty but workable. When Sandy said, "Do you have a phone?" he took them to an all-purpose building: combination USSR local power party representative, post office, welfare office, and communications center, cold as hell. Sandy was happy to let Blair take over. An hour later, Blair finally hung up the fairly new phone. "We need to get to a place called Rysy," he said.

It took an hour to find a car with gasoline. They emptied their pockets for the priest, for their wary hosts, and stupefied with hunger and cold they climbed on the old Russian utility vehicle.

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Margaret Anne Whitfield sluggishly came awake at the sound of a slamming car door, a pulling away of wheels... She then heard running, slapping steps. She sat up when the doorbell pealed, followed by knocking—and she could hear Sandy's voice calling to her—to her dad—and even to her mother. Thank God, she thought, they were actually out of town, visiting relatives-- she tumbled downstairs in her pajamas, not bothering with a robe. Felicity was pawing and barking at the door. From outside: "Margaret! Margaret? Daisy!"

“Honey, honey, I’m here,” she said, undoing the bolt and unlocking the door to let him in. Sandy stepped into the entryway, dropped his rucksack and swept her up in a hug. Though it was a mild night in early March, he was shaking.

She was shaking too. She was convinced she had lost him—to his secrets, to some woman?— or maybe some other mystery. The sedatives she had taken to sleep after three restless nights suddenly rinsed off. She pushed away from him and he let her. Felicity sat down from her excited dancing. “Okay buster,” she said but tears invaded her eyes. “Where have you been?”

“A place I didn’t want to be, and an amazed I got away back home.”

She believed him. She wanted to throw her arms around him again but held off. He needed to be punished. “Coffee?” she said, ordering herself not to cry.

“Yes, please,” he whispered. He followed her to the kitchen and then was stopped when she turned and hugged him—quickly. She then snapped the overhead light on, lit the stove and filled the percolator basket. A look at the kitchen clock revealed it was 2:47. Distantly, she was glad it was Sunday morning, so she wouldn’t have to appear in her classroom, calm and collected... She glanced to see him sitting in one of the kitchen chairs, looking at everything but her. “It’ll be ready in a minute...Ho-ney.” She then turned on the light over the cooktop, and shut off the harsh overhead light. It seemed easier to look at each other.

He opened his arms and she sat in his lap. They didn’t kiss, but she pressed her face into his neck, and he clung to her, rocking her like a child for quite some time. “God, I’m glad to be here.”

“After a moment I may kill you—what I’ve been through the last five days—you were gone ten days honey, and—”

“You don’t know what I’ve been through in the last several hours coming home on the plane.”

“Could you have called me?”

“Yes,” he admitted. “From New York.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“Daisy, I was completely unsure about what I should do. Even now.”

“About what?”

“About us.”

The coffee had perked by now. She got up composedly, and poured two cups of coffee, resisted seizing and hurling the pot at his head—and brought them to the table. Sandy fetched the milk and sugar and two spoons and they sat down in their own chairs.

“You recall, back in Connecticut— secrets are secrets because they are secrets,” he began.

“Dammit, I was away from home and damn near upended from all the glamor—and you—we were going to make love soon, I knew it and it seemed a lot easier to agree—but that agreement now stinks.”

“Yeah, it does. But all the facts weren’t in yet.”

Margaret folded her arms on the table and waited.

His next question was a pedestrian one: “Where are your folks?”

“San Bernardino. They’re due home this afternoon...”

“Did you tell them...about me not getting home when I said I would?”

“I lied, right through my proverbial teeth. Mainly...so that my mother was not going to tell me ‘I told you so.’ Maybe she’s right—”

“Daisy, you said you were free of your mother—”

“But not free of you—either in hatred or love. Sandy...what kind of—”

He yawned, enormously. “Sorry.”

“Oh, baby—you’re exhausted—forget it, get some sleep first—”

“I couldn’t sleep on the plane knowing that we have to have it out.”

“Have what out?”

“Whether we stay together or—I leave and you get to live a normal life.” He said this as they climbed the stairs to her bedroom.

Margaret died inside. But Wonder Woman would stand up...For herself, for one. “You get a choice?” she asked. “For whatever ‘it’ is...”

“They know about you and me.”

“Who...are they?”

“Daisy, when I said leave, it was not just leaving you. Leaving my life behind. Disappearing. If I could accomplish that they might—no, they would—come after you.”

“As a hostage for your return?” By now, they were in her bedroom.

“Maybe, and for what you might know. If that were to happen then your parents would become involved---and—” Sandy scraped up a chuckle. “Your mother would really be on my back.”

“Yep,” Margaret agreed after a moment. “I’d have to give you the necklace back. But I won’t.” He was overtaken by another yawn. “Come on,” she said, despite everything. “You need some sack time.”

“Would you join me..?”

“Bless your heart,” he said a while later, after they had made love in her bed, with Felicity first sitting and looking up at the bed...and then curling up to doze on the carpet. They dozed too...

“Ho-ney—I’ll never abandon you,” she whispered to him. They rolled away from each other and examined themselves in the daylight. They both looked thin to each other but beautiful--and so vulnerable. And perhaps...no condoms... When he slept again, his face slack with exhaustion, she gathered up his laundry, washed it, and hung it out the cool morning sun, and busied herself with household chores. She finally came up to him. “The folks should be home soon...” she said, gently shaking him, his underwear clutched in her hand. She had ironed his shorts dry.

“Okay,” he sighed, climbing out. “It’ll be good to see them.”

“Even my mother?”

“Yep,” he said. He looked at the disarranged bed, which she was beginning to straighten. “I wondered if I would ever see you and this room again.”

She picked up and then clutched a pillow in her arms, clutching questions back.

By now, she was perfectly comfortable being in the shower with him—though they showered quickly as Arnold and Elona might get home earlier than expected. They toweled each other off. He sleeked her hair back behind her ears. “About not abandoning me...I’ll take that a hope, not a vow.”

She slapped him. She then threw her arms around him. “Oh, I’m sorry!—but—dammit, if you’re saying that I won’t hold my vow to you—“

“Maybe you can’t hold that vow,” he pointed out. “For many reasons, and they would not be your fault, but mine. I know you, if you didn’t then you would hate yourself the rest of your life and I don’t want you to do that if you can’t bear up as to what—“

“What, WHAT?!” she shrieked. “Dammit, we’ve gone too far for you not to tell me something, something...” To her shock, she slapped him again—and he slapped her back. She didn’t cry and neither did he though tears swam in both their eyes. They twined their arms around each other. “We’re even then. But to be truly even, you have got to tell me what is going on.”

“My life is a helluva lot more complicated than yours.”

“Doesn’t matter,” she said. “Sandy, if I run—that’s what I did to poor Don, back in 1943—I won’t I can’t run again—“

“Daisy, this is our marriage, not some kind of a test—“

“Marriages are all tests, I think.”

Sandy silently recalled how Irene spoke to him, back at Bryncote...all marriages are different; that is, all marriages have their own set of challenges. This was theirs.

Naked, they sat down on her bed. "When I was in the army," he began, "I was told things on a need to know basis. I wasn't told the whole story from A to Z but enough to make the situation understandable—but that's when things became meaningful. But I was encouraged to join with them."

"Join them? As, as, for good?"

"Yes. But I didn't."

"Now what?"

"We play by their rules. Volunteering won't bring you any honor."

"Would they kill...me?"

"Let's just say they're not crazy about you or any knowledge you might have."

"Are they watching us?"

"In a way, yes."

She got up to put on a robe; Sandy could see she was steadying her nerves. He climbed into his laundered shorts and t-shirt. "Well—tell me—tell me," she whispered. "What I need to know."

Critical technology...not understood...no official national connections.

"This isn't the bomb?"

"We're not squaring off against Russia either, not in this."

"And now what?" she said.

"We wait."

"For what?"

"Anything...Daisy, I might be called away tomorrow—maybe a year. I don't know how long I'll gone. I may not be called anywhere. If I am, I might not come back." He put his arms around her shoulders.

"What do you think?" he said.

"We'll tackle this together."

"Thanks. Thank you." After a moment, "We have to be very brave from now on."

"I won't tell Mama and Dad a word."

"It's not lying," Sandy assured her. "It's just withholding the truth."

They were waiting on the sunny porch when the folks arrived at noon. Their smiles and hugs were certain and sure, as certain as they were of one another.

That night, less certainly, Margaret opened up her journal and wrote down all she could remember. She underlined the phrase, “withholding the truth.”

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Though how certain if he had divulged more truth to her... Sandy stepped into his apartment, wonderfully empty and stale. It’s okay, he told himself. How many months, years did he not know if the next mission would buy him the farm...But he didn’t have so much to live for then. And part of the “so much” would stand by him. Even if she did not know the full story.

Je glanced around, also sensing there was more to the story in this apartment than he knew. Things were askew...he could only figure that Margaret stopped by once, maybe even twice. Cupboards were open, and the bedspread was wrinkled.

No matter, as his memories took over.

He had heard more at Rysy. Their vehicle was stopped by three quiet figures who were waiting for them at a crossroads. He and Blair climbed off and walked to a car waiting further on. They were taken to a snug hut. For a while Sandy didn’t care about anything but getting warm. After the heat in the old ceramic stove had warmed them he and Blair had to meet—or confront—the three figures.

There was Tib. Sandy felt himself grow weak with relief. Tib was utterly impassive. Not friendly. Not mean.

“Hiya boss and boss,” Blair announced to the two men. They took no notice of him or Sandy as they quietly removed coats, mufflers—wearing dark glasses. It was like looking into twin swamps.

“Report,” said the older one. The skin of his face was rumpled, and his white hair was coarse. Sandy handed over the bag. It was opened. The older man handled the hilt with a gloved hand. He then placed it in a bag. They then started questioning until Sandy was wringing wet.

When the name Calman came up, the atmosphere darkened. “He disappeared. He might be dead.”

Blair then staggered from the older man’s backhanded slap. He spoke, raggedly. “He’s dead. He has to be dead...We heard a gunshot—two of them—“

“You oughta be dead too, you fuck cowboy,” snarled the older man.

“Sir, a word,” said Tib. “Let me go back and find him.” The second man, shorter, with the kind of glasses, nodded to the taller man, and the three men, with Blair pretty unhappy, left.

They were alone. The older man placed his swamp eyes on Sandy. “You did well. A lot better than him.”

“Thank you.”

The man grunted. Then, "Come on, walk out with me," he said. "The northern lights are playing..."

They walked out into the frigid velvet of the night. Sandy calmly figured he was not only receiving no answer about Calman, but he was going to be killed like Blair...but he gaped at the curtains of light that twisted about in the black skies to the north. "It's good to stop and look upon beauty," the man said, the lights unreeling on his dark glasses. "Many times I didn't; I was poorer for it. Never saw the deer in the park...though near the end, I stared into the eyes of a doe..." They slogged through the snow for no other purpose, Sandy figured, than to dump his body.

"Komansky—quit sweating. You're not headed for the gallows."

Sandy, a few feet ahead, turned to see him. The face was a granite cliff. He suddenly, violently, twisted to run and fell flat on the snow. He shoved himself away, cursing, and prevented himself from twisting away from the man's hands which were helping him. He stood up, balanced himself and was silent as the man brushed the snow off his coat.

"We found the sword's hilt or whatever the hell it is or was, what good are we now?"

"That sword's hilt was not expected. We're playing for different...stakes, perhaps."

"Are we playing a game?"

"Scarcely. But you're a player."

"All this is about the henge, right?"

"Never say that word to Hurlbert."

Despite his straight posture, his frozen face, his resolute voice—Sandy heard and saw great weariness. Oddly, he wanted to help the guy. They slogged back. "Beautiful," the man murmured as he looked back on the lights skirling, twisting, disappearing, lancing through the night sky again. They returned to the cabin. Sandy sought out the facilities and found a closet off the kitchen. A muffled roar, doors slamming and the men came in.

Report: Tracks from some kind of vehicle. The cave's entrance was choked with snow. A tangle of footprints; how many feet involved could not be told. No bodies. Some blood. No Calman. "We saw only two guys," Blair said, and Sandy corroborated this. "The scene looks like a small war happened. But as Sandy will tell you, we got away by getting up over the ledge, and crawling down through a ravine. We didn't see anything, but we heard...something happening."

Silence.

"Show us what you found," Blair was then ordered. "You picked up something."

With a “what the hell” expression, Blair dug into his trousers and produced an object. Laid on the table under the weak light, it proved to be a flask made of silver. Sandy’s eyes traced the former dent hammered out by a silversmith in Los Angeles.

Uh....

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They were taken to the airport at Krakow. There was a lot of waiting. People came and went. They were taken into an office and spoken with. A call was made. Griffs reappeared with a tight look on his face and signed papers. Passports examined and re-examined. Silence. Finally, they were released and tickets to Paris were issued. By now, Sandy would have been satisfied to be put up against a wall and shot. Not really.

Blair conked out on a hard chair. At a bar Sandy numbly ordered coffee. He sat down on wooden benches. The older man came up to them. Sandy handed the man his coffee, and he accepted.

“Our governments believe us to be dead and our families do not know we are alive.” He took a long sip of coffee. “It makes our work easier.”

Sandy was silent, wondering how and where Creighton had met them. Yet, if he were telling the truth about himself and his partner, they did make good workers for this...well, whatever it was.

“That covers it, right?”

“No.”

“I’m getting married.”

“Congratulations. But we can’t guarantee your future.”

They all boarded the plane after a long wait. After the plane was airborne for a while, the older man walked by and left a note in Sandy’s hand. He read it.

Blair came out of a doze and looked at him. “So tell me about the thing you found.”

“What about it? It was a sword’s hilt. Tell me more about what you found.”

“It was a flask, kind of what my dad used to carry around during Prohibition. Why the hell they took it I don’t know.”

Sandy was silent. He then asked about the word the old man had said, loudly, indicating it was of terrible important. “What did the old man say there at the end...’arras.” Sandy pronounced it as remembered: e-res.

Blair shook his head and then thought. “Well, in English, that’s another word for tapestry. As for Polish, I don’t what the hell it means...but maybe the same, since the word is French, and French words got

distributed over the continent because it...was French, but yeah, he was really squawking about it, wasn't he?"

When Sandy was silent to his remark, Blair looked at him with a "to hell with you," turned aside and slept again.

After a while, Sandy got up and moved toward the small lounge area. Tib followed him. Sandy showed him the note. "This for real?"

"Yes."

"Is this over Calman?"

"No. But this last event proves he's a loose cannon."

"Yeah." Conversation over.

Hours and hours...later...in New York. They wearily traveled into the city, checked into a hotel room, cleaned up. Before they went out for dinner, Sandy inquired about the report to Creighton. "That's my responsibility," Tib said to his relief...and somewhat to his concern.

On the way back to the hotel, he and Tib cornered Blair. He went to pieces, getting out words to the effect of that he didn't act very well; yeah, he kind of fooled around with Villda and Dryatkin, but I didn't exactly know...please, I won't...Calman disappearing was not his fault...

He was shocked. Pretty well shocked himself, Sandy then got to Idyllwild. It was not until the plane climbed up and headed westward did Sandy dare hope he was going to get home.

...In California, home, but scarcely safe, Sandy thought about choices in his life...he had made a lot.

One choice was at the Boys Home—to be good or bad. Good seemed easier though it was sullenly offered up. He still knew he made the right choice when he ran away from a criminal act, and joined the Army, and that he ran from being an officer...he wasn't ready. He made a good choice when he quit being a shithead about Gallagher. He chose to leave the Army...Good. Bad. And now a terrible choice: to leave Margaret. He had excellent reason now, too.

But he could not. Despite what his brain was telling him, his heart won out. But...now what? He hadn't plunged into these strange goings on as much as he somewhere turned a corner, and there he was, smack into it.

Within the hour, he came out of the shower to hear thuds on the door. He opened it up to find the building manager, who immediately said, "Where the heck you been?"

"Away," Sandy said. "Something, uh, wrong?"

"Last week the tenant below was hearing noise coming this apartment, the kind of noise you never make and then he said he had seen you leaving with a suitcase. I investigated. When I opened the

broom closet door some—guy—jumped out at me with boo!—knocked me down and ran like hell. I had the police come in try to find some fingerprints and nothing. I wasn't if the guy was a friend of yours and playing a joke on you—got scared and ran—or if I don't know, if the guy was here to do you some harm.”

Sandy thanked him and said, “Well, I know now why the place looked kind of funny. Figured it was my fiancée dropping by.” After the manager left, Sandy checked the windows and put things in front of the two windows and the single door. He had been through enough not to just shake this off.

### **Nikolai Borisovich Vorodenko: Walking in Darkness – Moscow, early summer**

Nikolai and Irina were in residence in Moscow in June 1949. Near the Kremlin.

They were provided an apartment in a new building—but newness did not solve the plaster problem. However, Irina had her own kitchen. Appliances were still in short supply so he counted them lucky to have a pre-war refrigerator. There was a similarly aged stove. They had running water, and a heater...which worked at times. Their flat featured a toilet, but the bath was down the hall, but at least they didn't have to share it with fifteen people—only three others, and thank God, the three were sensible and amenable to schedules—perhaps due to Nik's rank... The flat was all glaring white except one room painted an abysmal green. Soon after moving in with their few pieces of furniture, and three precious rugs, Nik installed a shelf at the door upon which they placed their internal passports to have them ready. And they both forever expected a knock on the door from the NKVD (now the KGB), with a "Comrade General, we must check..." on many things, including nuisance questions on how many feet they had been allotted to live in. The common comrade was allotted only seven feet...and they had much more, they knew that...

He warily viewed their relatively luxurious Moscow accommodations as a compliment to his hard work in Berlin, including his quiet conversations with the west to expedite difficulties of ending the airlift. He had indeed worked behind the scenes with certain Western representatives to promote the flow of materials into East Berlin, which had suffered an industrial drought during the peak of Airlift. He also had been instrumental in quietly bringing back some equipment from the USSR that had been dismantled and carried away for German plants for "reparations." In quiet rooms in East Berlin he had talked with "others" of how the US was not going to retreat this time into its shell, and was "purchasing peace" by allying with a unifying Europe. Of course, it would improve the US trade. He knew but did not say that Europe was not going Communist as workers of the world did not unite, as ideologues for thirty years had been confidently predicting and were still predicting despite the nationalism clearly revealed by the people the USSR had "adopted"...

"Our way is still the best way," grunted one fellow in a meeting over the future of trade. Vorodenko knew he believed so because he had been told so.

"So, let's advertise it as so," snorted Vorodenko. "Go on radio. Best mouthwash. Best toothpaste. Best anything. Americans buy best. So they buy Communism if pronounced the best."

Maybe that remark recalled him to Moscow, to keep an eye on him... Vorodenko was assigned to study western policies (it seemed like mainly to bash them but he figured the Allies were doing the same with their policies); he hewed to party line, but privately assembled thoughts and ideas. If you were a general, you were immediately on Stalin's shit list as he more or less automatically considered them too close to power; too long in their positions, and somehow, closer to overthrowing the boss because they knew too many secrets. But with Stalin you could not tell. You could blunder—horribly—and not be touched. You could be hell on wheels at your job, but arrested, ending up in a cellar, a cell, in a car headed for somewhere. A misplaced word at one of Stalin's late night dinner parties, which he always managed to avoid, could be recalled five years later. The boss had an incredible memory and an ever

greater ability of interpretation that was eternally in his favor, though he would claim it was for the good of the state. Hopefully, he had learned something from purging nearly 40,000 officers from the Army in the thirties; when the Soviet Union disastrously invaded Finland, the lack of experienced leadership was evident. Vorodenko did not want the lack of purges to increase the war abilities of his country, he really wanted lives to be protected.

Some of his colleagues, who all looked askance at each other, in fear and in search of alliance, actually wanted to enter the lion's den. A fellow sort of Ukrainian, Nikita Khrushchev, who had served the party in the Ukraine in the 1930s, had ridden to power approving—perhaps believing in—Stalin's sweeping arrests and purges for state security. He continued carrying out such orders for the boss, even to arresting some people who were just plain handy when the arrests quota fell short. Yet Khrushchev, in early 1939, once ordered/invited Nik to attend a party in his Moscow flat, and he went, expecting anything, and got it. To Nik's surprise, Khrushchev, after a long dinner, but few toasts, quietly called him into a distant room and informed him what had happened to his wife and his son. It was terrible...but he could finally put those ghosts to rest. Even though the news was cruel, Vorodenko sensed that the rather unattractive but vigorous commissar was recruiting supporters. Stalin would not live forever, and Vorodenko was wise enough to know Khrushchev's ambition. But he had worked endlessly during what they were beginning to call "The Great Patriotic War," and was hard at work in the Ukraine, reviving agriculture after the terrible drought of 1946; developing housing and industry. Maybe he was racking up points for the boss, maybe he was trying to make up for his own crimes—which, according to quiet accounts, he largely avoided, but being with Stalin you couldn't help but commit a few. In any case, Khrushchev was a committed Communist and it was hard to find the true ones at times...and was beginning, Vorodenko could sense, to question Stalin. This was no time to blunder...and there were so many ways to blunder, such as telling the truth to the wrong ear.

Searching for Harley Wilson... was an automatic blunder. So big a one that he kept the faithful Bronnitsey out of it. But Nik already had an excuse: he was helping cover up how Allied pilots had flown courageously during the war. The party line was that only the almighty Soviet Army truly conquered the Nazis; the allies were recalcitrant and cowardly bunglers. He managed to get his hands on a few SS records, after bribing the clerk-typist who had transcribed them, and identified the names of two American pilots who had gone down at a place called Riesa, relatively near the coordinates where Harley had disappeared. Vorodenko located a witness; he had been a young soldier on furlough when he observed a P-51 circling down, and a parachute opening. The soldier, on a bicycle, pedaled down the road to find an American being helped to his feet by a couple of Polish POWs, serving as farm laborers. The SS quickly arrived, as well as a Luftwaffe officer; the latter provided some protection it seemed as the pilot was not shot. He was taken to a nearby farmhouse, his wounds treated, and then taken to hospital. The young man recalled he was blonde—yes—but nearly six feet tall. Personnel at the hospital, when questioned, said little, but an elderly doctor did recall the American pilot, and yes, he was tall. No, that was not Harley Wilson who barely reached five-five. Well, he had a lead on another American plane going down five miles from Riesa, near the Koblen River. Two residents had been identified as witnesses of a bailed pilot. They had given a story that painted capturing Germans in good light, not surprising considering that the Russians were coming from the east and the Americans from the west, and good

manners might secure some mercy. The problem was, though, that both pilots had lived and had been repatriated by 1946. Wilson was surely dead—but where was his body? Or, had he been somehow carried into captivity by Soviet forces?

One evening Nik glanced up to see Irina, standing in the doorway of the kitchen, their daughter Bryna slung on her hip. She had been fed, bathed and was ready for bed. Irina had an easy delivery but Nik had unashamedly secured her the best by bribing a well-known baby doctor who supplemented his governmental income with secret visits to expecting couples. Nik had heard stories of expectant mothers having to walk themselves to the delivery room...and sometimes walk back after the delivery. One horror story was that just-delivered women had to walk through a room where paraplegics were given enemas, and the toilets were not strong enough for repeated flushings...

He smiled at her, but she lowered her eyes and turned away. “What is bothering you?” he asked, following her into the closet-sized room they called the nursery. When she did not answer, he said, sweetly, “zvezda moya.” She usually melted, at least a bit, when he called her “my star,” particularly after he identified a special one for them—a blue white stone piercing its light down through the black iron of a Russian sky, and even glimmering during the white nights of summer. When he told her this, she didn’t smile but her dark eyes filled with tears. He did not ask why. A quiet spring should never be pumped up.

Until you needed water and he had become thirsty as he entered into ever dryer territory. “You remind me of that day at...Poltava.”

“How so?” She asked this while putting Bryna down for her nap on a child’s bed. They built walls around her with towels and withdrew, quietly as Bryna murmured and grew comfortable...

“Heartsick.” She was silent as they entered the kitchen. “You never tell me you love me. When you were with Baladin there at Poltava, you had the same look.” She was silent as she made tea. “You and Baladin—”

“Risha,” she corrected him. “What about us?”

Nikolai wanted to reach out, take her taut temples in his hands—tear her hair out—and then kiss her until her fears went away. Alas, in Stalin’s Russia, no amount of kisses would do that. Despite having a child, and laughing together with friends, and even gaining a small dacha in the countryside which had made her pale face glow like moonrise, she was not his, yet, and maybe that was good, at least for her. As he poised to jump in and swim in dark waters, he had to speak what was in his heart. “Did you love Risha Baladin? I always felt that you were united in sorrow. But little else.”

“That was all,” she said.

They sat down at the table with their tea; nothing else to do despite the entire apartment filling up with smoke of old sorrows, old pain, and so much—that was unspoken. After a long ten minutes, he tried some humor. “Would a few soap bubbles---”

“Oh Nikki,” she laughed. “You think seeing Gallagher in the bath meant anything to me?”

“Not sure,” he teased. “Young handsome colonel, from the skies, all in wet gleaming flesh—and me, balding middle-aged man with face that is far from handsome—“

“Now stop it,” she protested. “You were the most—beautiful thing I have ever seen when I was released from detention, questioning—and you were there waiting for me despite trouble it might cause you—“ She took his hands and stared at him. “Without one soap bubble,” she said, flicking his wiry hair, and then using both hands, rumbled it.

He grabbed her hands and kissed them. “Then you love me. Say it.”

“If I never say it, perhaps you won’t be taken away from me.”

He sat back, filled with joy. He reveled in it, knowing it would not last. “Stalin wouldn’t care if you loved or hated me if he draws a bead on me.”

“Ah, Nikki, why must we live our lives in fear? I was scared of marrying you—loving you—some kind of immediate hostage to your work and fate. They could turn you against me, and me against you, for the sake of our glorious Soviet. Molotov denounced his own wife when she was arrested... And Bryna—I don’t want her to grow up as a hostage too.”

“Stalin rarely moves in on children,” Nik said. “I think he sees his daughter Svetlana.” He kept speaking, wanting to get this clear between them, wanting to push away memories of his son, destroyed not personally by Stalin but by his faraway orders. “Well?—do you want to leave, defect? Joe Gallagher offered us all assistance—we have no families, either of us, to be threatened, ruined—“

“I can’t leave Russia and neither can you. It is our home. But why must we hate and fear our leader?” Old arguments, no answers, except for them to know that Stalin could not live forever...

“But I want you to be happy,” he told her, his heart aching for her taut face, tight brow. Coating the heartache was fear...as he had recently lost a degree of protection. He had never counted on it too heavily, but anything helped. Even simple checking on a dead pilot could be construed as a plot.

“I could only be happy with you,” she was saying, knowing he was not completely listening but that’s how things were.

“If I were not here, you could leave.”

“What are you doing?”

“That I won’t tell you.”

“I saw you reading a note last night...” Then she was wise enough only to nod with no more questions; answers could be tortured from her. She rose, kissed the top of his head, on the balding spot. She continued sleeping two mornings later, when Nik left for their dacha, their country home, though it was

little more than a glorified garden shed. He intended to sand rough places on the floor to protect his soon to be crawling daughter's hands and knees. He left in a borrowed car and then left it at the dacha..

Nik only used the old wooden outdoor toilet and then walked five miles over boggy grounds to a train station in a village. He was headed for Vologda prison camp, far northwest of Moscow. One of the prisoners might be Harley Wilson; Nik had dug up obscure reports that were some Americans alongside Poles, Lithuanians, some Finns, as well as many Russians arrested and imprisoned for bewildering reasons.

He knew the commandant at Vologda, and knew him to be a cruel...idiot, to be as polite as possible. But he was bribable, though he could also be bribed to report on Vorodenko, in turn.

But he owed this step as a favor: to Joseph Gallagher. Joe, in his special P-51, had flown to Moscow to attest to Vorodenko's handling of the Poltava crisis; he had only good things to say. Then he was used as a courier for SHAEF, bearing documents for FDR, feeling out Soviet intentions for Japan—actually, non-intentions--which Vorodenko slipped to him. Nik found out months later that Joe, when returning to England, had nearly died when he was shot down in Germany. Captured, he had been beaten, starved and kept awake for three days while those pigs tried to learn what charred papers could not tell them. Joe had kept his mouth shut about Russian plans. For that, he had to take this step, this chance, which might wind up wretchedly...

The train crawled along the tracks to Vologda, three hundred miles away from Moscow. The train would stop out in the middle of nothingness, and then finally start again. At last, Vorodenko stepped off his car onto the platform at Vologda, appearing both bored and confident; it was an act.

A town of sorts was attached to the prison, reportedly the oldest prison of the Soviet. Looming tall with towers, it straddled the landscape, the horizon. It could be smelled at a distance.

Squaring his epauletted shoulders, Nik strode toward the prison, arrogantly demanding a ride from an old Soviet carrier taking supplies to the prison. At the gates, he presented his documents, waved off questions of why he was there, and demanded to see the commandant. Phone calls, careful looks, running back and forth, an offer of tea in the stone bunker of the guard's hut, and he was finally led into a great graveled yard. A guard ran next to him, clutching his weapon, and made sure Vorodenko got to the right door. Commandant Sikoljiv was there to meet him, running the thin strands of dark red hair away from his dented forehead. "Moscow business," Vorodenko lied as he was served tea from a freshly replenished samovar and helped himself to a tin of caviar; he detested the stuff but ate with style and elan.

"Yes comrade general," said the commandant, his voice like the smell of old fish. This was a man existing on orders, exhausted, and possibly heartsick from his work, but he did it, in hopes of escape, even if by death, a nice natural one. Vorodenko had understood he had lost two brothers in the purges.

"Do you have any Americans among your prisoners?" he said this, while leaning back, and lighting a cigarette, as if not caring a rat's whisker if there were any. "Moscow wants to know for sure."

"I—am not sure." He hastened to add that the prisoners were in transit to Vorkash, located near the Arctic Circle. They were to leave in two days. Clearly, names on paper had no interest to him; perhaps only numbers mattered.

"Take me to them," Vorodenko ordered, stubbing his cigarette and sighing as if bored to death.

"Why does Moscow wish to know?" said the Commandant.

"Why does Moscow wish for anything? I want to look, that's all."

Vorodenko then heaved a bundle of money out of his tunic and then said, "Ah" when it scattered on the floor. He nodded when Sikoljiv said "Let me help you." He helped put the bills into a drawer that was then locked. Sikoljiv called for guards, and instructed them to take his guest to see the prisoners. Keeping his face an utter blank, Vorodenko walked briskly along, treating the guards as bothersome pests whom he tolerated. They seemed happy to be treated so.

Doors were unlocked. More doors. Then they descended a flight of filthy steps, into the basement, which was a common cell. There were lights, but most of the prisoners, understandably, turned their faces, which at least had been shaved. Their hair had been clipped too and the smell of the old prison was alleviated slightly by harsh soap. Vorodenko blessed his good luck; under beards and matted hair, how could he have recognized anybody? He knew that this was probably the first clean up the prisoners had suffered in weeks. But it was just in preparation for their next leg, all the way to Vorkash. The guard shone their flashlights over the faces deemed for some reason American, at times barking at the men to lift them up.

Mentally screening the picture of Harley Wilson that Joe had supplied him, Vorodenko found no face that even held a shadow of the young man's flat, boyish visage, unless it had been completely wiped off, destroyed...Vorodenko came to a momentary halt.

A face had a shadow of familiarity, and as he stared at it, he could not place the features. He knew the face. He knew it. No name would come to him.

"Comrade general?" said one of the guards, politely. His eyes darted sideways, asking if he wanted to have the prisoner brought forward. Vorodenko calculated; decided yes, then decided no, knowing that he would have to invent a story, then another story, another, and then try to remember them all and keep it straight whose ears heard what. And what kind of story could he invent when he could not recall the face or the name? But it was an American he was looking at.

They withdrew. He later learned that when the lights were taken away, rats crawled out to join the prisoners, who threw them their bits of food to keep them at bay.

Vorodenko chatted with the commandant; made some promises that were probably not expected to be kept; found a few more rubles for silence, drank tea, a glass of vodka; and then left.

He waited until two in the morning for a train to return to Moscow. He got off where he had climbed on, and walked across the five miles to his dacha. By then, he recalled the man whose face had startled him.

Preston Gallagher.

### **Joe: Redeem Me from My Enemies – Return to London**

Competition sharpened the pilots' ambitions, and a result was the "Easter Parade," which intended to break all records between noon, April 15, to noon, April 16, Easter Sunday. For damned near 24 hours, a plane landed every minute, pitting Celle against Fassberg. Both sides won, because more people were fed.

By mid-May, 1949, the Airlift ended. Joe heard this from Glen King who came rushing out to their plane to deliver the news—"It's over! It's over! What a way to celebrate a wedding!" And they did, Joe, Glen and his bride Maria getting a ride to Flynn's Inn, an R&R center in a great big mansion, the thirty bedrooms of which were either for guests of whoever the hell once lived there, or a mighty whorehouse. In the enormous beer parlor, Glen rocked his bride on his lap, kissed her, toasted Joe, the German people and all the hell else in his joy. "But you know," he then said soberly to Joe when his bride left to fix her hair, "it's gonna break out someplace else again."

"Oh yeah," Joe agreed, through a blur of champagne. He didn't say so, but the east, the Far East, the "Orient" might go up any day now as alliances could not be formed, and everybody was treading on everybody's toes.

But they forgot such grim ideas to celebrate Glen and Maria marrying three days earlier in a dark church, with them all wrapped up against the chilly evenings of May. She was a "frau" with an adolescent son, who nearly glowed with the attention of Major King, who had lost his father himself when he was teen and thus provided the kid with more than just some extra dehydrated potatoes. Several years later, in the United States, the young man, a naturalized citizen, was accepted into the Air Force Academy...and retired quite a few years later as a proud colonel of the United States Air Force.

The next day, Glen and Joe managed to get to the big celebration at Schoneberg City Hall, where nearly half a million Berliners gathered, to hear Berlin Mayor Reuter declare a holiday for the city. General Lucius Clay, who had been compared to a Roman Emperor for sheer imperiousness, called not only the British and American pilots heroes, but every citizen in West Berlin a hero...and he was crying.

The ending, as Joe came to understand, had commenced in April when the four Allied powers announced that they were ending military occupation of their zones and were going to create an autonomous German Federal Republic, with Bonn as its capital. Berliners mumbled; what of us? Mayor Reuter calmed West Berlin—after all the money the Allies had spent on keeping Berlin alive, they would not abandon the beleaguered divided city. An agreement that was signed between the Soviets and the Allies ended all restrictions on transportation and trade that had been imposed on March 12, 1948.

And, there it was...money was at the bottom of things. Of course, not entirely, but Stalin, without TASS offering one word in that direction, had finally realized that the blockade was not working anymore, and had only polarized opinions and desires. But the Soviet voice took responsibility for nothing save that they, the "five occupying powers had agreed to lift the operation." Cripes, Joe thought. No matter, home was waiting, with Ceile waiting as well, and then...there was Pres. Still no word.

As the Berlin ball wound down, and normal life advanced to some point, Joe had to deal with his brother's disappearance. And he finally admitted to himself that perhaps Pres wanted to disappear.

A few years ago the thought would have been answered by No, not Pres! Now Joe was not so sure of his brother's strength anymore. Joe's own heroism had crowned his stars with a halo, while Pres's heroism in Albania had been turned into a joke, a political mess, and greedy power ploy; his personal fall out made laughable by the media. He had recently learned, in a letter from Irene, that even worse was being printed about Pres—in a dirty ragsheet, with a limited circulation. The stuff was putting the entire Gallagher family on the griddle, though Pres was the chief target. Yes. Perhaps Pres had fled. His older brother was far more sensitive than anybody could suspect. Pres had been the confident older brother, taking care of his guys, as he called them, and that was no mask he put on and off. But perhaps it had cost him something, something of his heart, soul and mind, sacrificed for his brothers, for his parents.

If he had fled, disappeared...Joe still loved him.

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Joe learned, not to his surprise, that he was not among pilots continuing to fly the Airlift until at least October to make sure the city of Berlin was well supplied for the winter, in case the Soviets executed another clumsy trick. He looked forward to living on Goodge again, with Ceile, whose longing letters filled him with equal longing. But he also sensed it would be a return to the desk and meeting room...and a new aide, probably, as his former one had married, and her memory stirred him in warm places once in a while. At times, he still missed Sandy, but even if Sandy had stayed, he would have kicked him out to find better things to do with his lieutenant bars than be his aide.

So what would he, Joe, be doing? God knows there was enough to worry about in Europe, but Joe toyed with the idea of being transferred to Japan—but he didn't like McArthur, though the man would not be his direct boss. Now, Joe, he thought, you need to settle down. Nearing forty, childless, his marriage happy but still a little fragile, he had to think of others. And there was NATO, now more than ever a beacon of hope for a continent that needed to join together, join with fellow continents overseas and put an end to war.

Glen had volunteered to fly until October to allow his wife to finish her processing. To celebrate Joe's leave taking, Glen took Joe, Maria, and his stepson Robert to a nice spread once more at Flynn's Inn. The menu bristled with available foodstuffs and featured a list of domestic beers and wines and all ate and drank with good appetite. Robert was a happy kid, and seemed thrilled to be between the major and the general and in improving English asked if Joe had ever known any "Red Indians," and if they were as fierce as he had seen in movies. "They had made excellent Marines in the South Pacific," Joe told him. "I've read that they performed war dances on the decks of their battle ships." Glen and the wife then took a romantic stroll out on the terrace; actually, she was a bit queasy with the rich dinner as happened to a lot of Berliners who were finally eating chocolate, some meat, and butter. Joe chatted with him until Robert said, "I think that man wants to speak with you." Joe twisted his head and indeed saw a man watching them expectantly. When their eyes met, the man winked, and Joe suppressed his surprise: Lt. Bronnitsey. As tall, broad shouldered and blond as ever. He was a good sight.

"Hi!" the younger man shouted. "Good to see you!" Joe recalled that Bronnitsey's English had been quite good, which is one of the reasons Vorodenko took him on as an aide.

"That's a friend of mine," he said. "Could you join your parents?—and give them my thanks."

Robert took a moment to sort out Joe's colloquial English. "Okay," he said with a grin. Joe watched while the young man left for the terrace and found his parents.

Joe went up to the massive bar with a companionable smile on his face and a bland and friendly greeting. They chatted like old buddies, and then adjourned to the game room, once lively with billiards players but quiet on that Thursday night. They selected cues, racked the balls. Both were not particularly good. *Click*. "It's good to see you in person. I take it that something could not be mailed..?"

*Click...click and click*. "Ah," said Bronnitsey when one ball went into a pocket. He leaned over the table and said, "Not for this. If only Harley Wilson were involved but there is more."

Joe smoothly released two balls from close quarters but did not sink any. "What is the more?"

"My boss," he said, referring to Vorodenko, "heard of American prisoners being taken to Siberia. He checks."

Joe leaned over and eyed the balls. "Yes?"

"I think the boss find your brother."

Joe went still inside. Then sweat broke out on his hands, feet, and forehead. He dried his forehead with his shirt's cuff and then leaned against the pool table while Bronnitsey circled about, and then pushed at a ball. *Click*. "How does he know my brother?"

"He met him at the wedding, some wedding."

"Of course, of course, Bryncote."

"He said he looks like you. Different, but like you."

"Why did he send you?"

"He is under enough suspicion as is. He sent me as a courier—for associates and for you."

"When was this?—when Nik saw my brother?"

"Ten days ago."

Joe nodded, while preparing for another shot. They circled the table. *Click. Click. Click*. "Can you find out anything more?" Joe asked. No use asking about why. Not yet.

"Boss did find out where."

"Where?"

"A long way into Siberia. Coal mines."

Joe's hands gripped his pool cue. Bronnitsey continued to play pool, idly, clicking the balls about, but glanced back at Joe who retained his composure. They shook hands for a good game, and left, chuckling, but beneath the chuckles, were taut words from the aide. Please don't put General Vorodenko in any danger. More danger. Protect him. Please.

As for Pres, Joe felt stymied.

Like any brothers, sometimes there was a flash of the psychic—something between them, as the time when an adolescent Joe was uneasy all afternoon, and learned that Pres had suffered an incident in shop class. Nothing terrible, but it was a deep cut. During the war he had never felt any tremors involving Pres's safety—and their two reunions during the war were both successful and unsuccessful. He had bled for Pres' mangling by the press, and then had ridden herd on his worry, and kept himself in balance hoping that Pres was involved in some truly critical mission that would restore his and others' belief in him.

But the possibility—Joe knew he could swear it was a fact—that Pres was in Siberia, in a prison—left him reelingly unsure as what to do. Had Pres had done something stupid? Was he, Joe hated to think, a traitor?

Maybe silence was the best..? Until he could find out something. But how without broadcasting Pres's disappearance, his, well...disgrace...

Joe kept coming to this conclusion and did so again on his last night in Berlin. He had been quartered in a decrepit hotel room for several days before departure, and he spent the night staring out the window. He had smoked a pack of cigarettes away, and knew that Ceile would catch the smoke on his breath, clothes and hair and would say nothing, but would hope he would quit...again. Ceile...how much should she know? Or knew?

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Joe attended closing party for the Airlift, his brigadier's stars twinkling on his Dress A Air Force uniform jacket, which he still tugged at, seeking the belt and tails of his Army uniform. The party was a casual one, out of which people came and went but surged and eddied when General Tunner took the stage, silencing the murmurs of jazz. He read off the statistics, both good and grim: the 79 men who had died had their names read aloud, and they were toasted. As far he could tell, the final tally of the airlift was nearly 3,000,000 tons flown by the British and the Americans, they kept West Berlin alive, and even better, had proven airlifts could work, and war could be avoided in certain circumstances.

"When you off, old man?" Glen demanded of him when they met for perhaps their final round of drinks. "Soon," Joe said. "Give the missus my congratulations." Glen nodded, his face happy with the thought of their baby, in gestation for three months.

With the usual rattle and roll and snipping of red tape, Joe, reassigned to the USAFE, returned to England, slipping in quietly...he and Ceile had a long delayed date on Goodge Street. Their flat, stuffy in warm days, frigid in cold days. Scene of sadness, place of joy... He arrived at Croydon, and, rather than calling to tell her he had taken an earlier plane, decided just to go home. He took a taxi, and an hour later, he entered the dark vestibule, and tired, took the lift.

He retrieved the key from the hiding place, quietly unlocked the door, and saw his wife...kneeling in front of the hearth, her nice behind in the air, and somewhat visible by the sexiest thing he had ever seen her in, including that night in the lakeside cabin. It was black lace. And very thin. He watched, while the flames took to life, and she stood up and turned around...pink mules were on her feet and her face was covered with a brew of mud, it seemed. "Oh, Joe," she cried. "I thought I had time—"

"For what?" Joe asked. He leaned in the doorway, enjoying Ceile being flustered at her appearance, the mixture of the seductress and the cliché housewife.

She was flustered but not embarrassed. “To do this to you,” she said, sidling up, her body appearing and reappearing through her gown...Joe closed the door.... She smacked him on the lips, leaving a coating of gunk on his face. They laughed and Ceile, with refreshing, practical simplicity, gave him a cup of brandy, said, “I will be right back, early worm,” washed her face, combed her hair and without a moment’s thought, slid into his arms, quickly slipped from his light blue shirt which joined the pile of other clothing. She slid on top of his body, bared and ready in a nest of pillows and blankets...

“Oof,” Joe said, sitting up, some time later. They had both fallen asleep on the floor, and Joe’s bones told him that was increasingly hard to do. “Hey,” said Ceile, her hand moving up his back and his shoulder. He lay back down in her arms for a while, and then he rose, got the fire going again with a few precious coals, In the meantime, she put the coffee on and checked on the bread and egg situation. They hurried back into each other’s arms. They kissed in lazy morning fashion. His fingers brushed at a few smudges of the mud mask. “You never did such a thing,” Joe said, referring to the beauty treatment.

“A girl gets older you know,” she said. “Natural beauty needs some help.”

“Not with you,” he assured her.

“Thanks,” she murmured, electing not to tell him how foolish she felt...and how, when trying to rinse off the mask, which she intended to steam off per instructions, the sink’s taps emitted their usual slow stream and anxious, she washed her face off using water from the toilet!

She poured the coffee and he built the nest into a sofa of sorts. It seemed hard to talk all of a sudden. And he didn’t want to talk about the Lift, not yet. He placed Pres far back in his mind. He suddenly said, “We’re both older. And times, it feels like years...and years.”

“And getting out of baby-making range perhaps,” she said. She shook her head. “Sorry to hit you with that Danzo when you’re barely home.”

“I understand.”

“Danzo, forget about talk of babies,” she said. “That can wait.”

“It can’t wait forever,” Joe said.

“When I have a moment to spare I’m in contact with Sydney,” she started, and then paused, to let Joe either ask or not ask about Percy Vivyan, of whom he heard nothing. She did tell him of Adelaide, whose son and heir to Bryncote, had been born successfully. Adelaide was working with Sydney to convert an entire wing of Bryncote into a school, a step partly due to ruinously high taxes. Ceile then said, “Frankie...oh, Joe, he’s a wonderful boy. I know you said we should not adopt, but, he needs us, I think. He’s happy at Bryncote, but I think he could be happier with us.”

“He has a mother,” Joe reminded her.

“We could petition for custody perhaps,” Ceile said. “I think old mom would be happy to grant it.”

“Well, we can make inquiries,” Joe said, trying to keep the excitement out of his voice.

“Good!” She suddenly bounced up, ran to the bathroom—“To pee,” she called back. “Even if last night was the magic charm, too early for morning sickness.” She came back, beautiful and glowing even in the

dim light of the flat; even in the summer the sun took its time getting to their two windows. “All this before breakfast too! Come on. Bring the brandy for more coffee.”

Joe sat at the old familiar wall bench, naked, but wrapped in a robe, and enjoyed her cooking, which she had been practicing. She grinned at him. “Martha told me that when you have a baby, you have to be good in the kitchen! A little hungry mouth grows into a big hungry mouth.” She whipped eggs, seared a precious pork chop, made toast in the oven, dished up tender scrambled eggs and poured the coffee. She sat down, smiling like a bride, and then reached over the table to clap his face. “And you, good shepherd. I have always been proud of you but serving in the Airlift like you did was wonderful. I’m proud of you and proud of every last person in West Berlin. They weren’t gonna be pushed around.” They toasted the Airlift and the citizens of West Berlin...and fell to...and then headed for bed.

The next morning he awoke first, his body warm and happy, but his mind spinning into the usual questions. One answer: Creighton. He had to talk with Creighton. But he had to do so carefully.

He wasn’t good at waiting. Stunk at it. Could get himself into trouble over it, like the time Hollenbeck had abducted the 918<sup>th</sup> and he was left behind...he flew because he hadn’t been told not to, and flew again when he was stay at his desk, but dammit, only he could do this. Doud was waiting for him, and Joe could only slouch in like he didn’t care, and only glanced at his superior officer when he grunted that Joe ought to be court martialed, I think I will... That was war when the objective of protecting shipping trumped a bird colonel sassily interpreting orders for his own good—and the mission’s good. Now it was peace, a frail peace, but he could not justify direct actions any more...

Joe had three days before he had to report—to Joseph McNarney. He and Ceile tried to make some plans...and didn’t get very far...

It was fine to make love; it was also fine just to hold hands and stroll down Goodge. The shops were better stocked, and women were sporting new clothes and here and there a new car spun by. They enjoyed a pint at the Crown and Dragon, had something to eat...and hurried home. Ceile first used the toilet and Joe saw that an envelope had been slipped under the door. He read his name on its white surface and didn’t look around when Ceile entered the room, clipping back her hair... She stopped and then came up to Joe’s shoulder. “Should I?” she asked. “We’re the Twins, like Gemini.”

The message was from Eoghain St. John Keighley. Without fanfare, he read the invitation to join Eoghain for a pint at The Devil’s Pool, a pub in South London, 1700, the next day. He wasn’t Creighton, but he knew and worked with Creighton...

“You gonna keep it?” Ceile asked. Joe stood by the window, fumbling for a cigarette, his first since arriving home. He stopped but she reached into his jacket, found the cigarettes, stuck one between her lips, lighted it with his Zippo that he handed to her, and then placed the cigarette between his lips. “For the duration,” she said. He smiled, accepting it.

It was hard to say, but Joe said, “You could request transfer, go home. Find your assignment. Wait for me. Adopt...I’ll get hold of a barrister here in London and make inquiries—“

“Hold on, he’s your buddy not mine. I love him, but he wants you. He sleeps with your wings under his pillow. No, I go when you go. Maybe we all go.”

“The clock is ticking,” Joe warned.

“The clock is ticking in this flat,” she reminded him. “Remember, I said I would resign my commission and go home if I get pregnant.”

They leaned into kiss each other. “Forever and a day,” they agreed. But Ceile wondered, anymore, what was forever? Their service to their country? Ceile had never intended military service to be her career but it was turning out that way...and as for Joe, she knew his longing to resign and go teach history. But the post-war era was full of clouds, and the clouds needed a skilled pilot to navigate through them. And, Ceile knew the note was calling him to new duties, perhaps new mysteries. And...she did not know if she could ask him about Pres.

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South London. London, south of the Thames. A very different place from north of the Thames though getting to it by bridge or by Underground was dead easy. Joe, in civilian clothes, was ambling along like a tourist, and finally found The Devil’s Pool, a public house perched on stilts, sunk into ground that overlooked the Thames, then at low tide. He looked back across the river and then down the historic river; plants spinning out steam; the sun glittering on the foul tips of the river, bridges lacing across, the churches poking steeples up, rows of dingy housing, and bombsites, still uncleared. Joe strolled up to the public house and skirted a large, shallow opening, which, according to a plaque, would fill up with water in high tide. He later learned why it was called the devil’s pool; quite a few pirates—the river kind—were shackled to the rotting post still standing, to drown as the tide rose. Nice spot. However, at the moment, a mom duck and her ducklings were scooting across the foot high level of water.

It was a humid day, the sky steaming with clouds. Eoghain lazed on the wooden terrace, leaning up against the brown bricks of the public house, eyes closed. “Well, Joe,” he smiled as Joe came up to him and stopped. Older, but still not aged, he was as handsome as ever and as calm as ever. “Sit, sit,” he instructed Joe, and went inside and brought back two cool pints of lager and lime. He sat down and of course, praised the Airlift, and like Ceile, praised the Berlin people, even if they had skimmed the British markets a bit. “And, let’s have it,” Joe said, finally, thirst slaked.

“Vorodenko.”

Joe dug out a cigarette and lighted it, cupping the flame against the pleasant river breeze.

“Reports are that he has been sent to a Siberian labor camp.”

Joe took a long pull of the lager and lime.

“The story goes...that Ekaterina Szeboyez, one of the chief dancers at the Bolshoi, has retired. She was a kind of mistress to Stalin.”

“Oh...ah.”

“If you are thinking that Vorodenko received any special favors for—keeping this quiet, you don’t know the ‘boss.’ Stalin would not care who knew, perhaps save his daughter, Svetlana. Szeboyez requested Stalin never bother Vorodenko as a favor to her. Perhaps he liked having an excuse not to execute another general. Yet, again, Stalin is no fool. He used Vorodenko as a catspaw more than once, and Vorodenko used his talents well as a sensible voice to the west...and no doubt Stalin knew it. The fact that Vorodenko wasn’t shot in some cellar some place indicates that Stalin is only bringing him into line after a period of being protected.”

“But Siberia—“

“Vorodenko wasn’t sent as a prisoner, we understand.”

“Oh, good.” Joe lighted another cigarette, though one was still burning in the ashtray. Eoghain pretended not to notice.

“We understand he was sent there as commissar of a new camp, for more prisoners, more’s the pity. And being a commissar is a few steps up from being a prisoner...but his wife is with him.”

“Good. I mean for Irina. For him. Do you know if they took their daughter?” Joe struggled to keep his voice level, concerned, and not babbling.

“I don’t...Okay,” Eoghain said, precisely drawling out the Americanism, increasingly heard in England. “Are you curious about how we know this?”

“I guess I should be.”

“Faye Vendry got us the message.”

“Oh.” Joe’s eyes ducked, momentarily.

“Faye confided in me about you...and her. My dear general, it was wartime.”

“Yeah, and it excuses some things, but not others. Is she well?”

“Yes.” But a shade passed over Eoghain’s eyes, Joe noticed. “Now, there are things I would like to tell you in presence of the wife.”

Joe entered the pub, found a refreshingly new telephone and connected with Ceile at her work. Ceile’s cheerful voice reversed the situation. “No, Eoghain is invited to dinner, with us. I have a few tricks up my sleeve, and I want to show off a bit. Be there at eight or I won’t be responsible for you missing a single, delicious bite.”

Joe rang off, both delighted and uneasy. Before he left for the Airlift, Ceile had tackled a dinner of roast beef with vegetables, akin to the meal that her mother had nearly barbecued the house with, back in 1945. The meal had come out beautifully, but Ceile was emotionally exhausted!—took two bites, became sick, and had to go to bed. Joe finished the meal and washed the dishes, and wondered if the stork was on the way, but Ceile laughed it off the next morning as a case of nerves. To Joe’s inquiries about her cooking skills, she said, “Got some mentoring in Texas.”

In the full glow of an endless summer evening, Joe and Eoghain elected to stroll back over the Thames. They arrived, famished, and Joe found their warm flat full of steam, delicious odors, the card table laid with cloth, napkins, and eating ware...and Ceile in her underwear, in the kitchen, basting a modest slab of corned beef. Eoghain and Joe saw this before Ceile knew they were there, and Eoghain retreated—he would pick up a bottle of wine at the nearest pub—while Joe sidled in, planted a kiss on his wife’s perspiring neck. She whirled around armed with a knife and a spoon and squeaked “Oh!”

“Easy, I’m sorry,” Joe assured her.

Ten minutes later Eoghain knocked carefully. By now Ceile was dressed in a light frock, espadrilles she had bought in Australia, and a scarf tying her pretty hair back. "Madam, you are as lovely as the day of your wedding," Eoghain proclaimed, kissing her hand and handing her the wine.

"Thank you," Ceile smiled. "If you will pour the wine, I will serve--"

"No, I will serve," Joe said. Now Ceile looked a bit uneasy, but Joe had enough training by his mother to cut the corned beef with the grain, arrange onions and potatoes, the salad tomatoes and cucumbers, and the pickled cabbage on the plates and sail them to the table. Eoghain popped the wine and filled the mismatched goblets and with a toast, they dug in. The windows were open and the cooler breezes of the summer evening were welcomed. Then Eoghain lowered the windows. Ceile watched him, poured the rest of the wine between the three glasses. "Well, where's the fire?"

Eoghain, full of truly delicious food, and enjoying the company of the two Americans, smiled. "You know, years ago, I worked in the British Embassy in Washington, and one frosty evening, detested the clank of radiators as opposed to a good honest fire. When I said such, one of the embassy staffers pointed out that the radiators required no manpower. Being a Brit of the old school, I huffed that able bodied men were being denied work, carrying wood and lighting fires. Well, guv, the staffer told me, if you want such a job, then do it. Being invited into some American houses, I realized how houses had been built to reduce the need for a full staff of servants...and if one can't be a servant, and with some good old American get up and go, one might do something else that carrying trays, lighting fires and hauling bathwater. Bred that egalitarian quality that my stuffier colleagues find so insufferable."

Joe tread lightly. "How do you feel about the Americans..."

"Leaving we Brits in the dust? Not happy, but the world turns, the world turns. When George C. Marshall outlined that Marshall plan in a speech at Yale—Harvard--?—one of my colleagues said if the Americans were offering money to save our necks, we could bloody well take their direction."

They laughed, toasted the Plan and then Ceile said, "But where's the fire, Eoghain?—and don't fob me off because if I figure in this dinner, then I must be involved."

"Is Creighton involved?" Joe interrupted.

"He agreed that you two are on a need to know basis. Among members of the wedding party at Bryncote, there have been two mysterious deaths, a disappearance, and your attempted assassination."

Ceile's breath hissed. "Then it was not a hit and run...?"

"I doubt it, which you pretty well suspected, I imagine," Eoghain said.

"Who else has died?" Ceile asked.

"Well, disappeared. "Colin Eppey, one of the musicians...and an agent."

"The disappeared includes Percy Vivyan," Joe said.

"Yes. Both MI-6. But the common thread was that you were all at the wedding. Posited: all of you either witnessed something—perhaps saw somebody who should not have been there."

"Over two years ago and the weekend was full of crazy incidents," Joe pointed out. His mind quickly inventoried a series of events: Posnan was being hidden at Bryncote, to begin with. Percy Vivyan,

somewhat working in the dark, without full information, kept seeking out a contact and nearly blew it. Faye was there in official capacity, but she was also seeking out Joe to make him give her some answers. Stoves going blooey; the plumbing even worse. Posnan sneaked out; a shoot-out which killed two enemy agents and wounded Faye...and in the middle of it all, Keith Donley sneaking out impact diamonds that Nik and Irina helped to smuggle into England.

“Recall anything that involved Faye.”

Ceile looked at her husband. “I’m sure you never lied to me Danzo. But did you ever withhold the truth about Faye’s actions?”

“Yee—esss...I found Faye in our bedroom. I had just cleaned up for the ceremony, and when I returned from the bathroom, there she was. We talked. Not very nicely. I asked her to leave, and she did. You arrived a few minutes later.” He smiled, wryly, and his dimples appeared.

“On your way to your room, did you see Faye?” Eoghain asked Ceile.

“No...I did see a big fellow kind of lurching about—he saw me and said—“

“Yes?” Eoghain urged.

“He was lost and never been in such a bloomin’ large place before. That was all.”

Eoghain leisurely lighted a pipe...indicating that the windows could be re-opened. “Charming evening, mine two good hosts. And I’ll be in touch.”

“Before you leave...do you have any word on the Toombys?”

“No.”

“They both retired it seemed, and both are now dead.”

“Well...they were no spring chickens, but we will look into it.”

The party broke up with everybody saying their goodnights, and good wishes...Joe volunteered for the clean up, and Ceile let him. She cleaned up the front room and helped shelve the dishes...and disappeared. Joe finished his brandy at the sink and walked into the bathroom, a little cloudy with steam and fragrant with bath salts... Ceile reclined in the tub, smiling, Joe joined her in little less than thirty seconds...

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Brigadier General Joseph Gallagher walked into the U.S. Embassy at Grovesnor Square at the invitation of Joseph McNarney. His face was calm but his hands were cold; this being ordered into the presence of McNarney could include anything, including...the issues Eoghain identified with him and his wife last week.

In some conference room, Joe sat down with the head of the Air Force in Europe, and after absolutely no chit-chat, the older general placed a growing topic on the table: NATO, the military organization, which had been created to keep the peace.

NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, organized to back up the Marshall Plan with a military presence. Joe had kept abreast of the decisions, the worries, the steps, and had some extensive conversations. McNarney was pleased with his knowledge and his interest. "Hell, waging peace is just as hard if not more than waging war," Joe said. "We have to wage it harder than ever now the Soviets have the bomb." McNarney nodded, acknowledging the mighty headlines that roused new frenzies of worries as the USSR matched the United States in destructive power, announced on August 29. He eyed Joe over the table. "As one concerned guy to another, will they use it?"

"Why? The classes would be wiped out as well, all of those they want to convert."

"Do you know its intelligence name?"

"What?"

"What the intelligence guys named it—'Joe-1.'"

"After me, of course," Joe laughed. "Unless it's after that other guy named Joe."

"Well, whoever," McNarney said and then asked him a question that Joe sensed was also feeling out his future: what would he identify as a great need of this new organization? If he had no ideas, then his task would be to identify them--Joe was quick with his first answer: "Standardization of military terminology, communications, and signals—particularly at air bases." Ceile, on a training flight with a joint team of RAF and USAF nurses only a week earlier, had complained that the French air controllers refused their request for landing because their pilot's coordinates did not match their own, and the flight had to turn around and fly back to Northolt without a thing accomplished. "That was merely annoying," Ceile snapped to her husband. "Someday, a life will be involved." "Yes mam," Joe had agreed, and related such to McNarney.

McNarney then became confidential: he told Joe that it was one of the better known secrets that he, Joe, had certain personal connections with the Soviet General Nikolai Vorodenko. "And it's been helpful, but several certain voices have made it known that you are edging on treason. Such might be holding up your second star."

"Keep it," Joe said brusquely—in his head. Rather, he nodded, and lighted a cigarette. "I see."

"Of course, the certain several voices have little else to do but stir up trouble, but certain several ears are listening. There are voices in the States that are suggesting the Army is full of Reds."

Joe nodded. His parents had sent him some rag sheets that not only questioned Pres' integrity and action, but made other astounding accusations. "And Eisenhower the biggest Red of all, or so it goes."

"Voices like that are bluffing the hell up everybody's asses but we can't brush them off. So, be careful."

"How do you define careful, General?" Joe asked.

McNarney was wise enough to hear Joe's request for guidelines, rather than taking it as impertinence.

"Being...damned...careful. Trust no one, not even me. But any data...would be welcomed." As Joe contemplated his words, his cigarette ashing down in his fingers, McNarney became brisk as if in warning. "You're on your own here. This conversation has never happened."

"General, I—" Joe began and was interrupted.

“Conversation over. But good wishes with your new assignment—I will formalize with an order, and this is critical. I will also order Colonel Rattigan to find you an aide—”

“No aides,” Joe said, firmly.

He was told, equally firmly, he needed an aide.

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Joe undertook his new duties the next day. An office was found for him in the Langham. A former hotel suite, it had been subdivided into an inner office and a smaller office for an aide. Joe was privately glad that this was different room from another room, that held some ecstatic memories...

He did not notice the battered state of the desk, the rather worn carpet—though he noticed how his window looked out on other windows. He shrugged; perhaps it was in keeping with his new life that had to be safer, calmer...in preparation for children, natural or adopted. He felt at home in the old hostelry, but some of his memories weren't happy. As always, he held them off. He got to work, identifying a list of priorities.

Third day at his desk, he was busy reading reports, on the horn for more reports, and dashing off notes, and fetching his own coffee—he enjoyed the walk to the commissary which gave him a slight vacation--when a tap on the door, and his “Come in!” revealed a beautiful young face—under which spread two broad shoulders, each decorated with a butter bar. Joe later realized that he found the face of Lt. Greg Dinwiddie “beautiful” because it was fresh, eager, and unmarked by war. Dark hazel eyes gazed out from other neatly combed ash blond hair.

“Sir, General Gallagher sir, I'm your new aide sir,” he said, as he held his salute longer than needed.

“At ease,” Joe said, suppressing a grin and a feeling of relief—guy, not a gal. His former aide had innocently sowed problems between him and his wife and though Ceile spoke kindly of her, as if in apology, both were glad she was gone; Randolph, he learned. “Name?”

“Lieutenant, well you uh know that sir—Gregory---Greg Dinwiddie, sir.”

“Glad to meet you, Lieutenant Dinwiddie,” Joe said. “Well—” He paused, not sure what to tell the kid as he barely had started himself and as was his habit, did as much for himself as he could. He scanned his documents and thrust several at him. “First thing you can do is to type up these lists. If you can't read my handwriting, be sure to ask. I need them by today.”

“Yes sir, of course, sir!” He saluted again, and when Joe looked surprised, looked abashed, lowered his arm and left...in a moment, tapped on Joe's door. “Uh, sir, there's no typewriter...”

“My God, of course not. Sorry, Lieutenant—”

“No reason to be sorry sir, if you can uh, tell me, where I can find one—”

“Frankly, Lieutenant, I can't. But you can. Just start asking questions...of anybody. Wait, call down to reception, there's a bright young woman down there—no, wait—” Joe paused, feeling a bit bamboozled, missing the plainer duty of flying planes, flying cargo, landing, going up again... He suddenly blinked and swayed a bit.

“Are you well sir?”

“Yes—I mean, no. I’m hungry, and I’ve been ordered to put on a few pounds. Forget the typewriter at the moment and get me a coffee and a sandwich from the canteen. Get yourself a sandwich if you’re hungry and then look around for a typewriter and typewriter stuff—paper, carbon paper, you know...”

“Yes sir!” Dinwiddie said this with such enthusiasm that Joe was embarrassed—and for the first time in a while wished like hell that Sandy were in the outer office, mediocre typing skills and all. By 1945, Sandy had long been a skilled operator, asking questions, finding, getting, making do. He had a brain and used it well; and they had come to work together like a flint striking iron. But Sandy had more in him than being an aide the rest of his life, which he might have done if Joe had requested it. He told himself again, get in touch with Sandy. Nothing to it. One friend to another...

But the new kid was worth his salt; he came back with the comestibles and had the wit to ask at the canteen if they knew how the general took his coffee and so he properly mellowed it with milk and a spoon of sugar. He said, “I found a typewriter! It’s being oiled and brought up.” He laid down the food with such a flourish that Joe chuckled. Dinwiddie looked at him with concern...and Joe suddenly recalled Sandy’s face when acutely embarrassed... “Look, Lieutenant—if I may—I have to tell you to calm down. I’ve sat at this desk all of two days, and I’m surprised I got an aide so quickly, considering the lack of personnel we have now. Not quite ready for you yet—but I will be, and soon. When the typewriter arrives, I’ll have more work for you.”

“Yes sir.” He was a fast learner, already he looked more in control—but a grin lurked at his mouth. “Thank you sir—and may I say sir—it’s an honor working for you! I mean—you’re legendary! You—and your aide, or whatever—Kaminski—“

“Komansky. Legends, eh? Well, I’ll have to think about that...where’d you hear ‘legendary?’”

“That newsreel of you, and your men and your wife—there in Normandy.”

“Good lord, haven’t they buried that yet in some vault?”

“I saw it sir, just about two years ago. Made me want to join the Army sir, or the Air Force, and I did, right out of college—my parents demanded I do that before I joined, but they kept saying, ‘there’s no war.’ I couldn’t believe it when told I was going to be your aide but that might be because I can type 40 words a minute!”

Joe smiled at this, but a little appalled...not at him or his motivations, but something else... He nodded and joked a bit and sent the eager young man on his eager way. He lighted a cigarette and got up and stood by the window...and smiled again at the lieutenant’s enthusiasms, and then grinned wryly at himself. Legendary – once he would have loved that word attached to his name, even remotely. And it could be argued he deserved the description. What had he done in the war? Attained rank at age of 33—not unusual in wartime, but still damned young to get eagles pinned on his shoulders. Shot down three times. On foot in Germany not once, but twice. Helped lead shuttle missions to North Africa and Russia. Came back successfully through the Underground. Led successful missions against Hagensburg, Wiesbaden, Wesselhaven, Danzig, Berlin...honored by the Russians, no mean feat. Was near the beaches at Normandy on that day of days...Went to Sweden, Ukraine, Italy, the Azores...

But hell, legendary was just a word. He would have wrapped himself in its abstract dimensions long ago...war, brute violence, meeting guys whose souls were lost long before their bodies were, a loss of a brother... personal sadness made the label of legendary laughable—a bit. Legends are important, to define ideals; when ideals could not be grasped, even reaching for them was something.

Dinwiddie, whose eager enthusiasm had not been made cynical by basic training or OCS, calmed down quickly. He proved himself at the typewriter, and hardly made an error. He quickly memorized names, including Joe's immediate superiors, read a great deal and within days was conversing learnedly about NATO. He was also good at figures, though always checking himself with an adding machine. Joe complimented him on his interest in his work, and the young man beamed. "Guess who talked to my fraternity at Columbia!—no other than Ike himself! I liked what he said about we need to work at 'waging peace'" —the phrase that would eventually adorn the general's autobiography of his presidential years.

One afternoon, as they were engaged in reviewing and marking expenditure sheets—getting a standardized system of communication among the NATO nations was proving expensive but needed, as Joe was quick to receive reports about communication foul ups—Greg twiddled a pencil while gazing out the sole window, and then nodded and smiled apologetically to Joe's verbal nudge: "We have a free weekend if we can get these complete, Lieutenant."

"Yes sir." He got to work.

"What were you thinking about?" Joe asked after a few moments, wondering if he had met a girl, or was homesick.

"About heroism sir."

Joe enjoyed taking a break from numbers—recalling how Harvey had largely handled that aspect of command, and how he had relied on him for that; many times he had simply initialed what Harvey gave him, and thanked the stars for such a good adjutant. "Odd subject to bring up over arithmetic, though the bean counters in any system get my admiration for being the ones to count beans and like it."

"Would you consider bean counters heroic sir?"

"That's an interesting question," Joe confessed.

"You don't have to answer it sir, I guess it sounds pretty silly—but my honors thesis at Columbia was about heroism—and I ended up being more confused than knowledgeable about the thing. When I was assigned your aide sir I got as many stories about you as I could sir, and well—if you're not a hero, sir, I don't know whom to call a hero."

"Well...in answer to your question...I would consider bean counters heroic...well, how would you define heroism, Lieutenant? Sounds like you've given it some thought."

"Well sir, doing your work and being faithful at it—deserved commendation, but heroic, no, not exactly. There's something more to heroism, but it seems like it could be many things."

They completed their work for the day; the following Monday afternoon Joe cleared his desk and his agenda and invited Lt. Dinwiddie in at 4:45. The young man came in immediately, a slightly alarmed look on his face. "Everything okay sir?"

“If you want to talk about heroism, now is not the time...but let’s make some time.”

“Thank you, sir! That would be great.”

Joe asked, “It’s a subject worth inquiring into...but why?”

“I’d like to write a book about it. As I said, sir, my honors thesis was about heroism. My professor said it was pretty pedestrian but he liked about two pages—because at the end when I was grappling with the term, and I wrote ‘It seems at times that heroism comes about by means of luck, both good and bad.’”

Joe chuckled with agreement. He then checked his calendar and put aside the lunch hour on the following Wednesday. It turned into four hours and could have gone on for many more as Joe’s memories were stirred up, called out, provoked.

During those four hours they wandered down the hallways of the word, the concept, its abstractions, its personifications, its criteria, its frequently dangerous qualities...and its maddeningly mercurial qualities which Joe saw many times.

When Dinwiddie asked Joe about what was the most heroic feat he had ever witnessed, Joe demurred. “Heroism comes in so many stripes, I can’t nominate the greatest.”

“What about when Sgt. Komin---Komansky landed your plane?—yes sir, I heard about that.”

When Joe looked quizzical, Dinwiddie went back into his notes. “You said sir that one way of defining heroism is when you put yourself behind the needs of others. That is, you come last. One man saving the lives of nine others, sir, that would make him or the act heroic.”

“Well, yes,” Joe agreed. “But Sandy was not proud of it.”

“Not proud--?”

“Oh, he was happy—relieved--the affair turned out so well. But he could not be proud of what he had done. I later learned from the doc—Doc Kaiser, our chief surgeon at the 918<sup>th</sup>—that he said to him, to Kaiser—I stress ‘he said’---he might have abandoned us except he had seen what happened to guys trying to get away from a plane with no one at the controls. I believe he was scared of jumping like that. But I don’t believe that fear alone kept him from doing so. His conscience over the nine lives he left behind would have destroyed him more completely than any propeller. And he knew it at the time. And I told him so. But I practically had to nail his feet to the tarmac to get that Silver Star on his chest.”

Dinwiddie wrote notes. He asked, “Do you have any other stories sir about, well, mixed motives?”

“Well one story...in a badly damaged plane I was struggling to get back to England. A Luftwaffe pilot was signaling me to land...or I suppose I would ‘get it.’ I shook my head and kept on. And that that man did...rather than shooting me down, he escorted me, my plane, and my crew to safety. Maybe not mixed motives... but without permission he changed his mission from destroy to save. I’ve often wondered if he had to face some pretty vicious music when he made it back to his own home field.”

Dinwiddie wrote this down and without asking, Joe provided a perfect example of mixed motives. “No names. No other data. But there were two fighter pilots who saved my skin. One just wanted to help—the other one wanted to kill me, and I mean that literally...yet they were both responding immediately, and without forethought to a situation in which I was in grave danger.” Joe spoke quickly, describing the first as a kid who wanted a kill on his record, but ended up “saving my life—I had to jump for it over occupied territory--and he had the grit to land and get me out of there. Helluva stunt, and he saved my life. But that act made him hungry for more and he died trying to get more....The other story was even stranger. That guy, a fighter pilot, wanted to kill me. Held me responsible for a friend’s death. Got on my tail when I was on mission control, and had limited ammo. But every time a bandit—a German fighter—got near me, he struck him out. Four times he did that. Saved my skin—but he wanted me dead. Would you call that a hero? Or a goddamned mixed up idiot? I didn’t dare nominate him for a posthumous medal despite saving my life because it would have exposed his record and it was a bad one. But he was an ace—but he got that way by putting himself first...”

“Or an ass,” Dinwiddie said with a slight smile.

“Yep, an ass.” Joe leaned back in his chair with his bit of brandy he had poured for them both an hour earlier. He knew that he had some deadlines to meet, but hell, this was important talk and he could hit those deadlines in the morning with the lieutenant who was proving very helpful. But talk that was making him struggle with the parade of fools, idiots, berserkers, and yes, a few heroes—real ones. Dinwiddie finally asked, “Did you ever meet a man who was completely heroic? No motives, anything?”

“You’re going to think I’m prejudiced Lieutenant, but my brother’s one.”

“General Preston Gallagher,” Dinwiddie said. Joe, ignoring the usual pangs of worry, related how he had “visited” his brother in the midst of Rommel breaking out of Kasserine Pass in 1943 when he followed the survivors of a shuttle mission to a desert airstrip—and had to fight their way in. There he had learned how his brother, at the place called Magadar, held off the Wermacht for a week, allowing the backwash of some smashed columns and brigades to make it to safety. His brother’s first task was to get his army out safely—and that meant refusing his brother fuel to fly his planes out. He was going to do this out of duty to his men, even though knowing “he would get his ass blistered for stopping the shuttle mission.” To Dinwiddie’s question, “What happened?” Joe said proudly, “Pres had the courage of his convictions. He also had the courage to change his convictions. He decided not to remove his army but to interdict with me and my planes to crush an oncoming column, and in so doing, helped protect the eastern flank of the Allies.”

“Did he get a medal sir?”

“No, but I damned near did! We left and went on to complete our shuttle mission but with only one third of the planes, and our fighter escort loused up; we killed some of our own people, my bomb bay didn’t toggle right, and I ended up having to land in England with a belly full of bombs and let me tell you I was terrified. And then Tr---“ He didn’t finish the name. “Well, the leader of the fighters was out to deck me for killing one of his men. And then I was hauled in before a bunch of generals and a Pulitzer

prize-winning journalist and they told me I was a hero!—like shit. But I used it to get some good work done.” He then grinned. “Well, Lieutenant, anything clearing up or are you feeling more confused?”

The next question was hard and Dinwiddie knew it. “What would you consider your most heroic act, General? During the war?”

Joe knew his story. “Have you heard of General Frank Savage?” Greg nodded but admitted he didn’t know that much about him either. Joe related Savage’s history, touching on how the famous general who planted his foot into the fouled up ass of the 918<sup>th</sup> had pretty well got him over his “jitters” with embarrassment bordering on shame. When the man and his plane were shot down, he, Joe, now in command, refused to alter the mission. “I shouted to my men ‘tighten up, you’re flying all over the sky!’—and we completed our mission by making it home.”

Dinwiddie asked, “How and why do you consider that heroic? Weren’t you doing your duty?”

“Yes, but...I wanted to break formation. Our leader had been killed. Even worse, I was responsible for letting the straggler in—a pirate ship. I was sick to my stomach—and may I say, horrified—and embarrassed. But I had to put others before me, before him—FDR, and the American taxpayer. They were paying for that mission, and we had to complete it by flying home, getting planes and home safe so they could fight again.”

“Wow...sir.”

“General Savage would probably think the same way. But, would you consider keeping on flying to give the taxpayers their due ‘heroic’?”

“I guess I would sir...based on your definition sir, and may I say sir...I think your definition has real value.” After a moment, Dinwiddie asked, “Did you model yourself on him, sir, I mean, General Savage?”

“No.” Dinwiddie saw General Gallagher’s face change from its usual pleasant visage into something troubled but set, firm. “I admired him. Didn’t want to be like him—though I was acting like him at the time he went down. Thinking about taxpayers and money was right, but I prefer to put my men first.”

“Well, you seemed to sir, when you demanded they tighten up.”

Joe changed the topic. “You know, heroism isn’t confined to pilots. You need to talk with my wife—she was a flight nurse and I’m telling you, those women trumped pilots any day of the week.”

“Thank you sir--! I would like to.”

By the next week, Joe and Ceile had arranged for the lieutenant to join them at dinner at the Crown and Dragon. The dark old pub would conceal the fact they were entertaining a junior officer. Ceile was happy to talk with the utterly respectful lieutenant. She appreciated his interest as a way to get a friendly ear listening about flight nurses, who still had to deal with some questionable incidents that certain senators and generals kept lively and unforgotten. She talked fluently, but named no names, or specified places and before he began asking questions, assured he would keep her stories in his confidence. The next

day, back at work, Lt. Dinwiddie was his usual friendly self but completely respectful of Joe, despite their pleasant evening with the wife the night before. Before they left for their respective lodgings that evening, he bought a small bunch of flowers for Major O'Briean, and Joe carried them home. With the flowers he added, "Gee sir, what great stories your wife told us last night! I hope...you don't mind that I am thinking now of writing a book about flight nurses..."

"How many books are you planning to write?" Joe asked, with a grin, and his blessing.

That was the last time he grinned for several days.

### **Preston Gallagher: In Silence and in Solitude – Siberia**

Vorkash. A sub-polar town, built by stalwart young Communists in the twenties. In the summer, the milky light of endless days illuminated the surprisingly tidy large village, which was a kind of company town for the mighty prison, ten miles further north.

Pres, face stiffened into a mask, his scalp prickling from the cold and the barbarous shaving it had received before they left Vologda en route to Vorkash, climbed off the transport where the intense crowding created the only warmth. He left more than his hair behind; he felt he left himself—whoever Pres Gallagher used to be—behind, somewhere, in a declivity in Poland, heading supposedly for a debris field of a crashed B-17 supposedly holding the Amber Room... then in a filthy crowded prison...once a death camp, now converted for other purposes.

Then came three months of hell. More than hell. Worse than hell.

The last thing from his old life he remembered was David McGraw, shot, sliding into his own blood, cursing, and hanging onto him as he struggled into the snow to escape. “Damn you, damn everybody,” McGraw was screaming, and it took Pres some time to realize that McGraw, without any hope left in the world was taking his one last shred of pleasure in making sure that he, Pres, was not going to get away, and was going to face a full symphony of music—played by balalaikas. They both tumbled into a hole choked with snow...and Pres held onto the man as they seemed to slide further and further down. McGraw, cursing, had clung to him, and then the hands loosened and the man fell away accompanied by rivers of snow. Pres was grabbed up and away to some oily vehicle. As they bumped away, he told himself that he was alive. But soon wondered if McGraw had been the fortunate one.

He was soon imprisoned in what he understood was a former Nazi concentration camp that had been converted into a death camp in the last months of the Reich.

He was thrown among prisoners, old and young, healthy and dying, all of whom the USSR had rounded up and then had seemed to forget about them as they festered in the filthy barracks, surviving on coffee and soup, doled out when somebody decided that the prisoners might be hungry. The prisoners almost seemed to be caught at random or by whim; some were German, many were Russians, with a sprinkling of Poles, Czechs, and other Slavs. There were Russian officers imprisoned and tortured; their crime was to have surrendered to the Nazis years earlier. More than once a guard suddenly became a prisoner! Some prisoners had been there for over three years, waiting for something to be done with them.

They were clothed with the remains of the dead, and Pres felt lucky to obtain a shirt, which he laundered in the troughs provided for them. The clothes he was arrested in had been taken from him, searched, and to his surprise, got them back, but that created another issue: other prisoners trying to steal his filthy twill trench coat. When his face didn't tell a potential thief to go to hell, his fists did.

Of course, Pres sought a way out. He would not be human if he did not. An old hand at trouble, Pres waited, getting a sense of the lay of the land, a homely expression to apply to an unfolding, unending cage of violence and despair. He had to get a message out. But then he observed a teenager speak a few words of English to the guards and was beaten for it. If a few words of English, not even stated angrily brought on a beating, what would a request to contact the US State Department bring?

And besides...when he took on this work he swore that he would take what came, without complaint, without question. That was the soldier in him, the one that often feared would become lost as his strength ebbed in peacetime and fucked up politics. He could take this. Yes, he could take this, whatever

came his way. Betty's scolding of him, her reminders of what he had been... "I didn't sign up for this," she finally told him once, while he was holding his head, aching from too much gin.

He and others were finally put on trial. At least he was hauled before a bunch of heads bent over a table. Russian flew. He was released. But he knew that "released" meant only release to prison. The unreleased were herded away and shot. Pres wondered if they were the lucky ones. He received twenty five years in Vorkash, a sub-polar gateway to coal mining.

And all through this was a dull curiosity: nobody had asked what the hell he, an American, was doing in Poland. Without identification. Nobody asked him for a story. No parading in front of cameras; no accusations of spying. No privileges in order to perhaps curry favor with someone. He was just one of the prisoners...which was a relief in certain ways. Even a kind of a thrill. Explain that Gallagher, he thought. He would have to.

Came a day he was loaded onto a train with hundreds of others.

At Vologda he surrendered himself to the fates because he was only moving further and further into the Soviet Union...to Siberia. By now he could numbly pick out enough to Russian to know that the prisoners were being told to be quiet, stand still, await for orders. Wait. Wait, and wait some more. Wait in the frigid wind, wait with an empty belly, wait to use the latrine, wait for the moment of possible sleep...wait without hope. Wait until somebody told you to stand up and get moving. Moved into transports they went further north, to the Vorkash complex: twenty miles away from the town were forty coal pits, mined by prison labor.

As they marched into the barracks complex, to black huts that squatted like turds on the snow, the October day was gray and wet. Pres, along with seventy others, were herded into a building and looked for his bunk, a three-foot wide shelf of wood, innocent of any sheets or blankets. His trench coat became his mattress. The first night there, he dreamed of Dante's vision of inferno, which was also cold. What were the words when he crossed into..."Abandon hope, all who enter here."

Pres had not cried in nearly ten years, deeming it a waste of time and salt. What had made him cry was a letter from Max, telling him about Jeff, dead at Clark field. But he cried that night in Siberia, without making a sound, and he felt the tears turning into ice on his cheeks.

That would be the last time he would cry for over twenty years for both good and bad reasons.

Next day, he and two hundred other men were marched two miles to Mine #3, down a ten-foot corridor cut through heavy trees, with a guard tower every one thousand yards. Then the work began: mining coal, with quotas to meet. They worked for nine hours at a time and then marched three miles back.

Guard dogs kept them in line, though by November, only a fool would escape; it would be stepping into death, a deadly twin set of dark and cold. After a while, Pres knew that the word "cold" was too weak, too short, too polite...

The bread was tough and tasteless; at least it was only 400 grams that lasted the day, with some held over for bargaining. They had a bowl of some gray gritty substance in the morning, and some soup, and more of the same twelve hours later. The cigarettes became bearable over time as Pres became accustomed to the coarse stuff called korizki, which was doled out with a sheet of newspaper. Cleaning up, vital to health, was at a bucket until it really got cold, then they had to scrub themselves with snow. Many of the men who had been "released" to imprisonment caught up with those released to death.

Each day two or men died, and Pres learned that one way to get a look at the outside of the camp was to volunteer for a burial party. He didn't volunteer too much, knowing that the guards were eyeing you to see if you were eyeing escape routes. By the second trip, Pres knew only a fool would try. The dark, hoary, towering trees cut off any view, whether to plot escape or just to see something different.

He avoided thinking about Betty...the two boys. His father. His mother. His career.

But he thought about Joe. A lot. Not in hatred, nor in love. Not in jealousy, or despair. His brother's face, which he limned in his memory, assumed immense proportions: not in size, but in importance.

*Joe had never been captured and enslaved by the Soviets!*

But he, Pres, had, and moreover, intended to survive. He'd show that Joe, that glamor boy high flying son of a bitch...and his wife...and his parents...

The barracks was roared awake; Pres rose, went outside to clean himself down with snow, received the thing that was considered breakfast, and, without hardly a thought, marched off for three miles to labor nine hours and then march back...

### Harvey: Perilous Times Shall Come - Archbury

Harvey received a phone call in the afternoon from Melva: "Get here, immediately." Harvey's already worried temperament went up a notch as he hurried to the King's Cross Station and climbed off at Archbury's high street to find the usually peaceful town turmoiling...around the council flat house where the Stallers lived. "Oh, Jesus," Harvey murmured, not being able to find his wife. He finally ducked into the Star and Bottle when a rainstorm whipped down.

He listened while the locals bought drinks and talked about something that seemed right out of the cinema: there were dead people in the council flats and nobody could quite tell what had happened or who—Melva continue absent, and his inquiries only produced shrugs and "don't know mate," until he was finally convinced that Melva was one of the dead people—he finally bolted to the flats where—thank God—he found Melva in the foyer, talking with Constable Whitcomb. He shook Harvey's hand. "Archbury changed, it's changed," he said, leaving them.

"Molly's at the constabulary for questioning," Melva said. "She walked in on the scene—"

"What happened?" Harvey demanded.

"Mrs. Staller killed her husband with a knife—I told Molly that we would take Jackie home."

Jackie, by turns anxious and happy like any three year old, went home with them. Melva played with him while Harvey warmed up soup and scrambled three eggs.

At six the next morning, a haggard Molly came knocking, after being dropped off by Constable Whitcomb. Melva hotted the pot and served Molly tea and toast. Harvey, making sure Jackie was sound asleep, came down and heard...that Mrs. Staller had killed Mr. Staller—with a knife. When Molly opened the door, the "incident" had happened all of ten minutes earlier...and her mum was seated on a kitchen chair, just staring at the dull wallpaper. "Mum admitted to it. She's been charged and she talked with a solicitor. I was told that the case was more'n likely goin' to the Crown. Colonel Stovall—"

"No, I can't defend your mother but I am ready to help you in any way I can."

"Thanks," she whispered.

"One way is to ask some questions...did you ever suspect your mother could do such a thing?"

"No, but I wanted her to more'n once. Coulda done it m'self with half a chance—"

"Did your mother ever speak of killing him?"

"When she was hurt and cryin'. Saw her fondle the knife more'n once. But I never saw her lift a hand against him—saw him do it more than once."

"Did you tell this to the Constable?"

"I'm no idiot," she said.

Tea became brandy and Molly was bundled off to her bedroom, now in the attic, after first taking a warm bath and then hot milk and more brandy—and a mild sedative. “As the Cockneys say, ‘coo,’” Melva said. “I know that the Stallers— Mr. Staller—claimed that Molly was an unfit mother—but to what end? To get custody of the child?—he hated Jackie and every pence it took to feed him.”

Harvey and Melva assisted with the affair as they could, and Molly similarly soldiered on as their housekeeper, and she was helpful to Roxanne who finally packed up and moved back with her parents, in Norwich. Jackie cried when Mary Diane was taken away.

Harvey felt as though where he walked, where he went, there seemed to trail violence and mystery. Clare Schmitz was the first. The poor young woman had died bringing unknown but critical information to him at Mara’s recommendation. David McGraw disappeared though he didn’t feel responsible for that. Then Alyce Siddons, and Bea Wales. He felt at times poised on or trapped in a triangle or perhaps a quadrangle, the points of which were dark. But it all started with Clare Schmitz and Richard Stolfuz...nobody ever followed up on his prior connections with the Madame Stolfuz.

He had assumed that the incident had been thrust into the high weeds. For a good reason. Suddenly, Harvey was sick of weeds—which was the first real moment that told him it was time to leave the service. A moment later, he backed away from the idea. It was good living in England, with Melva There was Molly, in the midst of her family tragedy. But goddam, he was caught in mysteries and—cover ups.

It was time to start getting some answers. A lot of them.

Mrs. Staller was bound over for trial. Molly visited her mother when she could and one evening came home after some whiskies. “I don’t know how she’ll make it through,” she sobbed into Melva’s lap. “She won’t say a word, not a word to help herself. Why she killed ‘im other than she hated him.”

Harvey, in his office one gray October morning, looked up at a knock: Erika Bridgestone.

She had an advertisement in her hand. It was torn from the bottom of an ugly little magazine. There was a portion of an image still visible, and Harvey thought he saw a woman’s gartered inner thigh. He read the advertisement: “Too many children at home? Call 44-3838 for family counseling.”

“Yes?” he said.

“I had an acquaintance call the number. Nice friendly chap on the other end, encouraging the family member to come in and get some counselling. While not exactly being told all the facts, he got the idea that this was some kind of black market ring, peddling children.”

“Buying children?”

“When he made a second visit, I made a call to this man to meet me in the lobby. My acquaintance searched as he could and found a list of names which he partly copied.”

“Yes?”

“Mr. Staller’s name was there. He might have been trying to sell Jackie Staller. A good motive for Mrs. Staller, right?” She lighted a cigarette and leaned back with a smile—though Harvey detected her anxiety as she clicked her thumbnail on the nail of her little finger.

“Yes, a possible motive. So why are you speaking of this to me?”

“I just want some justice for that wretched woman. If it’s true.”

“Do you also want for me to feel grateful?” Harvey asked.

“As in quid pro quo? Sure. And if you know anything about David McGraw—but you don’t.”

“Miss Bridgestone, you are the one who knows about David McGraw. Did he kill Clare Schmitz?”

“Yes.” Her eyes were hard and steady. “But I say that by deduction based on Bea Wales’ notes and some letters. McGraw was in Nuremberg. That fraulein was going to pass a secret about Nazi loot. McGraw went to her apartment. He killed the man—wounded her—and somehow she got it to you anyway—but why you?”

“Thank you Miss Bridgestone,” Harvey said in answer. “Please tell your story to Mrs. Staller’s solicitor.”

“For what?”

“Justice. And that’s better than any reward, whether money or digging out some secret. And I will tell you, I don’t know why she gave me the papers. I handed them over to the higher ups. Period.”

She smashed her stub in the ashtray on Harvey’s desk, and nodded. From his window, he saw her depart and get into a taxi waiting for her. Harvey made a call to Whitcomb and learned later that she visited Mrs. Staller’s solicitor. He then wrote a report on his conversation with Bridgestone and sent it by courier to Dave Creighton. He left out, however, that Mara had told Clare to give the materials to him. It was too damned byzantine and might involve Mara in more trouble. He understood, in a letter of great confidence, that Mara had been quickly processed into the US—where she and Casimir Posnan, in a simple ceremony at a small countryside church, were married. They were now living on Long Island.

A pawn, he thought. Dammit, he had helped her become one, or another one, even though she was in safe circumstances. But he had to come clean about Mara and Clare, for whatever purpose.

“Peddling Children,” Melva read from the London Courant, three days later. “Erica Bridgestone, Anson News Service.” She skimmed the article while Harvey sipped on tea. “Well?” he asked.

“It’s largely general, no names, but she’s making a good case of how Beltrille Family Counseling buys and sells kids to bidders. A file of photographs reveals they specialize in brown children, whose current locations are not known. One can hope they were placed in adoptive homes, but there is always a sex market for little boys and little girls...My God. If this doesn’t convince the council people...”

The case still went to the Crown, and in the late spring Mrs. Staller was convicted of murder in the second degree. Her sentence was a short one, including time served. More than a few newspapers wished to speak with her. She spoke about her grandson's needs, and the needs of many like him.

The Archbury council took notice...and Harvey took a happy Erika Bridgestone out for a drink.

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Harvey made some quiet inquiries about David Creighton. For a long time the general seemed omnipresent; showing up, vanishing, intriguing. And now, incommunicado. Suddenly, one afternoon he appeared to Harvey...in his garden, spading up Melva's vegetable garden.

Harvey held onto his feelings of being flustered...but upon being told that he was carrying out Creighton's orders, Harvey reported on the new information about Clare Schmidt's death in Nuremberg. "I have learned why she chose me to pass on the information. And, in all respect...I want to know more about the man found dead in her apartment."

"Why?"

"Am I the only person who would like to know what the hell happened to Dave McGraw?"

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Showing his pull with Pentagon, Creighton secured reports. They met at the Langham with Merriwether. On their first day, they studied the confusing business in Clare Schmidt's death. It had transpired moments before Harvey knocked on the door. A neighbor had visited briefly to see if Clare could spare some "ersatz coffee" the German citizens drank, some five minutes before Harvey arrived. Clare Schmidt seemed calm as was the man who lived in the flat with her.

"Then I knocked a few minutes later, opened the door and found Richard Stolfuz dead," Harvey said.

"No, Richard Schultz," Creighton said, turning a page.

"No, Stolfuz," Harvey said.

"It reads Schultz here."

"The body was Richard Stolfuz," Harvey said. "Madame Stolfuz's husband--"

"It reads Schultz here," Creighton repeated.

"Uh uh," Harvey said, emphatically.

Merriwether sat forward in his chair. "I had a stenog there at Nuremberg in 1947—a Paula Milner. She had migraines—bad ones...had to be replaced by, uh, Terry. I bet like hell...Paula-- misspelled the name. Schultz, Stolfuz, Schmidt...my God, that's right, Stolfuz."

Harvey spoke with care. “I wondered why nothing seemed to come out of my connection with him and his widow—I met her when I attended the court martial of the two pilots accused of stealing family treasures, in 1944.”

“To get on the bandwagon, I wondered about the lack of follow up too for a while. God, in this business, a bad memory is bad for you...and for others.” The next day they flew to Nuremberg, out of Northolt. Though the dramatic and confusing trial of the chief Nazi ministers had been over since 1946, trials had continued of judges, doctors, and ministries.

Merriwether and Harvey reviewed police records with a translator. At their request they conducted another examination of the flat which had remained locked since that night in 1947. They interviewed a police officer who had investigated the murder. The man had died from having his throat cut. There was nothing new learned except what Merriwether recalled about Josh McGraw. The junior McGraw had been in Poland for some two years, and had learned the kind of tactics field operatives used—like taking somebody from behind with a rope or a knife. “I’m not saying Josh did it, but maybe he taught dear old dad a few things.”

More records. Clare Schmitz was confirmed as a Swiss citizen. No information about how she knew Mara, but Harvey had a sense of how knotted and complex underground connections were. It would make sense that Mara, with her connections, would carry documents—plans, information, money?

They were quartered in the residence hall Harvey had lived while serving at the trials. Without much fondness, he walked through the foyer and requested the key of the room assigned him, and the clerk, a middle aged German woman whom he recognized, also recognized him with a smile—several Americans as well as their allies had been rude with, but Harvey had always been truly courteous. She exclaimed in German, and then in English of how—right—it was for him to be here, because a piece of mail had just arrived for him, after months of delay. Harvey, when he took the envelope, knew why; the letter had not been sent through the usual APO. Somebody, somehow, hand delivered it.

Harvey thanked her, his hands cold with sudden—fear, or understanding. A brown spot on it might be blood. He keyed open his room. Bed, lamp—desk and chair. He sat down at the desk and finally opened the letter. There was no note. Only a key with a small metal tag. Words were stamped on it, and Harvey made out “Bad Zemel 79.” He knew ‘bad’ meant bath—as in public baths, common in towns with residences without modern plumbing.

He handed it over to Merriwether, who got CIC personnel to check it out. A consultation with the phone book, a 1948 edition—a mere three years after 1945, which Germans were increasingly calling ‘year zero’--when one era violently ended and another violently started—proved no listing for Bad Zemel. But Creighton’s aide would start boots on the ground work, inquiring first with the Nuremberg police if anybody recalled the place, and if it still existed, perhaps under another name.

Creighton wrangled a C-54 to take them to Giverney, in Normandy. This happened the next day. They touched down on a field bordered with weathered poppies....and a young man met them. He identified himself as Etienne Joliet, son of Madam Stolfuz. He drove them through the quaint town which had

repaired its war damage, though the years of German occupation still draped over it like a ghost. The young man pointed out the home of Manet, famous impressionist painter of the nineteenth century, who had lived there in the summers. Etienne then drove them to his mother's manse on a hillock. It seemed to overlook the town, though in a friendly fashion. Harvey recognized it; the court martial had been held in the town hall, but US personnel had visited the home where the theft had supposedly taken place.

Etienne escorted them to a door carved quaintly with stars and snakes. He opened it to reveal Madam Stolfuz. Even though Harvey had not seen her in some four years, and that had been in official capacities, he was surprised at how she had aged. Her brown hair was white, drawn back from a face which had suffered, at some time, a beating. Dressed in black with lace trim, she was the chatelaine, with a ring of keys fastened to her belt.

After the appropriate greetings, she escorted them into a sitting room, heavily paneled, with ancient windows letting in diluted Norman sunshine through diamond shaped panes. They sat down on brocade chairs and Madam Camille Stolfuz also sat down, her back as straight as a sword. A young woman sat next to her. "I will translate for Maman."

Merriwether was direct. "You have been beaten, madam, and recently. May I ask you about this?"

"The man who was seeking our treasure did so."

"Who was this man?"

"I don't know."

They produced a picture of David McGraw. She shook her head, no, not him.

Merriwether brushed off his surprise and asked, "When did this beating happen?"

"A few months ago."

"Do you know anything about your husband's connection with Adolf Schmitz?"

Her husband Richard Stolfuz, as she learned in his few hand-delivered letters to her after he fled Giverney, had been directed to Schmitz as someone who could help him hide. Schmitz was a contact for the underground. Daring work, but his position as a chemist in Farben seemed to have protected him. But Schmitz was dying with cancer and what he could do for Stolfuz was limited in late 1944. His niece, Clare, was turned to. After the Reich's collapse, Stolfuz and Clare had thrown in their lot together.

"What was this lot?"

"At first, survival in Germany. But she too was in danger by someone looking for her."

"Was this the man who beat you?"

“No, but the man seeking her was an American. Perhaps that one,” she said, pointing to the photo of David McGraw placed on the table before her.

Creighton asked, “Madame Stolfuz, can you tell me what is going on?” Her daughter translated this blunt question slowly and slowly translated her mother’s words.

“If my first husband were alive, perhaps he could tell you. He died in a hunting accident, in 1932, before he divulged any secrets about family relics that were first thought stolen by the American pilots. This man did not believe me when I told him these relics were taken to Germany years ago, by my second husband.” She fell silent and then spoke again, and her daughter translated, with a frown. “I don’t know what he was.”

Harvey said, “Do you mean, mademoiselle... ‘who he was’?”

“No. My mother said, ‘what he was.’”

“What do you mean by that?” Creighton asked.

Her daughter listened to her words, conferred with her, and finally said. “He—the man who beat my mother—didn’t seem quite...human.”

“How so?” Harvey asked.

“He seemed to look...like a cat, somehow.”

They questioned her, gently, for a while longer. Papers were signed. Then they thanked her and put up for the night in the town’s single hotel, sharing a room. “Well, Stolfuz was hiding treasure, and why it was important, we don’t know. Nor do we know who was seeking it. What did she say?”

“About the person—who didn’t seem quite... human.”

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They returned to Nuremberg to some remarkably good news: the boots on the ground investigation had turned up the location of Bad Zemel—under a collapsed building that was being dismembered for its bricks, a long process as the work crew, including women, used crowbars, shovels and wheelbarrows. The former owner of the bath was there. Harvey felt pity for them all, wondering when—and if—Germany could dig out of this pile of rubble, despite the Marshall Plan which was in strong evidence. Some money, dug out of their own pockets, plus cigarettes, spurred the former owner’s memory as to where the lockers had been. They worked as they could, found flashlights and continued digging—and in the morning, the lockers were reported found.

“Seventy nine,” Merriwether told the straw boss as they crawled into the opened up cellar area. It was pointed out with a flashlight. Merriwether struggled to insert the key. He had to force the bent door open. He poked in the beam of his GI flashlight.

“Paydirt,” he said.

The Joliet family treasure was soon laid out on the desk in Merriwether's office. Enclosed in velvet bags, the items were in good condition, but easily occupied the desktop. They inventoried three silver forks, a silver serving spoon with a jewel in the handle, a small medieval era painting of the Madonna in a gilt frame; five goblets in varying conditions of wear; four fragments of jewelry.

Also, three pieces of amber. One was set in a ring. One was a hefty chunk with a perfectly preserved small snake within it. And one was a clear piece of amber, shaped like a tear.

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Harvey now kept his mouth shut again: about Madame Stolfuz's description of the man who beat her. And wondered if he should keep it shut. He also recalled another time the phrase or feeling of "not quite human" had occurred: Siddons, the pandering husband of that poor drunk Alyce Siddons. He first struck Harvey as looking like a thin white cat—which indicated something "not quite human." Terrick, the pilot, who said the pilot of the aircraft he had foolishly chased "didn't look quite human."

Three times and a pattern was set. Pattern for what? Harvey asked himself. And what was next?

And after that, who had learned about the location of the pieces and notified him by a letter?

The treasure was returned remarkably quickly. Harvey soon received a letter from Madame Stolfuz. The letter was a brief, polite, a little apologetic—and her husband's body had finally been released by the Nuremberg police and returned to Giverney.

She also asked if she could send him a relic of the family treasure as a keepsake of her gratitude?

Harvey wrote to her with Creighton's full knowledge and understanding—almost. He accepted the gift of the amber, but intended to give it to the Viscountess. By some chance...maybe it belonged to the Turkish necklace. The Viscountess, when he called to inquire, was gone...on a holiday with her son, and Harvey understood, somehow.

Harvey, back in England, happily back in an occupied bed, took up regular work and hammered on getting a new trial for Mahoney, then received a communication which threw his life out of alignment. He wondered why he received this new order at such a time. Possibly to get him the hell out of the way while issues he had innocently become involved in ramped up.

### Pres: In Silence and Solitude – Siberia

Pres, like many others, worked every day of the week except when it came into somebody's head to give the prisoners a day off. After a ten hour stint, framed by the three mile walk back and forth, a cup of coffee in a tin mug, a bowl of soup and a ten-gram chunk of bread, he climbed into his bunk, ignoring the gathering around the single stove by men who had the energy to stay awake for talk and even some laughing. Lying there, in the seconds before dropping off, he pushed aside thoughts of Betty. But, oh Betty...what happened to us? Two boys and their father...

He came awake, choking from a hand on his mouth.

Bending over him was another prisoner. He did not work in the mines; rather his duties were in the buildings attached to the mines, but they weren't light ones.

The man offered him a smoke. Such overtures were usually for sexual favors, and Pres assumed the worst, backhanding the guy who clumped to the plank floor--but climbed back with fingers of his right hand to lips. His left hand held an ace of diamonds. His hand indicated he had picked it off Pres.

Pres knew what it meant. The "blatnois," professional criminals exiled to Siberia, never worked like the other "political" prisoners. Gruesomely tattooed, all below the age of thirty, the men taunted the other prisoners, drank hooch, blackmailed most out of their tobacco...and once a month played a card game. The low scorer was then detailed to murder the man the ace of diamonds had been placed on. No rhyme or reason; the person died for just being there and being asleep. Fearful of the blatnois boys, if anybody witnessed the act, kept their mouths shut.

And then...the head of the victim was chopped off, and carried to the Commandant, who gleefully ordered the blatnois low-scorer to be killed for killing. Great fun.

"Get up quick," the man whispered in English. "We'll find someone dying." They found a body wasted beyond life. Pres saw him sinking into the snow three times in the march back.

The card was placed on him. They stole away, with Pres following the guy through an open door...down a flight of steps and into a room that served for laundry, medical care, quiet beatings.

"Well, fellow Yankee, talk to me now?" His was a Midwestern tone and drawl. They rolled cigarettes and the guy lighted them with something Pres had not seen in weeks: a match. "I'm from Kankakee. Name is Hobart."

Pres had to sort out the sounds first... "Kankakee?"

"Put it...here?" he said, extending his hand.

Pres took it, gingerly. "I hail from Connecticut originally. Call me Pres. What do you want?"

"A fellow American right now," he said. "Look, Pres, there."

They looked through the single small window of that room of many purposes. One of the blatnois, holding a dripping head...was plowing through the snow with his prize that would kill him.

He felt no sorrow that the man died in his place. He was out of his misery. But he could not feel even grateful to this Hobart for saving him. "What do you want?" he asked.

“We escape,” Hobart said. “Together.”

“Now?” Pres demanded.

“Not now. We plan.”

“Sure.”

“No more talk. We talk tomorrow night.”

Pres and the guy named Hobart went back to their bunks.

Hope. He had hope for the first time in months. And he wasn't sure he wanted it.

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The next day Pres marched to the mine and accomplished his ten hour shift so strongly that the guards were shrugging their shoulders. The tall American had never been a problem, but he seemed to have a new set to his shoulders.

That night, back in barracks, Pres handed over some tobacco to borrow a dull blade to shave and while he was at it, whacked at his hair that he had worn long for warmth. He wondered why he was cleaning himself up for some chimera. “Hi,” offered Hobart, coming behind him.

Pres turned, grabbed his jacket and pushed him against the wall. Hobart grinned. “Nervous, are we?”

“One goddam reason not to be?” Pres said, conversationally.

“We are from Connecticut and Kankakee. Interesting collection of sounds. Ready to talk some more?”

“Who are you?”

“A fellow American in the thirteenth year of his own 25 year sentence.”

“You've been here since--1936?”

“I've been around. Even mined diamonds in the Urals. You're the first American I've seen in six years. And you've got moxie.” When Pres stared at him, Hobart elaborated. “In 1935 I got hired to be an engineering consultant for the new Moscow subway system. Girls, my own flat, cars, lots of money. One night in 1936 I got kicked awake, led away. I guess they wanted their goodies back.”

“Is this the first time you've tried to escape?”

“Yep. So I'm counting on you.”

“You got any ideas?”

“I have the sympathy of a commissar's wife—”

“You got what?”

“The lady—and I do stress lady—requested English speakers. She wants to read some books in the language. I volunteered to read for her and said I could get another reader.”

Three evenings later, Pres was shaken awake. “The lady calls,” said Hobart. They walked to one of the three cabins, past the guards’ mess. Of course, a miserable soldier came with them. The cabin, glaciated over with snow and ice, faced southward. Hobart knocked, and the door opened on a quiet severe face, framed with dark hair twisted into a knot. She led them into the cabin, which was palatial with smooth walls, a sanded plank floor and a ceramic stove. The soldier stayed behind in the main room.

She led them into the bedroom, where the light was better. It had only a bed and a cupboard for furniture. A crib too—and Pres’s heart broke for his boys. A guard brought two chairs for them. Pres sat down next to the wall, and realized a map was on the wall, right at his shoulder.

Hobart introduced Pres to the lady, in Russian. Pres was able to mumble, “Ya rad vstretis’ s va vami.” The baby then squealed and peeked over its crib. She spoke with Hobart, who nodded. “She has child raising manuals from England and she wants us to read them to her.” Her dark sharp eyes looked at him. For reasons well beyond romance Pres really wanted a good haircut and a shave to appear before this thin, clenched face...which was laid over a pretty lady.

Also, there was something familiar about her. Ha.

Hobart began reading in English. She listened, asking questions in English and Russian.

Pres turned ever so slightly, put his eyes sideways on the map and let his mind operate again—sharp, tight, and photographic; Pres could memorize mathematic formula and parrot it back to his instructors, all of whom were impressed except for Major Lauritz Macmahon who told him that memorizing math did not mean he understood it. Joe could not or would not memorize things and he seemed better for it because he honestly tried to understand algebra; he had listened to a professor who said “Algebra can help you strategize.”

Pres found their camp on the map: it was handmarked. He noted the nearest town, Irktusk...and the river Lena nearby...always follow a river...it would lead to other rivers. The book was placed in his hands. He read a chapter on infant care in the first six months and kept his thoughts about his own two babies away. The chapter finished, the woman spoke in Russian to Hobart and Hobart then spoke with Pres. “She said, ‘If he talks with you escape-- Listen—to—him.’”

“She on the level?” he asked Hobart when they returned to their barracks.

“Maybe she’d like to escape herself and wants to help others do it.”

Fuck answer Pres thought. But he said, jokingly, “When are we leaving?”

“We got until next spring to plan. April of 1950. Still snowing but by May even spring comes here. “

“Six months then,” Pres said.

“Where are we going?”

“You’re letting me decide?”

“Yes....go ahead.”

“Turkey.”

“Turkey it is,” Hobart said, as though agreeing to scrambled eggs for dinner. Pres pointed out that Turkey was some three thousand miles away...did he know that? “Well, we can’t break for Vladivostock,” Hobart said. “That’s the first place they’d figure. South—hell, we got Mongolia to cross including the Gobi Desert. Too hot. North? Too cold. But yeah, why Turkey?”

“That’s as far as the map on the wall extended.”

“Fair enough.”

“All right then.” For the first time, they shook hands. “You take responsibility for me—and I for you.”

### Joe: Redeem Me from My Enemies - London

Every time Joe's bakelite phone rang on his oak desk, he had a twinge of hope that he too, like in his in-laws back in 1945, would receive news about Pres. Good or bad, something. "Gallagher," he enunciated as Lt. Dinwiddie was doing courier work this afternoon. He pushed aside documents he had been reading about NATO using atomic weaponry, though tactically, rather than strategically, and that would demand more attention to communication issues, which he was going to discuss with ...

"Joe...I'm sick..."

"Ceile? Where are you?"

Gagging, vomiting noise... "Ceile? CEILE?"

She whispered a street name, and "Bayswater...St Mary's court....herbal shop."

Joe could hear a horn honking over the still open line. His brain worked like lightning. He recognized the address; it was not too far away from HQ. He should call an ambulance. No. An ambulance would create attention; he instinctively knew something was bad, something needed to be handled with silence. Perhaps she was just sick. Dying? Oh, God. Joe snatched his hat...and walked out of his office, calmly, knowing you just don't show up at an appointment with a senior officer. He paused to scribble a note to Greg to phone General Woolrich at Northolt; there was an emergency he had to tend to.

Let'em court martial him. He rode the lift down into the garage...walked out...turned a corner, looked around, and hailed a taxi. He gave directions calmly to the driver, but urged him to hurry as perhaps a problem existed...They arrived near the court in ten minutes thank God. Telling the driver to wait, he climbed out and ran down the walkway praying to find an herbal shop. He did.

The door was open. He glanced around at the shelves, neatly lined with blue and white tin canisters decorated with Chinese scenes, and bearing names in both English and graceful Chinese characters. He went behind the counter, and saw Ceile on the floor, pale as snow, clutching the phone in her hand.

Joe shut and locked the door to the shop, and turned around the sign, "Closed for Tea." He removed the receiver from her clenched hand. It was still warm. He replaced it, and then kneeled down over his wife's face, streaked with vomit.

Her breath was shallow, raspy. Her eyes slitted open. "Joe?"

"You bet. Come on. You're going to stand. You're going to walk out with me. You're going to be fine."

"I can't, I can't..." Joe sat her up, looped her arm over his shoulders and hauled her to her feet. He fixed her against the counter.

"Now take a take a deep breath—stay here—I'll get the taxi to pull in as close as possible."

He left her clinging onto the counter. Her moans were tiny ones, weak, as though she could do no more.

Ceile rallied what strength was left in her and clung to him as he half carried her to the taxi. He then sprinted back to the shop and made a phone call: "Dr. Gagarin please—tell him that it's Gallagher." The man answered in less than a minute. "Bring her to the lorry port, the back way."

Joe wondered if his need for secrecy was going to kill his wife. He sprinted back to the taxi.

"We're getting help," Joe said to Ceile, sliding in beside her. She somehow raised her head. Her face was white. He recalled how his own father had been poisoned, four years ago; God in heaven what the hell was this all about?—all of it, more of the same—"Go!" shouted Joe when the driver lingered at a circus; he shot the taxi forward into the maelstrom. It careened, provoking a shout from a traffic officer; the driver, an old hand at such things dove into one of six avenues branching off the circle.

Ceile's breath seeped from her mouth. Joe massaged her hands, praying like a madman, calling on God for help and hoping that someone was out there, in the cosmic dust of faith in the unknown. In his exploding whirl of thoughts, he recalled how Sandy had once said he believed in God because he had to believe in something...and now was the time to believe in something, ask for help. Prayer over, he whispered, "Hang on my queen, just a bit longer..."

At Joe's directions, the driver darted behind St. George's rambling length and braked at a ramp. Gagarin was waiting. Two orderlies flew down the ramp and expertly placed her on a gurney. "What do I owe you—for the drive and for silence?"

"Silence is for free," the man said, with a calming wink. "Best wishes to the lady." He received a five pound note from Joe and tipped his cap and drove away...and Joe tipped his face up at the red brick battlements of the hospital, found his way in, took the elevator to the fourth floor, seeking Gagarin's office.

He came to in a chair. "Bit of a faint, that," said a nursing matron to him, her coif looking like angel wings. "No more than a minute." Joe stirred, shocked that he passed out, though he had done so before, and was grounded for two weeks back in 1943. Kurt Brown flew in his place; where was Brown now and had he found some peace...? Joe drew in his thoughts like a fishing net. "May I see my wife?"

"Sir, you must identify yourself first," she began and then Gagarin was at her elbow. "Come with me, and thank you sister," he said. Joe slowly stood up, thanked her and walked off with the Russian doctor. He took Joe to his office, poured him a strong cup of tea, and told him to stay there. Wait. Wait. Joe smoked half a pack of cigarettes while he waited. Steps fanned out down the hallway past Gagarin's door, he tensed, hoping for news, dreading officials, police, coming to question. The shop's owner, wherever he was, surely had something to say about the affair. What affair, and what the fuck was Ceile doing in a Chinese herbal shop in Bayswater?

The door finally opened. "It is always good to see you General," said Gagarin, coming and removing his coat. "But why must we always be in an emergency?"

"Is she all right?"

“She will be. How close—how close though!—fortunately she had already thrown up a great deal of the stuff she had taken. Have you contacted the authorities about this?”

“No.” He had been mulling that course of action in the last endless hour.

He put a calming arm on Joe’s shoulder before sitting down. He pulled a bottle from his desk and poured two libations of medova. “Gift from a certain Russian general,” he said and they raised their glasses to each other before drinking. Joe took his in one swallow, knowing he needed it. He did. “Was she attempting, do you believe, a miscarriage?” Gagarin said.

“WHAT?”

Gagarin watched as Joe put his head in his hands, clutched his graying hair and spoke. “I didn’t know she was pregnant—how old, how long?”

“The fetus was only about a month old. She may not have known...”

“That doesn’t make—we’ve been trying—so hard and for her...does she know?”

“I told the sisters to say nothing unless asked—by her.”

Joe nodded. “Thank you.”

“Being that I helped your father—and took care of your wife after her first miscarriage—we are friends and so I ask this as a friend: did she take herbals?”

“Not that I know of, but I found her in an herbal shop in Bayswater—“

“Did you know what she had taken?”

“I’ve no idea...there were canisters to the ceiling...”

“Did you speak with the owner—“

“Nobody was there.”

“General, do I have your permission to investigate this—unofficially of course--?”

“I’ll go with you—“

“No, as a doctor I might have more influence with the proprietor. And this is unofficial.”

Joe nodded. Gagarin made some phone calls, and then put on his tweed coat. “Matron Eugenie Tywater is to report to you any changes in your wife’s condition.” Before he left, he said, “There are crackers in my desk and make yourself a cup of tea.” For something to do, Joe did so. He finally called his aide, who nearly exploded with relief. “General, Colonel Drew at Northolt needs to talk with you, and I didn’t know where you were—“

“His phone number please,” Gallagher said. He called, apologized, and learned, via a scrambled transmission that two USA pilots had reported UFO sightings in the last twelve hours. Gallagher requested the pilots be isolated, full reports taken. He would be there tomorrow at 1500 to take their reports and additional interviews. Joe ordered their records be pulled and available. He didn’t put much stock in reports, which seem to occur too often—odd clouds, sun-dogs, other aircraft were being identified as such but they had to be checked out. He hung up. Now what? Fortunately, Gagarin returned within the half hour, but with bad news about the proprietor. He had found the man, a Chinese gentleman in his fifties, dead in the flat above the shop, but there appeared to be no struggle, and his ending seemed peaceful—but he called Scotland Yard, and then did not give his name.

“An autopsy will be done. Rest assured, I left you and your wife’s name out of it.”

“Thank you,” Joe whispered. “Did you learn what my wife might have taken?”

“I found a disturbed canister of blue cohosh, which I suspected.”

“What is it for?”

“Many purposes. A relaxant, but too much can kill. Native Americans also used it as an abortifacient.”

“I see.”

Later that night, Joe beheld Ceile gurneyed in and neatly transferred to the white iron bed. The bags of fluid she was attached to were carefully hung and adjusted; the nurse tidied her pillow and pulled the blanket up over her shoulders. She looked like hell—pale as the walls—and she also looked wonderful. Gagarin came in and told Joe what to do; if she asked for water, no more than a teaspoon. If she woke up and wished to talk...it was up to him. Joe loosened his tie and his belt; took off his shoes and lay down on the cot, recalling how he stayed with his father after he had been poisoned.

There were too many questions to get them into order. He passed out.

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“Danzo, have you had breakfast?” These were her first words after she swallowed several bites of oatmeal and soft boiled eggs administered by a nurse.

“Not yet,” Joe said, holding his temper. He woke up angry, at several things. “Please, finish your own.”

All she wanted to do is sleep but the nurse in her told her she needed sustenance and firmly got the rest of the oatmeal and soft boiled eggs into her stomach. She then had to sleep.

Joe had already assured his wife that he had called the USAFE hospital with the report she was ill and could not report for her shift. “Oh yes,” she said. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” He didn’t know what else to say. He had a dreadful flashing image of grabbing her by her hair, the hair he loved so much—and--

“What happened?” Joe finally asked.

“What do you mean?”

There was a knock on the door, and it was pushed open: Dr. Gagarin. “Madam,” he said beautifully, bowing slightly. “I am glad you are doing so well.”

“Thank you.”

Gagarin then murmured kindly about the morning, her husband, and herself, checked her pulse, her eyes, her heart, and asked if she felt pain anywhere. Everywhere, but not bad. But she felt like ten miles of bad road. “Normal,” he said.

Joe then asked if she felt like talking. Yes, even with Gagarin in the room.

“Of course. Attempted murder needs to be inquired into.”

“Murder?” Joe asked, carefully.

“There may be a successful one if I ever see her again,” Ceile muttered. She then clenched her lips as a wave of nausea went over her. Gagarin hurried away and hurried back with a shot to settle her stomach. Ceile let the stuff relax her before talking. “Danzo, I am so sorry.”

“Don’t be,” he told her, brusquely, his mind darting in ten different directions. “But you were literally in the weeds this time, you know? You were poisoned by something called cohosh, right, Doctor? Ceile, my queen...what were you doing there at the herbal shop? And who is this ‘her’?”

“I was trying to get pregnant,” she said, so wistfully and calmly that Joe exhaled, mentally. She didn’t know. She would never know about the fetus she didn’t know she was carrying.

Ceile saw Gagarin making sense of her phrase. “Correction, I am trying to get pregnant.” She then drilled them both with her eyes. “Will the police get involved in this?”

“Yes,” said the doctor.

“Our people Danzo?”

“Of course. But we’ve taken some steps to limit the, uh, fall-out.”

“I wiped away fingerprints on the canister and the phone...the door knob—hoped I got all of them,” said Gagarin. He never told them about the amount of explanation he had to give to the police when they arrived...and they believed his story that as a toxicologist, he had visited the shop for professional purposes and found the owner dead.

She commenced. She had taken over a shift for an ill nurse, and finished duty at 1100 hours. Tired, but enjoying the freedom of being awake and off at mid-day, she did what did when she had some time

free—after changing into civilian clothes, she hopped on a bus and went sightseeing in some part of London she had never been in.

“I didn’t know you were doing that,” Joe said.

“I have little to do at home...and, uh, rather than sitting around waiting for you—and getting tense...If the time is right, I get off the bus at some point, and just walk around...I always enjoy London.” She stepped off the bus in Bayswater, and spent an hour strolling...and to get away from the sight of young and not so young mothers pushing baby prams down the pavements she ducked into a tea shop. With a tray set with a pot and a cup, and a tiny pitcher of milk, she looked around for a table and saw a woman gesturing for her to share her table. She was a friendly woman; far friendlier than a many English people who were still reserved about meeting strangers. She identified herself as Beryl Chessingham. Beryl then turned to her baby’s murmur; she had drawn up her pram between the two tables. She was so affectionate that Ceile said, “Your first?”

“My last,” she said. “But my husband and I agreed that we could adequately care for four children—food, clothing, and education.”

“Four,” Ceile said, and it seemed as if the woman caught the longing in her eyes...how many did she have, if she could be so bold to ask...? None, Ceile admitted and then told the woman how she had her husband had been trying to conceive since...1945. A miscarriage, and then....

“Oh, poor thing,” the woman sympathized, but not cloyingly. “My husband and I had similar problems, just before the war—and there was a miscarriage of a precious little boy. Then a friend of mine suggested I take certain herbals, and, as they say, voila—we had our lovely first child, a daughter.”

Ceile smiled, but was unimpressed. Growing up around her mother’s associates, the doctor who practiced Chinese methods as well as western methods, she learned about herbals and continued to appreciate them as she completed her nursing studies. She also had, in quest for pregnancy, read about the power of herbals—on both sides. One article extolled their power with plenty of evidence (which could be merely dreamed up, Ceile knew); but another article, which she believed more readily, admitted that herbals, while far from being proven in aiding conception, could be a psychological boost a woman needed to get pregnant. Perhaps some soothing qualities of herbals could create a more relaxed state of mind, state of body, which assisted in conception.

“Shall I take you to the shop I patronize?” Beryl Chessingham asked. “Just a hop on the underground.”

Ceile checked her watch and knew she had at least three hours before Joe arrived home, and thought about how the flat was perfectly clean, and dinner already planned. Besides, it might be interesting, as well as educational. Herbals as supplements and cures had been used for hundreds of years before the sometimes doubtful excellence of modern western medicine sent the stuff into quaint shops with quaint little keepers. “I could also recommend a most wonderful midwife,” Beryl said, and with that, Ceile admitted, she was sold. They finished their tea, walked out, and with Ceile helping transport the baby pram safely into and up out of a fairly deep underground station, they found Queen’s Lane and turned

into the curving court to find the truly quaint shop, something out of Dickens, or an Austen novel. The panes in its bow window were thick and cloudy and its floor was wooden. A bronze bell chattered when they entered. Ceile peered at the wall-high shelf full of canisters, baskets and glass bottles and her nose dealt with a thick, sickening, intoxicating fragrance of medicinal plants... "Probably a few eyes of newts and a flask of unicorn powder lurk about," Beryl joked, leaving the pram outside. "Mr. Lee? Mr. Lee?" she called. Mr. Lee never arrived, and Beryl climbed the ladder to search out the herb she had been given, once. "Aha!" she exclaimed. "He does have it!"

"Yes?" Ceile said, watching the pram. "Is that what helped you?"

She climbed down from the rolling wooden ladder, with a small scoop of bluish shreds, which she called "cohosh." She slid the shreds into an envelope. "My pleasure," she said to Ceile, laying a pound note on the counter and fastening it with a lead weight. "No more than a quarter teaspoon."

"Thank you," said Ceile, struggling against the fragrance, the close quarters, the feeling that she should not be here. They left and she enjoyed the fresh air in her nose and throat, and had to be urged to take the envelope, which she pocketed a bit pointedly. "It does help," said Beryl.

"Of course," Ceile said and in amends, invited Beryl another cup of tea at a stop at the end of the court. They chatted about odds and ends over cups of black tea and Beryl asked if were true that the cowboys and the Indians were still fighting each other..? "Only if Henry's wives are still having their heads cut off," and with smiles they gave leave of each other.

Two things sent her back to the shop. Yankee honesty made her feel guilty of just leaving money behind—and she wanted to talk with Mr. Lee about the cohosh. She was already feeling a bit sick as she entered the shop...and then grew nauseated and finally started vomiting—she staggered to the phone and then called for Joe; thank God she got him... "I assume this Beryl woman, baby and all, slipped this cohosh into my tea," she said, safe and relatively well in her hospital bed.

Gagarin agreed. "We got it out in time."

Tears suddenly came to her eyes. "Oh, Danzo, I was such an idiot!— I don't deserve sympathy—and a kick in the ass for acting so stupidly—but who'd suspect a woman with a baby--?"

"That's why she nearly succeeded," said Major Merriwether from the door.

Gagarin got up and shook his hand. "This man and I have met before, General," he said to Joe. "You weren't here at the time."

After a salute—which the rumpled general returned--Merriwether similarly acknowledged Ceile who was lying back in her pillows, exhausted. He identified himself—CIC; yes, Army; the Air Force did not have their own investigative unit yet. He said, smoothly, he would pass on Joe's regards to General Creighton—thus silently answering Joe's silent expectation of the major general's arrival.

“And sir, Major, let’s have it,” Merriwether said. Ceile related the story again, abbreviated by exhaustion, her voice trickling to the end of the tale. When she slept, the two men withdrew to a private room at the Langham and spoke...and arrived at the same fact, not idea or theory. This was surely another assassination attempt against a “member of the wedding party” at Bryncote. “You, Major Stovall, and your wife. Three trees make a row...and to that we add the fourth victim, Percy Vivyan...but who is still listed as missing.”

“They were probably successful with Percy...” Joe did not go on to say that maybe a fifth, perhaps. His brother. He had been at the wedding too.

“It sounds like an Agatha Christie novel,” Ceile said to her husband, the next day. Her voice was anything but flippant.

Joe was sitting in the hospital room’s single chair, his arms resting on Ceile’s legs as they spoke. She pressed her hand on his slightly graying temples, and wandered on to his taut neck and tight shoulders. “You could use a massage,” she said.

“The whole world could use a massage,” he said, lolling his head to look at her.

“Soon,” she promised. “When I am out of here.”

“Ceile...it’s time to go home.”

“Home? To the US?”

“That is where we belong.”

“What about your new work with NATO?—you received a note of welcome from Ike—”

“People are out to kill us. Four attempts, four failures. They are bound to be successful soon.”

Ceile shook her head. “If they really want to kill us, the Atlantic wouldn’t stop them.”

“It might slow them a bit. And I’d rather die at home. I can find good work to do for NATO in Washington—like those senators who think we ought to return to farms and raise chickens or those who think all you do is flourish the bomb. And then there’s always China,” referring to the civil war which had outlasted the Japanese invasion and growing worse. “At the office we’ve been talking about the need for some kind organization like NATO in that part of the world.”

“Funny...I’ve been called home myself.” Two weeks earlier she received a kind of feeler message from Randolph from who else...her old friend from Minnesota—would she, Major Ceile O’Brien be interested in assuming the command of the flight nurse school? “That was one of the reasons I went walking that miserable morning, wondering how we would deal with this--”

“Have you written back yet?”

“No.”

“What is your answer?”

“I never regretted getting transferred to combat but I also regretted not being able to satisfy people’s faith in me to take over the position...Joe, it seems right up our alley.”

“Texas...” Joe said. Memories blew through his mind—training, waiting—dating—roommate Chamberlain—and how he and Ceile had walked the same sidewalks, drove the same roads, but at different times, neither of them overlapping their presence except that one time, in 1947.

She leaned over his head, wrapping her arms as best she could about him. “Barbeque...Waaahd open spaces...Tacos, nopalitos...margaritas!”

“So much sun, we will pray for rain,” Joe whispered. He stood up, gently took her shoulders and kissed her, resoundingly. “You know, I’ve been wanting to fly one of those new jet jobs. Been itching to get into one. Maybe I can now.” Joe sat up, knotted his tie, seized his jacket and retrieved his cap. “Home for a shave and back to my job,” he told her.

“When do I get out of here?”

“I will ask Gagarin,” he said. Within the half hour he had found the doctor and explained that their flat was under investigation for evidence of intruders...he himself was bunking at the Langham...and he didn’t want to tell her about new trouble at their flat. Assured by Gagarin that he would insist she stay for two more days Joe suddenly turned and headed for the stairwell, and sat down on a step and wept...without making a sound. They had lost a child...again...God...But there was a child waiting for them. The son of the man who saved him as a pilot.

The next afternoon Joe was on his way to pay a quick visit to his wife, when a phone call from McNarney held him up. He covered the mouthpiece with his hand and gestured, through the open door for Greg Dinwiddie to come in. Whispering, he said, “At the commissary I ordered a milkshake for my wife—to be ready at four, and they’re going to close in a few minutes—would you pick it up and take to the hospital? She’s been craving one.”

“Yes sir,” Dinwiddie said with a salute. Joe saluted back, telephone still in hand. He turned to McNarney’s phone call, which was disclosing some data about NATO’s request for an atomic magazine.

Greg picked up the milkshake and hurried across the traffic circle to the hospital, its smoke-darkened edifice in the process of being cleaned; scaffolding covered the front and crawled up one of the battlement-like towers. He didn’t know why the general’s wife was in the hospital; it had been reported that she had been suddenly taken sick.

He was excited to see her again. At their first meeting, she seemed a good looking woman in a uniform, but one whose green eyes became more bewitching as they glanced over slightly freckled cheeks at him. Even more bewitching were her amazing stories of the role the flight nurses played in the war. She was straightforward, and not demanding admiration for heroics; she spoke highly of the medical orderlies who found the wounded, patched them up and littered them to the staging areas. But she did not turn

aside the idea that the tireless flight nurses were nothing less than heroines as they endured blood, vomit, urine, feces, strained faces, hysteria, pain, and death as they tended their charges in the air. She also talked about how her “heroism” was joined with the heroism of many many others, the pilots, the crewmembers, and the men, some of whom insisted that others be treated before they were.

Crossing the traffic circle with care, feeling the chill of the milkshake in his hand, Greg thought how he now wanted to write a book about flight nurses!—he might ask General Gallagher to write an introduction—maybe a movie would be made about them... and calm down, he snapped to himself. He hurried up the steps, and asked for the room of Mrs. Ceile Gallagher—no, Major Ceile O’Briean.

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An hour later, Joe entered into St. George’s and took the lift to the third floor. He nodded to the sister at the desk and opened the door to his wife’s room...

An ampule of ammonia was under his nose when he came to. He gritted his teeth and shook his head. “My wife, my wife,” he kept saying.

Two orderlies by now helped him to a wheelchair. He sat quietly. The sisters churned about as a doctor arrived. A cart was delivered and a body was rushed out of the room. Joe realized his shoulder was burning; his jacket was slashed. He was taken to Gagarin’s office, where he was eased out of his jacket and shirt and his wound was tended. “Sit there, and I mean it,” Gagarin ordered, putting a shot glass of brandy in his hand. An hour passed and Joe could hear and feel the hurried feet, the excitement. There had been a death. You could hear it.

Ceile had died. He kept waiting for someone to come and tell him. He wanted to die. Get it over with. Gagarin finally returned, with a man in an overcoat. He introduced himself as Edwin Bulkett, Scotland Yard. “They got away,” he said to Joe. “But our men are on their trails. We are hoping that you could provide descriptions of the person.”

“I didn’t see a thing. Where is my wife?”

“She’s under sedation,” Gagarin said.

“Only sedation...?”

“Yes, and... dear God, nobody told you...it was the lieutenant who died.”

“Greg?” Joe was split down the middle with joy and grief.

“According to what your wife was able to tell us, he threw himself between her and her attacker.”

Joe put his head in his hands. “A hero,” he finally whispered. “A true hero.”

After he finished his report to Bulkett, he spent the night with Ceile in her new room, guarded by a London bobby. The window was unlocked: that is how the assassin got into the room, by climbing up the scaffolding. Sometime near midnight, Major Merriwether hurried in and interviewed them both. Joe learned how the attacker had been dressed like a hospital orderly—the other like a nurse—they had

been taken by surprise by the presence of the lieutenant and then, as Ceile recalled, “rushed forward like two mixed up prizefighters. Lieutenant—uh, Greg...got knocked aside...gave me a chance to grab a water pitcher and defend myself—and I guess that gave him the time to get between them and me— Oh, God, Joe...” she said, her courage breaking over into tears.

Merriwether remained firm in getting as many details as he could, but he was not without sympathy and shook both their hands before leaving. Merriwether then grimly folded his arms as he took the lift down. Another attack. It had to be related somehow to Gallagher’s assault, the clumsy attempt on Harvey— now the wife, Major O’Briean. And he couldn’t ignore that Gallagher’s former aide, Komansky, had been victimized as well, according to reports, but that had only been attempted robbery it seemed.

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“How long has it been since you cried?” whispered Ceile, somewhere in the middle of the night, knowing her husband lay awake at her side. She stirred up the fire before returning beside him in their magical cave of blankets and pillows. They had their grail of brandy.

“Not since...we lost our daughter,” he said. He decided not to tell how he had wept again at Bryn’s grave, and some of his tears were over her, in Australia, and getting further and further away from him.

“It might help you to cry,” she said, stroking his face.

“I sometimes think if I started crying...I might not ever stop...I realized that during the war.”

“You must have cried during those days...at least once.”

“No. Didn’t dare. I even held on when...I thought Sandy had died.”

“You mean there in Russia?”

“I thought he had been murdered and it was my fault.”

“What?”

“Let’s drop it,” he advised.

“No...well, I like a good murder mystery...Danzo, I didn’t mean to sound flippant.”

“We’re kind of involved in one already...”

“Yes, but that must be a quite a story...and it had a happy ending.”

“All right...Briefly...Sandy’s big mouth got him in the cross-hairs of a really fu--” Joe paused, reining in his language as he would have to around a child. “A fouled-up pilot. The guy had some problems but even he didn’t know how bad he was. They both were on a mission and Sandy got hit in the upper back thigh bad, and this pilot tied a tourniquet about his leg and threw him out.”

“Maybe he was trying to save his life.”

“That’s what he claimed. But circumstances and events had stacked up in such a way that it seemed a case of murder—he had motivation and opportunity.”

“What did you do?”

“I was out for blood. For me and for him. I felt like I had played into his hands and worse, I had played Sandy into his hands. Britt, thank God, may have saved my career by hauling the pilot in for some tough questions at Pinetree. And he had some pretty shit fumbling answers—until he finally broke down and finally admitted, maybe even to himself for the first time that he had blackouts.”

“Where was Sandy..?”

“Some Third Army troops in France spotted him—got him to a field hospital in time.”

“Well, thank God.”

“Yeah. I and this—pilot--both flew him back. But that night before Britt grilled the guy I wanted to bawl my head off. But not just for Sandy—but he was the tip of an iceberg of so many men I sent out who never came back. If I had started crying I might not have been able to stop. Oh God, poor Greg. Poor Greg.” He took a long shuddering breath...Ceile watched him, held him...and he finally wept.

They held onto each other, with love, and with fear...and with grief, as Joe’s heart was sick over the pleasant, eager lieutenant...who died like a hero. But that wouldn’t help his parents, not immediately.

When he finally wiped his eyes and blew his nose but Ceile knew he still had much left in him. “How can I help you?” she said. “Is there a way?”

“How about,” he said, after a while, “we write Sandy about Bryn?”

“He must know by now.”

“One lesson I learned from that circus with Sandy and that pilot—face your problems. Don’t blow them off. I had to face a few of my own at that time too and it made me smarter for it. Ceile, my darling queen, face the fact that we both treated Sandy pretty badly by not directly telling him about Bryn. I think we both hid behind our grief and our desire not to bother him.”

Ceile was honest. “Not yet,” she said. “But, we will. A little more time.” She leaned back, staring into the guttering fire. Joe was silent, recalling how another baby had been lost. And of all the dark currents that slid about their lives.

“Let’s talk about Frankie,” he then said, with a smile.

“Oh, Joe, what we could do for him...love him, and tell him that he belongs to us.”

“You bet. I’ll get started in the morning.” They went to bed but in the night, Ceile found Joe missing, and when he did not return, sought him out. She found him staring out the window, seizing onto the little bit of sky that could be glimpsed. She wrapped her arms around him, and he took her hands, and pressed them into his chest. He was already contemplating writing that book on heroism...and dedicating it to Lt. Greg Dinwiddie.

As for the investigation, it went cold. Joe often wondered if this were for political reasons, or for security.

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In a few days, when some normalcy had been restored in their lives, Joe called Harvey Stovall at his home, and felt good all over at the sound of his voice. “Hey, Harv, to be original, long time, no see!”

“Joe! Well, give an old friend a call when you get into town...”

“Well, I’m doing it now...” After inquiries on both sides of the wire of how their wives were doing, with Joe saying “fine” in a gloss of recent events that had, thank God, put into the weeds, told him that he and Ceile were headed overseas—west overseas, to home.

“You’re returning to the States? Well, that’s great...” Harvey paused.

Joe was so focused he did not hear an odd tone in his former adjutant’s voice. “Harv, you either know British law a helluva lot better than I do or you could recommend a barrister. I want to take Frank Savage’s son back to the States with Ceile and me, adopted. I have no idea about the protocol.”

“Say, why don’t you two come down for dinner and let’s talk about this?”

“How about you two coming up here to dinner?” Joe offered in turn.

“How’s about you two chaps taking two charming women out for dinner?” chimed in the ladies who were both listening on bedroom extensions. Harvey had a brainstorm—he and Melva were going up to London for the theatre on Tuesday night, so how about meeting them for a picnic earlier in the day? They settled on Hampstead Heath, situated on the rising ground of northeast London area. Everybody awoke under sodden skies, but they all agreed, “To hell with it,” and charmingly, the clouds parted and the sun broke out just as the two parties, umbrellas in hand, met each other on the slopes that looked out over the Thames Valley. Due to the rain, some tables were available, and they claimed one before other parties, noting the break in the rain, similarly charged forth.

They greeted each other with hugs and grins, and cooled bottles of Courage beer were in everybody’s hands...and Joe glanced up as a commercial airliner sailed overhead between foaming ships of clouds. “Really and truly going home this time?” Harvey asked Joe and Ceile.

“Yep,” Joe said, without a hint of sentiment. “High old time.”

“Twelve o’clock high old time,” Harvey agreed. “Date of leaving?”

“August 1. Just in time for the humidity. We’ll be staying with the folks for a while and Ceile reports to Randolph School of Evacuation on September 1. She’s in charge,” he added proudly.

Harvey provided the names of three solicitors for Joe. The older man reported there were good points and worrisome points of adopting young Frank Savage Jr. Adopting a child from living parent(s) was not that unusual; many times it was done to direct an inheritance or insuring the succession of the name. Frankie had an American father, though deceased. His mother might be appealed to let the boy grow up in the country of his father, with guardians who had excellent connections and reputations.

Harvey and Joe volunteered to get ice cream at the vendor down the hill. They talked on the walk down.  
 “So do we have a chance you think?”

“A chance, certainly. But Joe...why are you doing this?”

“Adopting—or trying to adopt Frankie?”

“Yes.”

About ten kids, scuffed and hot from playing soccer or just running around the ways kids did, in dirty shoes and knee socks fallen down around their ankles, had surrounded the ice cream seller, who, for the first time in years, could get ice cream to sell, and another one was hurrying in to vend his wares. Joe and Harvey sat down on trampled grass to wait. “Do you disapprove?”

“Frankie could do no better. But are you doing this...for Frank Savage?”

“In a way,” Joe admitted. “He was a great man.”

“You respected him...and hated him. I think you used him like a mirror image to avoid.”

“Whatever he was...I wasn’t. Didn’t want to be. With the exception of being a good—”

“Great,” Harvey interrupted.

“Okay, a great pilot. Hated, yes, but not all the time. But my respect for the man was without...bounds. He was the right man for the right job, including the job he did on me. He made the 918<sup>th</sup> great.”

“He was great but he was a good man, too,” Harvey said, more aware than ever of Joe’s powerful and conflicting emotions for that remarkable man they had respectively served, as an adjutant, and as a gleamingly confident young pilot who had to have his wings clipped so they would grow in right.

Joe said easily, “What are we talking about Harv?”

“That Frankie is Frank’s son...for better and, forgive me, for worse. But I wonder if you think of yourself as Frankie’s savior. Joe...at times I wanted to lie to you about the casualties, the damage, the planes that were never gonna fly again. I always told the truth when I brought the reports into your office.” He saw Joe’s face tighten. “And what I’m saying...isn’t the truth, but I’m seeking it.”

“I don’t think of myself as a savior anymore, if I did. The boy is such...a ...victim of circumstance. I don’t know about Frank’s private life—much,” he added, recalling Susanne Arnais’ love affair with Savage—when he was already married to Liz Woodruff. He also understood that the knitted scarf Savage was seen folding into his inner pocket was yet from neither lady. A lot of the guys only saw the scarf after Savage returned from Scotland; Joe also saw a softer, sadder look in that eagle eye. That also might have been the beginning of Frank emptying a bottle in his desk about once a week, according to Harvey’s report. Then, death over France. Pills found in his desk. In the center of this maelstrom “Was a child that I sometimes wonder if Frank knew was coming before he died, and if he did, might have wondered it was his—though he is, there’s no mistaking Frank Savage in his eyes.”

“You kind of thinking about Sandy, perhaps, too?”

“Oh cripes, that guy. Wasn’t he a piece of work?”

“But he worked out fine, thanks to you.”

“He had it in him. But, well, I grew up like most people thinking that an orphan, too bad—but if they were fed and had a bed, got some schooling, it was enough. Sandy never asked for sympathy, but he made me realize that if you don’t have someone to love you, and let you know you’re special, all the food and clean sheets in the world ain’t enough. And Frankie has so much...of his Dad in him. You can see it. It might get lost if nobody really cares for him.”

“He’s cared for by Sydney Archer. And he seems happy.”

“But he’s in a situation like an orphanage. When he goes home, two people don’t really care for him.”

“I don’t mean to sound like a social worker...it’s just that I don’t want you to think—” Harvey paused to choose his words carefully. “That helping his son is somehow to apologize to Frank.”

“Apologize for what?”

“You weren’t glad when Savage died, but it became your moment. For greatness.”

“You think so, huh?” Joe said. But it was said gently, with a half-smile.

“I hope you don’t mind me speaking like this Joe.”

“For caring about Frankie? Not a bit. And, Harvey... I don’t plan...to mold the kid in my image. Frank’s heritage, whatever it will be...has to be. And...all this depends on whether we can adopt him or at least have some kind of guardianship of him.”

“Hey guys, what about the ice cream?” Ceile called.

“Miladies’ requests have been made,” Joe said and went on down to the ice cream seller, who was counting his take from the kids. Thankfully he had some cones left.

“Looking forward to going home?” Harvey asked Ceile as they sat on the benches, licking their ice cream cones.

“Yes. Though I will miss England.”

“Miss a cold wet sponge?” Melva joked.

“I’ll probably think about that cold wet sponge in a Texas summer.”

Melva asked “Are you flying home?”

“You bet. I get seasick. I admit it. I’m a gal for the air!” Ceile said.

“Really?” Joe asked. “Come to think of it we’ve never been on the water together.” In the water, yes, recalling lustful moments of being at her parents’ house, alone in the pool...

“And let’s keep it that way.”

Harvey had a thought—maybe he and Melva could return by ship...to the United States. He had things to tell her, tomorrow, after a pleasant evening.

Joe dreaded making the phone call...at times like this he recalled how he had to drop out of formation, and the pirate ship came for them. He had made mistakes, the man next to him hated him as much as he hated him, he had to prove himself to himself—and it turned out all right. Yes! He had held steady, the pirate had chickened out, flew over them and Komansky knew where to drill his guns... and then silence, except for the chatter of the crew. But he had held steady.

Hold and keep steady, he whispered to himself, about Pres, about Ceile, about himself...about Frankie.

He called the number that Patricia Bates Beckworth-Smythe furnished him. Of course, a servant answered the phone, probably a private line. In a voice too plummy to be real, a woman answered, “This is Mrs. Jorham, personal secretary to Lady Beckworth-Smythe. To whom am I speaking?”

Joe graciously identified himself, and said he had met her, Mrs. Jorham, at a wedding in 1947, between Lt. Col. Stovall and Melva Halloran. The wedding went beautifully, due to her excellent management...

Mrs. Jorham thawed a little. “To who—m, do you wish to speak?”

“Lady Beckworth-Smythe, if she is available, please,” Joe said in his most winning tone. That would be Liz—Elizabeth Woodruff. Patricia Bates would assume the title after the death of her father-in-law—which she did not wish, but probably would not mind too much when it happened. Her husband, the man’s own son, felt somewhat the same way, declaring that all titles were fuss, feathers, and rot—and more than once, expressing dislike of his father’s business dealings that transcended all thoughts of patriotism—or least, loyalty to one’s country, and its people...

“Please hold sir,” said Mrs. Jorham. A time passed. Joe could hear doors closing, and faraway voices...Finally, the rattle of a phone being picked up. “Yes, General Gallagher?” Her voice was both warm and quite cold. He suddenly wanted to say “Hiya Liz, y’remember a night full of brandy?”—to startle the hell out of her. No, God, no.

“Lady Elizabeth, thank you for taking my phone call. I would like to, talk about, your son...Francis.”

“What about Francis?”

“It’s important enough to speak about...but not over the telephone....could we meet—at a place of your choice?”

There was a long pause.

“May I recommend the tea room of Brown’s Hotel in Mayfair?” he finally asked.

Her breath softly released as he proposed a public venue of high respectability—while not being stylish. “Yes, of course.” They made a date, for the following Tuesday, at 3:00.

“Success, at least the first step,” he told Ceile. They had agreed that he would talk with Frankie’s mother alone, as two people might seem more threatening...and perhaps indicating an eagerness that she might take advantage of. Or maybe not. Ceile had given little thought to Frankie’s mother, except for contempt. But as they prepared to ask her—to give up her child—Ceile grew both more sympathetic, as well as more contemptuous.

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The next day, Joe, at 2:50 pm walked into Brown’s, an old and elegant hostelry that served a famous tea, even during the war. He was dressed in civilian clothes; he wondered if Liz—The Lady Elizabeth Beckworth-Smythe—would think he was trying to intimidate her if he appeared in uniform. Or appeal to her sentimental side, if she had one. He was soon seated at a linen-draped table, exquisitely laid with flowered china and other tea accoutrements, and waiting for the lady to appear.

Elizabeth Woodruff seemed to have several sides, possibly because she had no real background. What was offered seemed a tissue of...exaggerations, maybe. But being referred to as “Liz” by some 918<sup>th</sup> pilots suggested a reputation. Joe’s first glimpse of “Liz” was at a reception at the Preserve, in early 1943. This was being hosted by Lord Beckworth-Smythe, but in punishment. He had deliberately created some problems for the 918<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (dash it all, they were parking their beastly planes on his lands!), and the British Air Ministry “suggested” he had a reception for “good relations” with the understandably disgruntled commander and his ranking officers. “Liz” was on Savage’s arm, and she was quietly dressed and “off limits.” But Joe, fairly accustomed to salons and elegance, took the Preserve in stride...but to him, Miss Woodruff (maybe Mrs. Woodruff; he heard her name with two different prefixes) seemed to glance about rapaciously—which was maybe his imagination. He also saw her perched on a window seat, sherry glass in hand, laughing at the words of her much older host, his face bouncing and beaming at her, like an overwhelmed teenager.

He also knew from his “evening full of brandy with Liz” that she had a rough side. While waiting for a snow-delayed train at King’s Cross, Joe had found a derelict pub for a drink to warm up his feet. There was Liz. She had jested with a couple of railworkers, and matched them drink for drink, word for word, some pretty foul. She left when they left—which may have been just a coincidence, Joe told himself...But it seemed to fit into the rumors he had heard about Savage’s “woman.” And apparently Liz was “just his woman” as Savage had two true romances.

Joe stood up graciously when the Lady Elizabeth Beckworth-Smythe entered the tearoom. She came toward him, extending a fashionably gloved hand, and peering at him under a fashionably compact hat. Thank God, Joe thought, hats were toning down from their Olympian craziness of the mid-forties. He was surprised at his thought, but it told him how much he dreaded the conversation. He was savvy enough to make no assumptions about how Liz—Mrs. Beckworth Smythe might react to his request.

The teacart was rolled to their table and the pot placed on the table along with milk, lemon, and sugar. A selection of dainties was presented and they chose. "May I pour?" Joseph asked. She nodded and he swished streams of fragrant tea into the cups. They talked companionably, coolly, directly—though not completely directly. Joe described his great fondness for Frankie—Francis Jr.—and his wife, Ceile, was fond of him too. They met him at the Bryncote School. He made no mention that the place was more along the lines of an orphanage than a fashionable—and expensive—school. Francis did have an American father, and though he of course did not know General Savage's wishes, he and his wife would be delighted to take Francis to the United States...and raise him there.

There it was, Joe thought, his face calm, and his eyes unswervingly on Elizabeth's eyes, so steady they were flat. I want your kid. You are an uncaring mother. We could raise him better for all your money and position. You have him being raised by other people already...

Her eyes dropped slightly. "You wish to have him as a guest...or adopt him?"

"Either," Joe said in a voice both neutral and concerned.

Her eyes studied the heavily swagged rose-colored drapes—the floral carpet—and the other groups at the other tables. Joe waited, but sipped on his tea, and calmly finishing his cucumber sandwich. At last her lips parted for a quick intake of breath. "I am not sure...at this time," she said.

Joe spoke carefully. "I am leaving for the United States soon for reassignment. We—"

"Why is your wife not with you?"

"She's on duty," Joe explained, honestly, but he chose the time based on her duty hours and to which Ceile had agreed—meeting only one of them at a time might be more acceptable. "We would certainly both like to speak with you more...about this."

Finished with her tea, she placed a cigarette between her lips and accepted a light from Joe. For a moment, her face twisted and then smoothed out. "Can you meet me for cocktails day after tomorrow?—at my flat here in London. Both of you, of course."

"Thank you, we will." He accepted her address, and they spoke briefly of inconsequential things, including where he and his wife intended to live in the United States. Joe told her that his wife was being posted to Randolph Air Force Base in Texas. She confessed never to being in the States, and what Frank had told her about the place...it sounded...large. She then thanked him for the tea, and left, with half of the sandwiches and cookies unconsumed. She was probably watching her figure, Joe thought. Finished with the meeting, and relieved about the outcome, he was starving, and he hungrily consumed the rest of the sandwiches and tarts and emptied the pot of tea.

Rain of course was falling as he and Ceile emerged from the taxi to enter the St. Olive Arms, a rather nondescript manse in St. Olive Court. Inside, was sheer elegance. They found the lift and her flat, Number Three, on the fourth floor.

They lingered in the corridor while Ceile nervously donned her gloves, which she was wearing for a good impression, and which also made her very angry. "I have nothing to prove to her," she said, for the third time in thirty minutes. "She doesn't love him. She can't love him. Why she can't see that and let us..." She stopped from saying "Have him." That made Frankie seem like a piece of merchandise.

"Neither of us have a thing to prove except we want to take care of him," he told her. When she looked at him with irritation—but not with him—he knew better than to kiss her. Instead, he took her hand, and she squeezed her gloved fingers into his. He knocked.

She answered the door, dressed becomingly, expensively. Her face was welcoming, and she brought them in. A maid took charge of their coats and umbrellas. Joe and Ceile glanced around appraisingly. It was not unusual that she had a flat; many wealth country-dwellers had a London residence, but they both wondered if this is where she entertained her lovers, given her reputation. They heard slight noises in a bedroom...

She had already fixed martinis and poured them nicely...Joe and Ceile smiled and thanked her. They spoke of the weather, and they both wondered how to start on the topic when it was solved for them: Frankie, in pajamas and robe, appeared in the doorway. "Mama?" he said. Now they knew the source of the noises in the bedroom.

"Yes, darling," she said. "Please come in and greet your friends."

He did. He came forward and shook Joe's hand. "Mam," he said to Ceile.

"Come, come, greet them," said his mother. "I know how good a friend you are with them." Her voice sounded a little accusatory. If Frankie heard, he ignored it, and accepted Joe's embrace, and then Ceile's. "You're growing so tall!" she told the five year old lad, who grinned. "I've been learning how to swim too!" he told them, and that he was learning cursive writing.

"Dear," interrupted his mother, "I want to ask you a question. Would you like to...go with General Gallagher and his wife—to live with them in the United States?"

Frankie's doubtful sense of himself as a member of any family was clear. He did not shout with glee or look with alarm at his mother. Instead, he asked, "When?"

"It would be soon," Ceile said. "Not immediately, but we would like for you to join us in September, in time for school. It may be later, but we hope not."

Frankie came up to her. A kid so young should not be so thoughtful but also a kid that age should not be invited to leave his mother and stepfather for another family. "Do you really want me to go home with you?" he asked her.

"Yes," Ceile assured him. "You would live with us, and go to school, and make new friends."

"May I say goodbye to Mrs. Archer first?"

On the couch, Mrs. Beckworth-Smythe stirred slightly as Frankie was more concerned at saying goodbye to his teacher, not her. Joe resisted smirking, as did Ceile. Not only was it rude, but they both sensed there was more going on with Lady Beckworth-Smythe than her son's distance. Her face was set but Ceile detected a shade of something... hardness, crossed with guilt—a flash of pain. Emotional or physical?

“Of course,” they assured in unison. Joe then grew grave but gentle. “Son, this is a big step for you to take. We want you to be happy. Be sure you want to leave—the people you know, and to fly all the way across the ocean...”

“Yes sir,” Frankie answered, equally gravely. “But I think I want to.”

“Well, we are glad you would like to. Now, we aren't leaving tomorrow, and there will be some things to do, but we will get busy with them.”

“Thank you sir,” he said, reminding Joe of Freddie Bartholomew, an English lad who acted in MGM movies, saying his lines with a bell-like accent. “Thank you too, Miss Ceile.”

Ceile bent down to gently hug him, and brushed the golden hair from his eyes. “You are welcome.” He then solemnly shook hands with Joe and Ceile. He then said goodnight to his mother with a ceremonial kiss.

The rest of the evening blurred as they talked with Lady Beckworth-Smythe, who finally waved her hand. “Our barrister will talk with your solicitor,” she said. “I will commence with the arrangements. Wait for his call.” She then frankly asked them to leave as she was very tired. “Of course,” Joe and Ceile said once again in unison. They left into even heavier rain, their hearts happy but their minds tangled with all that would need to be done—and what they were doing—adopting—and Joe realized again he was adopting Frank Savage's son. Odd how the world turns, how fates tangle, and things turn out.

After returning to Goodge Street, warming up with brandy and talk, they went to bed, and Ceile lay awake, wondering if Lady Beckworth-Smythe were well. Something was wrong with the woman.

To their relief, but not to their surprise, Lord Beckworth-Smythe created no interference with the proceedings which commenced the next day. Fortunately, their solicitor had a high personal regard for Harvey Stovall, commenced when he was consulted about “assault and battery” charges at the Star and Bottle back in early 1945 after American airmen and sailors attempted to destroy the place. The lawyers for both parties gravely but kindly questioned Francis Lawrence Savage Jr. about his desires, and his concerns in his mother's presence and in Joe and Ceile's presence, together, and then separately. Joe and Ceile's records were above reproach. They requested any documents his stepfather might have created or signed about his step-son. They both described their families. Papers were signed. And more papers. Joe and Ceile good naturedly dealt with everything, because they knew a child's future was at stake...but at times they felt they were smuggling artwork through customs. Though happy about how affairs were turning out, they both experienced pangs of concern—for themselves, for the boy. At times, Joe was glad that Frankie's adoption distracted him from Pres, and from the lost baby...

One special trip was to visit him at Bryncote; they agreed it was best to keep Frankie's life as normal as possible before great changes commenced. Sydney greeted them. As pretty as ever, she was feeling a bit bilious—"The stork is on the way!" she confided. Joe, holding hands with Ceile, felt her fingernails dig into his palm. When asked how long, she said two months.

They asked how Adelaide—the Viscountess—was faring. Sydney shook her head. "After the baby came early January, young Christopher Vivyan—it seems she has taken, well, to the bottle."

There was a moment of silence, of understanding.

"I know Ethan is delighted," Ceile then said to Sydney about the baby. Then Frankie was running toward them, and he begged Joe and Ceile to come with him to the stables; there were two smug ponies for the children to learn how to ride, as well as how to take care of them. Joe went off with him, asking about Redline, who was as happy as ever. Ceile and Sydney went to the school teacher's office to review his education records, such as they were. Sydney said, as the two women chatted about the boy, "We can't judge why his mother can't love him, but, well, I simply don't understand. It's sad to say that he's been happier here."

"She's a hard package," Ceile said.

"I agree," said Lady Beckworth-Smythe. The woman stood at the doorway. She was beautifully if overdressed; gloves, hat, jewelry, and a fur stole over her shoulders.

"Mam?" Ceile asked, startled and embarrassed.

The lady was neither. "What do you know about barely surviving in a Chinese warlord's compound where every breath might be your last just because you were a daughter of a Christian missionary?"

"Not a thing," Ceile answered.

"Or after escaping working your way across two oceans when you are only fourteen years old—"

"Stop," Ceile commanded. "Clearly, you have suffered and I am sorry."

"Please, sit," said Sydney, gesturing to the teacher's chair.

She did. "I actually came here without invitation to say my barrister is coming to provide a check for five thousand pounds to you, Mrs. Archer. He is also bringing documents to be signed."

"Five thousand pounds?" she said. "Mrs. Beckworth-Smythe, you don't owe us anymore—"

"Then give it to others engaged in the same pursuits. Taking care of children."

"Thank you. I will."

"Mrs. Gallagher, let us talk," she then said. Her voice was neither challenging nor inviting. Sydney, without a bit of embarrassment, excused herself and left them alone in the classroom.

“Lady Beckworth-Smythe,” Ceile began...

“Call me Liz,” she said. “I didn’t expect to find you and your husband here today, I was coming to see Mrs. Archer. This really is an accident. Where is your husband?”

“At the stables, with Frankie.”

She actually smiled. “Frank—my husband--once told me he wished he could take charm lessons from Joe Gallagher. It would not have taken him places—he arrived quite well on his own--but he knew he would ‘get on’ with people better. He was once told, he said, that he never really met people, he clashed.”

Ceile smiled in return. “I never met Frank Savage. I certainly did hear stories though.”

“They may have all been true. He was a remarkable man.” Her voice was low.

Ceile summoned the gentleness she brought to hurt and wounded patients. This woman was giving evidence of being one. She asked a question. “Are you sure about this course of life for your son?”

“Meaning, if his father was so remarkable, why I have somewhat washed my hands of our son? Well,” she said, standing up in her fashionable shoes, dyed to match her mauve suit, “I didn’t love his father.” She moved to the window.

Ceile was silent, realizing that she was about to hear a confession...of sorts. By a woman who wanted to talk, it seemed. Otherwise, Ceile figured, she would have somehow evaded the conversation.

“Do you remember Kaye Francis, that beautiful American cinema star?”

Ceile’s memory scrambled back to the early mid-thirties to recall the statuesque brunette actress, really much better than the “women’s films” she was forever cast in, always playing some woman who should have known better in matters of romance, whether in comedy or tragedy or sheer melodrama, all while wearing killingly stylish clothes—which she could carry off.

“I learned how to act like a lady from watching her. I had my hair dyed and fashioned to look like her. I had dresses made based on what I saw at the cinema. It succeeded, splendidly. I also learned to guard your heart. She was always falling in love with the wrong man. I did not. I used men, and was not used by men.” She paused. “But I let Frank Savage use me. He used my flat for sleeping. He used my body for sex. Used what I knew...to forget about the war for an hour. He used...my arms for crying. He had a lot to cry about. And he was a man. The best I ever met. He was honest. Honest enough to know who I was, or what I was, and not to give a hang. Honest enough to know I didn’t love him. Honest enough to talk with me when I wanted to talk. Honest enough to give me money when I asked for it, and not expect much else in return. Honest enough to ask ‘Are you sure you are carrying MY child?’ Good enough to believe me when I said it was. I regret he never had the chance to know that I was not lying.”

Ceile moved to the window to stand beside her. Joe and Frankie were nowhere to be seen. Instead, they looked down a slope of land that led to the reed-fringed lake.

She went on. "I got pregnant not by accident. The war would not last, and neither could I. I'd nearly lost him to a woman in Scotland if she hadn't died. Then there was this young French woman I heard about. So for once, when I conceived, I didn't throw the child away. And Frank was honest enough to tell me that was the reason he married me. An old story. I was to be taken care of, in some way. So was our child. Frank would honor his obligations. Then he died." She then eyed Ceile. "Without Frank as competition, I had to move fast with Beckworth-Smythe. But he had plans with me, already."

Ceile didn't dare speak, and wondered why she being given so much information... "Such as?" she asked, in a careful, cautious voice.

"Mutual secrets. If I married him, I would hold onto his. If he married me, then he would hold onto mine. But the bargain did not include raising my son nor letting him inherit in any way."

Ceile nodded. "Thank you."

"Thank you as well." For a moment, the two women looked at each other. Ceile could tell that the woman had spilled her guts and was both relieved, and fearful and humbly asking her, silently, to hold these stories within herself. And to protect her son. Ceile read that request clearly in her eyes.

And she could also see love for her son...maybe. If that emotion had appeared, it was snuffed.

Ceile, also silently, told her she would—protect her son.

But Ceile knew there was more to this story—her story, and her husband's story. But now was not the time to inquire. But whatever it was...Ceile thought it must be pretty awful...at times she caught a glint of—well, heartsickness—in the woman's eyes, the twist of her lips, the turning of her head. There was more than just money going on here...or maybe so much money...that it scared her. Big money frequently had big consequences. She resolved to ask Joe...to ask others...about Beckworth-Smythe, senior.

They descended together into the residential wing of the home and Ceile resolutely kept back happy memories that had changed to bitter within five days. A solemn ring of the door chimes brought the announcement from a maid that Hugh Sheridan, barrister, was here to see Mrs. Sydney Archer.

Tea was rung for. A houseman was dispatched to find the general. He came back with Frankie riding his shoulders like a delighted bird. Joe's face revealed some pain. They sat down in the drawing room and drank tea while Sydney, Lady Beckworth-Smythe, and the barrister spoke in another salon.

"What's say we, uh, visit our old bedroom?" Joe proposed.

Ceile said, "Why?—do you mean--?"

He laughed. "It's a wonderful idea...but I thought maybe we could fire up our memories...try to figure out what we saw, or what we thought we saw."

They retraced their steps up the alpine heights of the grand staircase, down the corridor, to the right...and Joe gingerly opened the door. The drapes were drawn, compelling them to turn on night table lamps. They recalled warm memories of those happy few days that then went so wrong. They reviewed that afternoon, just an hour before their rather rowdy second wedding commenced. They could only agree that they both encountered a tall fellow with a cockney accent, and with all the people coming and going for those two busy days it was not an odd occurrence. Ceile dared to ask Joe...if he knew where Faye Vendry was these days. Somewhere way in the east, he said. And not in the east of England.

"May I come in?" Adelaide was at the door. "Of course," Joe said, a little too eagerly, but gladly as Adelaide looked sad, but utterly composed, and for somebody who had taken to the bottle...bright-eyed but steady. She said how glad she was that they were there, and how happy she was that Lady Sydney and her husband lived with them...while writing a note to them on the dusty surface of the tea table. "Need to talk privately." That moment did not occur until nearly four months later.

### Harvey: Perilous Times Shall Come – London, summer

Harvey rather suddenly had proposed this jaunt to London, which began delightfully with meeting Joe and Ceile for a picnic, and then checking in at the Langham which still offered hotel rooms for members of the USAF. They caught up with each other over dinner—and he happily listened about her successes with the brown babies—how in the wake of the Staller killing the council was willing to sponsor their raising, and the local Women’s Institute was expressing some interest. They then searched for theatre tickets, and attended “Carousel,” Rodgers and Hammerstein’s second hit musical in its first run in London. The opening number was a waltz as played by a carousel’s calliope and became a tune that swirled in Harvey’s head for many years...duhhhhh, da da da da, da-da da da da duh duh da duh...circling, circling, like a plane trying to land.

The story started in heaven. Shiftless Billy Bigelow died trying to get money, fast and criminally, for his unborn child. He learns he has the right to visit earth one time to take care of things. After telling his story to the no-nonsense but sympathetic starkeeper, he is escorted to earth to see his wife and the now-grown child, but not after first plucking a star from the heavens for a gift. He tries to talk with his sad bitter young daughter—and to give her the star he brought down for her—and can only slap her when she, scared of him, tries to run. Billy Bigelow has one last chance to redeem himself. At her graduation ceremony, he pleads for her to be brave, and not to let the town’s opinion of him, her father, a thief, break her down—to open her heart and not be scared and not run away—and she listens. There were few dry eyes at the end when the school chorus, including Billy Bigelow’s daughter who had heard her father’s plea, stood up and sang “When you walk through a storm, hold your head up high, and don’t be afraid of the dark...” It was sentimental to mawkishness, but Harvey’s eyes overflowed, and Melva worried, soothed him to sleep in their Langham room.

The next morning, he was strong and steady, but Melva sensed there were other things afoot, and there were. As they ate breakfast in the hotel’s dining salon, enjoying eggs and ham which were once more appearing on tables, Harvey said, “I’ve been reduced.”

“And what does that mean?” she asked.

“It means, I am being forcibly retired.”

“Oh. Ah...because of the Mahoney appeal?” she asked, directly.

“Possibly, but that won’t stop me.”

She swallowed some scrambled eggs. “What does this mean for us?”

“Do we stay here...or go to the States.”

“When do I--we--have to make a decision?” A bite of ham turned into salty meat in her mouth.

“Melva, dear, I love England, and would be willing to stay...”

After a moment, she said, “You’re also an American. You want to go home. You practice law there.”

“Maybe I have no home there anymore.”

“I think you do—you speak about Providence lovingly.”

“Yes.”

“Could you practice law here?” she asked.

“It would require a lot of work...I could find work perhaps in some American concerns. But Melva, I could carry on for Byron Mahoney there...far better in the US than here.”

She nodded. Mahoney deserved Harvey’s work and support. But what about her? What about the life they had managed to put together? Harvey said their rather disastrous home over the Norman keep with its secrets had been a kind of destiny; do you walk away from destiny?

After breakfast, Harvey became decidedly merry. “I have still two months before I need to be out of uniform. We have two months to decide what to do. Let’s not worry about it.” And so they didn’t, shopping at Selfridges for bathroom trimmings of matching towels, washcloths, curtains, a hamper, even a wastebasket, to set off the recently installed tub and toilet. They arranged for the items to be delivered. They caught a cinema, an American musical with Fred Astaire and Judy Garland, singing Irving Berlin tunes—Harvey could not help but hear the evocative strains of “when that midnight choo-choo rings for Alabam,” a song that celebrated homecoming.

They took their own choo-choo to Archbury out of King’s Cross station. They walked home, and they were growing excited about being together—the first night together in London they were too tired; the second night Harvey was upset over the musical, and tonight, tonight they would be alone, in their house, which they made into a home...Extending the pleasure, enjoying the feeling of desire soon to be consummated, they had brandies at the Star and Bottle, then they walked, slowly, hazily, down the long road to home...they smelled smoke. Not an unusual situation, as farmers burned their summer cuttings in low simmering fires.

But the odor was sharp that night, not the usual mustiness mixed with humidity to create an earthy smell that one came to like. As they approached their little turn off, Melva, oddly, began talking about a novel and a movie called *Rebecca*—and the mousy young wife and her puzzling husband Max, finally out from under of being accused of murdering his unfaithful first wife, Rebecca—were returning home and found their house, now their home burning, in a cloud of fire...

“Oh, my God!” Melva shrieked...

In the morning, well after the local firefighters had battled the fire to a standstill, and departed, Harvey was surveying the ruin and saw something horrible—on the power line to their home, he saw a nurse’s uniform, stuffed. It had been hanged.

“Ohhhh.”

Harvey turned and saw Melva staring—at herself, hung in effigy. As she had put her arms around him as he cried over the musical, he put his arms around her now. “They can’t hate those poor babies that much!” she then screamed. “They’re babies, and they’re brown but that’s not their fault!”

“But you caring for them does,” Harvey said. “To some people.”

“They’re my people,” she said. “White, black, a mix—I don’t know them anymore, not after this.”

Harvey wisely stayed silent. No way could he soothe her and he didn’t try. All they could do was to move into the small house from which Roxanne had moved. It had been spared though smoke had invaded it.

Harvey was not at all surprised when Dave Creighton one day soon after quietly entered his office. Harvey was sitting a little numbly at his desk, dully catching up on his paper work. Of course, the local constabulary had investigated the fire, so clearly an act of arson. Apparently, the CIC had become involved too. Creighton told him that “Investigation pretty much indicates it’s a case of local vandalism—blowhards not liking that you boarded a Negro officer who married an English girl, and your involvement with the Stallers, and helping Mrs. Staller get off a murder charge that his drinking buddies thinks she ought to hang for.”

“Was a chap named Siddons involved?” Harvey then asked. “You know, the strange thing married to Alyce Siddons? He made some cheap threats after the court martial ended in the kid’s favor.”

“There’s been a hunt for him,” Creighton said, after he knew that Harvey was not taking half-assed answers, and of course, could be trusted, absolutely.

“Is Alyce... giving you any help?”

“She cannot even help herself. She’s detained at Arrowmore Prison for Women in Cambridgeshire.”

“Does she have a lawyer?”

“Yes, but she needs a doctor more. She’s dying of cancer. Being a lush isn’t making it easier.”

“Great God,” Harvey murmured. “I need to see her.”

“Good. She’s asking for you.” When Harvey lowered his eyes, Merriwether chuckled, but quietly. “We know there was nothing between you. But she may be willing to ‘fess up to some things to you.”

“What kind of things?” Harvey asked.

“Ask her. She might be willing to talk, and solve a few mysteries. You’re obliged to report to me.”

“Yes. Yeah.” He wasn’t being given carte blanche with her.

Harvey paid the grim visit three days later, being driven there by Creighton. Phone calls preceded his visit, and he was kept waiting a long time before being escorted down a cold gray corridor. Alyce

Siddons lay amidst tubes and IVs. Her face looked like a smudge on her pillow. The sister who had led Harvey in, touched her skeletal shoulder and say, clearly, "A Colonel Stovall has asked to see you."

"No, I asked to see him," she said, in a harsh voice. The nurse nodded and put something into one of the bags of fluid dripping into her. Her pretty face, raddled with drink, had vanished into a mask of blue-white skin. Harvey felt a storm of pity and horror, but he smiled. "I'm here."

"Don't be so damned nice to me, I don't deserve an atom of it," she whispered. "Can you talk with me?"

"What do you want to know?"

"Is it true Troper is set to hang?"

"Yes. June 6 1950."

"If you can, tell him I'll be waiting for him." Her transparent lids closed on her eyes, and she then raised them. "What do you want to know?"

"I thought you might tell me. But...who was the person who arranged for a tab to be opened for you at the Star and Bottle?—with my death as repayment."

"She never said."

"She?—then it was Bea Wales?—or, Erika Bridgestone..."

"Neither. Didn't give her name. I can only remember...she was pregnant. Yes, a pregnant woman. She was near to having her baby...I once spoke to Trope about a baby...he made me get rid of it...the goddamned bastard...what a father he woulda made...oh, what a life, now...I sang 'Three Little Maids Are We' at my school's pageant...already knew where the headmistress kept her gin...do you know..."

"Know what?" Harvey asked her, coming close. He hoped to get this pregnant woman's name.

"You're a nice man. But you look like my stepfather...who raped me when I was twelve..."

Harvey was silent with pity.

"I'm sorry, God, I am so sorry..."

"No sorrows for a thing..." he said. And then gently, so gently, asked "What did the woman look like?"

"What woman?"

"The pregnant woman, who opened the tab..."

"Tall...brown hair...rather pretty..."

"English?"

"I think so..."

“Name?”

“Didn’t give one.”

“Was your husband involved?” Harvey said.

“I don’t know. Don’t know about him. Did he seem in any way right to you? He was strange. So strange. Didn’t mind killing him...let him have right in the back of the head...though I felt bad dumping his body in your house before it was torched.”

“What?”

“Not for gin. He was evil. He wasn’t human...I think... Her voice ran down. Harvey withdrew his fingers from her clutching hands and rang for the sister. He hated abandoning this poor wretch who tried to kill him, but powerful forces had moved her like a pawn on a chessboard, a shit tiny pawn selling out for gin.

Creighton awaited him in the car. Harvey gave his report immediately, and nothing was written down. Harvey said, “That is the third—fourth—time I have heard the phrase, ‘not quite human.’ I know she didn’t say that, but she verged on it. What’s going on?”

“More than our ears can hear,” Creighton said, at last. “Those I work tell me that it’s all a kaleidoscope, with the picture changing with every turn.”

“Here’s another turn of the kaleidoscope: was Siddons’ body found at Troyroys? His wife said she dumped his body there.”

“What?”

“You heard me. I know CIC investigated. Was his body found?”

“No.”

Harvey could only figure she was lying, or had been hallucinating...four days later, he learned that Alyce Siddons had died.

**Pres: In Silence and in Solitude - Siberia**

Pres and three hundred other men marched into the camp after a day's work. Hobart always managed to always managed fall in step with Pres as the column returned.

The blatnois must have also taken pleasure in the summer day as they had spilled out of their dark stinking quarters to continue their card game under the anemic Siberian summer sun. The guards gave them wide berth. As the prisoners walked past them to the food shacks for their bowl of soup and ten grams of bread, one of the blatnois, whose eyelids were tattooed with skulls-- fluttered them at Pres and Hobart—and shot a card at them. It landed right between them. The ace of diamonds.

They were dead men. Maybe both at once. Maybe one and the other. Obviously they knew of the trick they had pulled on them. By a couple of stinking Yankees.

The prisoners stopped from reaching the food shack by an order. They wearily shambled to a stop, but enjoyed standing in the sun.

Voices barked. Pres leaned his ear toward Hobart. "Selections," he translated.

Nobody knew for what. Maybe to try a new coffee, Pres thought suddenly as old radio shows that he listened to in the thirties suddenly streamed through his head. Which coffee do you select; if right then ten tons of the stuff would be delivered to your doorstep... The prisoners were spaced apart and one of the commissars of the camp, bearded against mosquitoes and with a service cap over his forehead, walked among the men. They did not know if they should try to look sick, or healthy; should they promote selection or prevent it?

Pres heard Russian and he knew it meant "You." It was also said to Hobart.

Pres, Hobart, and some one hundred other men were hustled away from the barracks, not being given a chance to collect anything they might own. Pres always hoped his trenchcoat made somebody warmer.

They were marched out and away from the Camp 303.

He and Hobart were walking away from their own murders. It was too incredible to be true.

But what were they marching to?

They marched four hours into the endless twilight, following some kind of supply truck which ground on ahead, its wheels carving a road. After three hours they saw a wink of light. They nearly dropped around a fire that had been kindled in a clearing. They didn't get dinner. They were too tired to care.

In the morning, after breakfast of soup and bread, they were separated into groups of four and actually handed shears with which they cut each other's hair. They were given razors to shave with—with cold water and slight lather, but he and Hobart enjoyed the process. They were herded toward a lake and told to strip off their clothes. For a few moments the men tossed water at each other; scraped themselves down, shouted with joy even though the water was icy. They slept in the nude that night

and in the morning were given new clothes and shoes which were brought to the camp in another lumbering vehicle. They all saw, from a distance, the commissar of their camp and his wife climb out and head for a tent erected for them. She was the woman who asked them to read from English language child raising manuals. She paid them or anybody else scant attention. "What happened to the baby?" they asked each other.

Unalloyed pleasure in being clean, wearing new clothes and boots ended but they still felt wonderful.

For four days they marched, steadily, toward the southeast as far as Pres could tell. Rainstorms beat down hard enough to tear through the firs and pines and they accepted it as a laundering from heaven. Delightful winds in the afternoon brought smells of flowers and from somewhere the fragrance of turned ground, of rolling streams, of animals, of life. But it was no cakewalk. Hobart and Pres could not help but worry about exposure from the commissar's wife but perhaps she was worried of exposing herself.

"Hey pal, you with me, huh?" asked Hobart one evening. "I need to show you something."

Guards and prisoners were drying out after a vicious thunderstorm had unraveled the night sky into great fall of water. The fires had been quenched; cries were heard---and a lightning bolt had killed three prisoners.

Pres was staring at the three dead men, their faces shocked, quiet, singed. A crew was detailed to dig graves and the scorched bodies were laid into them. "Not that," Hobart said. From his gray trousers, Hobart showed Pres the map on the wall of her bedroom. "Gift from the wife of the commissar. She gave it to me when all hell broke loose."

Pres didn't know how to take this. Mentally or physically. "She's a nice woman and she wants us to get away," Hobart said.

"How do you believe her?"

"I guess I have to. This is the closest I have come to escape. We're going to take it."

They had tramped two hours the next day when Pres said, "Next April right?"

"Now you're talking," Hobart said.

### Joe: Redeem Me from My Enemies – London, Summer

“And here,” Harvey said, placing a package into Joe’s hands.

It was now 11:15 at the Crown and Dragon pub after a good evening. Their farewell dinner at the Goodge Street was another chance for Ceile to demonstrate her cooking skills and Joe’s ability to pick up some pork chops. They then attended a showing of *Road to Rio* at the local cinema and laughed genially at the antics of Crosby and Hope, both angling on the affections of Dorothy Lamour... it was a good movie to lighten feelings of regret. “Do you two see yourselves as those characters?” asked Melva over pints as they finished the evening at the Crown and Dragon.

“Nah, we never tried to steal each other’s girl,” Joe laughed. “That is, when we were chasing girls.”

“I was too tired to chase girls,” Harvey said. “So was he,” he said, gently winking at Ceile.

“But as for rapid comebacks, Harvey was always at his peak.”

“Yeah, which planes were ready and which pilots needed another mission to get back home.”

Melva then asked, “Joe...Harvey told me that you flew well beyond what you had to—why?”

When Joe was silent, Ceile spoke carefully. “He never could bear not—well, sending men into things while he was safe at Archbury.”

Joe grinned. “Before you think too highly of me did this man of yours say how he could have stayed safe at a typewriter but he flew with me?”

“Did you?” Melva asked her husband. “I mean, fly into combat? You never spoke of it.”

“Well, your husband—first husband--”

“That was my first husband, not you.”

“Flying into combat twists your guts into knots—not pretty for the underwear,” Harvey joked. “Who wants to talk about that?”

“More to it than stained underwear,” she said, gently. “But talk about it when you want to.”

“I will say for now...it was for Mike.” Both knew the loss of loved ones.

They did not spend too much time talking about the past; there was too much going on in the present and certainly in the future. Harvey described Pottle and Johnson as being “not in the groove...Jackson,” paraphrasing some funny business in *Road to Rio*. However, Harvey said, “Maybe I can gas it up a little.” Privately, he was thinking that he would insist on representing Byron Mahoney as a civilian lawyer in a military courtroom—and if Pottle and Johnson didn’t agree—then...

Of course, talk turned to Joe and Ceile’s future. Ceile was set—she was to report to the School of Evacuation Medicine at Randolph Air Force Base, now on October 1. “Me, I’ll bump around the

Pentagon a little...I am going to work on the numbers for NATO.” Briefly, Joe explained, the United States and the European countries that had leagued together all needed to contribute ground forces and money to this new undertaking for peace, but each country had the right to state how much it could contribute... “A little delicate,” Joe said. “Those that got run over by the Nazis are just beginning to come up to industrial strength, while we, the United States ended the war richer than ever. So some countries point out that we should contribute more as we have more, but others say that if we pay the bill, then we’re gonna start running over them, and round it goes...However, bean counting may agree with me...though I never could balance my checkbook.”

Harvey smiled but asked, delicately, “You think you’ll be okay Joe?”

“Even an eagle gets tired,” he said. “Hell, even gooney birds need to land.”

“Aren’t gooney birds also known as the albatross?” Melva asked.

“Much misunderstood birds,” Joe said. “Stupid looking on the ground, but in the air, a god. They can coast for several hundred miles without a single flap of their wings, just riding on top of the wind...” Joe misted into memory of flying... and recalled the words of the Ancient Mariner... “And I killed the albatross...” and forced to wear its body about his neck in punishment...to survive his shipmates and tortured by thirst and fear...until he blessed the creatures in the sea...

The evening approached 11:30 when the pub closed; announcements started at 11:29 while the customers ordered their last libation and the quartet similarly struggled to extend the time. “What is this, a dirge?” Joe finally demanded. “Hell, we’re both going back to the States and no law against us seeing each other. We’re acting as though we’re both headed for limbo.”

“Absolutely right,” Harvey said. He asked the man at the bar for a box and then presented it to Joe.

“I take it I should open it now,” Joe said and did. “Dear God,” he blurted, peeling back the last crinkled layer of the weekly *Archbury Advertiser*.

The Toby.

Robin Hood’s masked face stared back at him. Joe grinned and then suddenly teared up in joy and sadness. “Where did you find it?—I heard it had disappeared. Some souvenir grabber—“

“It was sitting in the bow window in a Sudstree junk shop. I swear it winked at me.”

“Cost much?” Joe hated the question but he was still overcome with memories that both gladdened him and tore his heart into shreds.

“Got some pence knocked off when the owner realized he called me ‘one of those demned Yanks.’”

“May I see it?” whispered Ceile. She held the old mug and though her memories weren’t as searing as her husband’s, she remembered it, and the terrible dance it did when Joe and his men were flying six

missions a day, and were dying—some literally, some figuratively of exhaustion and heartbreak. Melva, who had no connection with the piece still understood the value they placed on it.

“Harv...this belongs on the mantle of the Officer’s Club,” Joe said.

“Which is now boarded. I took it there, Joe...and put it on the mantle and stood back—and remembered so much I was nearly crying. But it has to be among the living. You take it.”

“No, you take it. You were the one doing most of the turning. Besides, you will have a home to live in. Ceile and I are pretty much gypsies still.”

“Okay. But anytime you want it, you ask for it.”

“I don’t think so, Harv. Those years were good—and so goddamned terrible. If anybody ever asks what—God, what were my best memories, I always say, ‘met damned fine people.’”

The two men then let the tears come and then dried their eyes. “Time for this caravan to move on,” Joe said. “Don’t expect us to see you off at Southampton. Brigadier Generals don’t cry in public.”

“Britt tell you that?” Harvey asked Joe, as he took his good friend’s arm as they walked out.

“He may have,” Joe said. “Sometimes those months, those years, blur together...” He needed to visit Britt when he returned to the States. The tall, one-legged, ever so slightly mocking, hectoring, demanding, at times cruel, but always protective Major General had recently suffered a mild heart attack and the news was that he had been permanently posted to the Pentagon...and was enjoying his grandchildren immensely, who were Joe’s niece and nephews by marriage.

Hugs were exchanged at the Godge Street Underground entrance. They kept their farewells light, and festive. Good to see the old Toby again. England was great wasn’t it?—except when it was raining, which was 99% of the time. Off to the land of good coffee. Farewell to the living, farewell to the dead in Cambridgeshire, under white crosses and stars of David—farewell to General Savage who still on occasion, rose up in Joe’s dreams, angry, demanding—shaming him—but salvaging him from a Flying Board, transfer, perhaps even a court martial...Harvey and Melva disappeared into the Underground and Joe and Ceile determinedly and cheerfully walked home—home not much longer.

And their new home—wherever that would prove to be—was going to have a young man in it: Frank Savage’s son, now their son.

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Joe and Ceile turned to the work of leaving. Both had an official gauntlet to run, with duties to hand off with a minimum of trouble. Because government movers would come in and pack their flat, their main concern was deciding what went, and what was pitched or offered to neighbors. They had a good laugh when they found Preux’s memorializing of Rigel’s bra in a framed bed of velvet which she had stuffed under the couch in 1945. “Wonder where Preux is now?” Ceile wondered. Some inquiries managed to

produce the information that he was still with PRO. Yes, he and Susanne had married. The bra memorial went into a box.

They communicated with both sets of parents, who were eager to meet Frankie. Plans were fluid as Ceile was to report October 1 at Randolph...and Joe waited specific reassignment. They took leave of friends and officers. Joe had intense private meetings with certain generals, and certainly with Creighton and Merriwether who had nothing new to report...on several points, though Pres was not one of them. Joe realized, more than ever, that moving back to the States was no escape from webs, mysteries, lies, cover ups...but at least he would be home.

Consultation continued with the lawyers, which necessitated Joe and Ceile find their way into the Inns of Court, a fascinating tangle of lanes and courtyards in “legal London.” It was a lovely if a confusing walk; and they glanced through 12-paned Georgian windows to glimpse 200 year old offices featuring phones and typewriters, even a few of new electric ones. Hugh Sheridan, the Beckworth Smythe attorney belonged to Grays Inn, and after they found his offices, the amount of papers and documents to wade through recalled Joe to the famous line from Henry IV Part II: “hang all the lawyers.” However, adopting a child in another country, from one parent still living, and taking the child overseas provoked a necessary concern and the skills of lawyers. However, Lady Beckworth-Smythe was so cooperative that Joe and Ceile hired a solicitor only to assure themselves that the paperwork was in order. Considering how wealthy the couple was, Joe figured some money was greasing the process.

Joe and Ceile called Frankie at Bryncote three times before they left and always asked if he had any questions. One of his question was about traveling to the States: “Will General Gallagher fly the plane?”—he recalled the few times that Joe flew him and his friends in the Little Lily. Joe told him no; and told him that he would be coming to the United States not for a while, because the case was to undergo a hearing before full custody was granted. He and Ceile had already made their depositions, because they had to be in the States by August 1.

Frankie was disappointed. “When can I come?”

“If all goes well, you will be with us by Christmas. Miss Sydney is going to come with you.” Joe imagined them all at Dusky Boughs, with the Christmas tree towering in the library, and warmly atwinkle with prized family ornaments. “What would you like...for Christmas, Frankie?” He thought it best not to say, “What would you like Father Christmas to bring you?” He recalled Sandy remarking that Santa Claus does not have much presence in orphans’ lives.

“I don’t want anything except to be with you.” He spoke these words timidly.

“We want that too. Well, another question...what would you like to call me?”

“Call you’ sir?”

Joe then said, “You could call me Joe—or Mr. Joe, and ‘Dad’ if you like.” Joe urged him not to worry about it. “However you name me will be fine with me.”

The only time that Joe and Ceile became truly sad about leaving England was selling Little Lily. Even though they had a plane waiting for them—a wedding gift from Ceile’s parents, and one which they had never actually flown themselves—the Little Lily was far more dear to them. Together they had flown places, seeing parts of England that would forever remain in their hearts. The rarefied air sometimes helped to clear the clouded air between them. The crew at the field was always welcoming. But the Little Lily was to be left behind, and even though Joe trusted the buyers. He had the image of Lily removed but had the pleasure when one of the field crew hailed him to give him a present. “Thought you might appreciate this, governor,” he said with a wink. A fairly skilled artist, he had drawn the indomitable woman who had first decorated Savage’s plane and then, like the lady for hire she represented, she had then taken up with him, and her sultry look, décolletage and long gloves had been his for a while, though he always thought she longed for her first love, Frank Savage. But she had been a brave and willing mistress to her new man...even to witnessing her new man and his woman marrying underneath her gaze. Joe and Ceile had the portrait rolled up, sealed in a tube, and packed carefully away. Someday, she would decorate a wall of honor.

A poignant moment was soon followed by a moment that might have been bad—and ended on a safely neutral moment. Not one for letting military movers take care of things—a fact was, if you left ashes in an ashtray, the movers would pack up the receptacle ashes and all—and so Ceile sorted through their clothing, personal articles, toiletry items for their own packing...and found a nylon stocking. Not her own.

No sneaking around, trying to cadge hints. When her husband arrived, she was waiting with a glass of brandy—and the stocking held up by a single finger. Joe grinned. “You found it!”

For one of the few times in her life, Ceile was, as the cliché goes, “struck dumb.” “It’s not mine.”

“It’s mine...and its mate is in my right hand lower desk drawer at work.”

“Yes, all right--?” she said.

“Julie told me to wear a stocking when my leg began swelling.”

“Oh.” Mentally, she kicked herself. Physically, she went to his arms, nylon stocking dangling down his back. “Sorry. For many things. That I wasn’t here to tell you to wear a stocking on your leg at times, which was a good idea.”

“You were on orders, my queen.”

“Yes...yes.”

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A week before their orders sent them home to the States they drove to Bryncote for one more meeting with Frankie. They brought him a new suitcase, which he gravely thanked them for. “Look Frankie,” Joe

said, taking the boy on his lap, "I am leaving this schedule and these tickets with Miss Sydney. If all goes well, you will both fly into New York on December 12. I will be there to meet you."

"Will Miss Ceile be there?"

"I will try!" Ceile said. "And I will be so happy to see you!"

"I will be too!" said Frankie, a fragile grin breaking out on his normally serious face. They hugged him and said goodbyes and waved to him, as he stood in the entryway, encircled by Sydney's arm. They walked out to their government sedan.

Ceile suddenly hugged Joe. "Oh, a child at last!" "You bet," Joe said, his arms tightening about his wife's waist and back. "No need for tears," Ceile then laughed, dabbing at his eyes with his handkerchief.

They were driving sedately down the macadam road to Hitchin when they caught sight of an auto following them, and trying to catch up with them, as a toot of the horn indicated. Joe slowed down and stopped, and the car came abreast of them. Sydney was at the wheel. They pulled off together and climbed out of their cars.

"I must tell you something about Frankie."

"Yes?" Ceile said anxiously.

"I was hoping he was over certain things. Quite a few times Frankie woke up crying, almost hysterically. When we ask him what he is scared of, he says he can't remember."

"Nothing?"

"He never says. But I sense something terrible happened to him at the Preserve. I can't make any accusations, but, well, when I was there once getting some signatures from Lady Beckworth-Smythe, the housekeeper asked me about Frankie, if he were all right. She then told me that he had been left alone more than once in that big house—oh, of course, there were the servants, but a child that young needs to be looked after constantly and, I don't think he was—Percy and I both had a Scots nurse that kept up us safe in that big pile of stones—"

"What did she tell you?" Ceile interrupted, quietly.

"The housekeeper said that...begged me not to say a word to Lady Beckworth-Smythe...The lord and lady left the boy alone in the house. Mrs. Jorham spent the night, of course, and looked in on him but she found him missing. The next morning they found him by a tree on the estate...in a dead faint it seemed, soaked to skin by rain. He seemed unharmed but he never spoke if he took off on his own or somebody...took him there." After a pause while Ceile and Joe took this in, Sydney said, "The lord could care less about his stepson, and Lady Beckworth-Smythe exudes more guilt than love. Pat Bates suggested him coming here. You can't send a three year old child to school—and coming here seemed to be good answer."

“Why haven’t you told this before?” Joe asked, not angry, but concerned.

Ceile had another question: “Did Lady Beckworth-Smythe tell you about this?”

“I am not sure she knows. I am telling you, well, you need to know, and perhaps seek help for him.”

“Thank you,” Ceile said. “We’ll take care of him...and thank you for telling us this.”

“We will see you in New York,” Joe said.

“How is Adelaide?” Ceile then asked. They said nothing, but were still curious about the note that the woman had traced for them on a dusty table, weeks earlier.

“Well, asleep,” Sydney said. “She drinks so much...but she misses my brother. I do too. But, young Chris is bright as a button, and has many admirers.”

Joe and Ceile were quiet on their return to London. Of course what they had heard did not affect their decision, but it carved a new dimension into their adoption of the young boy, and their regard for his mother which was mixed at best...they appreciated how cooperative she was about the adoption, as well as puzzled. Ceile said it well: “What is going on—and should we confront the dear lady about it?”

Joe just shook his head. “I have a feeling that...if we stay quiet on this, the adoption will go through. If we start probing it with Lady Beckworth-Smythe, she may haul him back.”

“How can a frightened child be a scandal?”

“I don’t think it’s a scandal. But I don’t know what it is...but Frankie needs our help, that’s for sure. And that help is going to be love and security.” But what happened to him—no reason to doubt Sydney’s story—was yet another disturbing thing. They both agreed that his adoption should be kept quiet...when Joe and Ceile wrote their parents about Frankie, they both asked them to be circumspect.

### Joe and Ceile: A Time for Long Ago -Ireland

On a typically misty morning, with gale warnings for the afternoon, Joseph Gallagher and Ceile O'Brien, dressed in Air Force blue, sat in the waiting room at Prestwick, Scotland. They both remembered when it was a thriving aerial hub of ferried craft, with many of the planes being brought from Belfast in Northern Ireland, across the Irish Sea to inland Scotland. Incoming soldiers and airmen and press and entertainers had come in, flown out, and then flown back. Now the few announcements made over the loudspeakers echoed off and away into a vortex of years. As they waited, the mist turned to rain and they grinned at each other. "Good old England. What a place. What history. What weather. What a brave country."

Ceile grinned. "Me forbears would be spinnin' in their graves when I say that I love England...all right, didn't get the Irish lilt right."

"My god, we never got to Ireland did we?" Joe said. "But wait, we're hopping to Belfast—I'll shine up my stars and twinkle them to get our orders changed—"

"You mean, just get off?"

"Exactly!—My queen, we have a young man coming to live with us soon, and when you are parents, things change. We also have new things to face..." They had both learned, by a letter from Irene, about certain stories being printed about the Gallagher family and those involved with them. When not getting facts wrong, or events became stretched as a taffy pull, the stories were just plain scurrilous.

"Can we take the time?"

"Yes. And we have to." Joe didn't rise to his feet, he jumped, and with Ceile watching him through the glass panes of the waiting room, he headed for the nearest phone, down the drafty corridor. She never was happier over Joe's rank when he came in, beaming, after a half hour. "New orders are being cut and telexed to Belfast. I will carry you home, Kathleen..."

"Who were your people Joe?—you don't talk about them except they come from County Tyrone—that's in the north of Eire."

"Well, talk is they were horse thieves!—and great great and so on grandfather escaped the noose by half a league—but I don't know. It's a kind of romantic story we Irish like to tell of the English landlords. Maybe great, great, and so on grandfather Eamon and his brothers my great-uncles simply got on a ship and sailed to the New World."

"Well, let's find out...about you."

### **Irene Anson Gallagher: Nets Fine and Strong – Washington DC**

Irene watched out the window of the lake cabin to see her daughter-in-law Betty entertaining young Ben as they waded around the rocks near Starfire Lake. She was helping him steer around the stones, and letting him splash in the water.

Irene then glanced at Joey in his high chair. He was industriously eating a cookie and when he saw her looking at him, smiled while saliva ran down his chin. "Let's clean you up," Irene said, easing a napkin on his tiny lips. "Well, look at those rosy cheeks and those wet shoes," she said when Ben and Betty came in the door. Ben was soon eating a cookie too, and Betty buried her nose in a cup of coffee...and wishing it were bourbon.

Betty had been expecting...some tough words...since the chief of the Anson News Service had stepped from behind her desk in Washington to take her and her two sons on a weekend by the lake. Irene had dealt with Pres's absence by remaining busy as had Max who was continuing duty in the Far East. China was in a worse mess than usual, observed from Formosa. Betty felt like a shadow next to her mother-in-law. And shadows could disappear when the lights went out...

Irene suddenly placed a bottle of the stuff in front of Betty; she knew the level had gone down in the night. "Go ahead, if you wish," Irene said.

Betty pushed the bottle away, angrily, and then seized and plunked a splash in her coffee. "Happy?" she demanded of Irene. "Is there a miniature camera in the clock taking a picture for custody purposes?"

"My old Seth Thomas? Of course, dear. Right in the pendulum. Reams of photos. Including your little excursion last night to the liquor cabinet. Of course I want to raise your children after getting you declared an unfit mother. Betty," she said with golden directness, "drinking will not help at this time."

In answer, Betty drained her cup. She then deliberately raised her head with a big smile when Ben asked for another cookie. "Of course dear." She picked up the cookie jar and it slipped from her fingers to crash on the maplewood floor. "Oh," she gasped.

Ben and the baby's eyes were riveted on the sight. The baby was too young but Ben always had a sharp, tearing memory of his mother folding over and then gasping she was all right, and even letting a jagged laugh come from her mouth for his benefit as she was helped away by his grandmother. He watched his grandmother guided his mother up the staircase. "Stay put," Irene told Ben over her shoulder, who did so, willingly, so willingly...

"Now boys, lunch," Irene said after she returned and picked up the fragments of the cookie jar. They had soup, with the baby pushing around the noodles on his highchair tray. Ben ate obediently, hoping that not dallying over soup and finishing his milk could help his mother whom he could not please. Irene left him sadly working on his coloring book, which featured pictures of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table and their adventures. He tried to keep his purple crayon within the lines of the fire-

breathing dragon... if he did, then everything would be all right. He chose a turquoise for the scales on the belly and a silver one for the crest on its head.

Two hours later Betty was lying awake, dry-eyed but wretched when Irene entered the bedroom. She had a newspaper tucked under her left arm and a mug of coffee in her right hand. "Yes?" Betty croaked, pushing herself up. "Read this," Irene said. "And here's coffee to do it with."

She sat with Betty to make sure she read it, and then did not climb out the window, or perhaps swallow a handful of pills. Betty was a faded, fragile version of herself, not that confident young woman and ex-Army Nurse Pres had brought home with him from Europe, pretty much from the frontlines where she had worked night and day over the wounded. Her second pregnancy, which was difficult, occurred in the nasty fallout of Pres's great moment. When Max and Irene came to the apartment in Washington to tell Betty about Pres's disappearance, they found the house clean, Ben tucked into bed, the baby in its crib...and Betty drunk on gin. In the days following, Betty further withdrew....she reminded Irene of how a snowflake simply disappears when it meets a warm surface.

The paper Irene handed her was printed on cheap stock, with advertisements for doubtful services. Among the nasty tidbits were stories of various congress people and their secretaries, plush mistresses, military men up to no good; traitors up to worse, and who in Washington was suspected of filthy Bolshevism and who was a homosexual. The chief article reported on the life and "reported" disappearance of General Preston Maxwell Gallagher, in the most scurrilous way possible. His wife, siblings, and parents were not spared.

First, Pres's much lauded, much criticized Albanian mission was pounced on, with the peccadillos of family life repeated. Not surprising; Preston Gallagher came from a bad tree that covered up rotten fruit with a fulsome leaves. The lives of Maxwell and Irene Gallagher were dissected. Max married Irene for her money; she was a spoiled heiress of the Anson newspaper empire, and so lazy that she scarcely lifted a finger after the business was passed onto her. Her father's paper was a rabble-rouser; it supported unions, mixing of the races, and worse...

"I know you married Max for love," Betty said, steadied with some coffee and Irene's face that told her it was now time to quit feeling sorry for herself. "And this guy doesn't realize that you have taken charge of Anson..." Irene nodded to both, though saying that she kept leadership fairly low key as it did pose certain problems for Max's career. Always had, which is why she withdrew from open journalism in the twenties and let her father's protégé conduct the business. "However, when I established television and radio connections in 1947, the word went out that I was going to get Max nominated for president in 1950. As if I want to live in the White House and be First Lady."

"That is what is implied here," Betty said, almost smiling, nervously.

Further said by the anonymous author: that Dusky Boughs, the Gallagher estate, though decrepit with age, was maintained as the family headquarters because that was where all the bodies—figuratively of course—were buried. But there were mysterious things going on there. Irene laughed a bit. "The only

mystery I recall was why everything went wrong the moment Max would leave me alone with the house. And the boys turned the house into a mysterious castle where the grail was hidden.”

“The grail?”

“The holy grail—Jeff once told me that he was so young when he and the boys commenced the game he thought they were hunting for the ‘holy whale.’ Pres and Joe and Jeff would go way out in the fields behind the house and pretended to slay dragons and fight paynims on their way to save the house, and did so always in time for lunch. I stood in for a captured princess more than once. Their grail was an old silver flask that Jeff found in the barn—you knew of it, right?” Betty nodded, adding that more than once while going through their rough courtship in North African and Europe, they would share a capful of the precious brandy within.

Irene told her that Jeff made a point of giving the flask to Pres when the brothers began scattering for Army duty. She had been pleased—and surprised--when Sandy returned the flask, leaving it with the jeweler in Archer’s Run for safekeeping, adding a note as how it had come to be in his possession. Pres has been surprised and a little suspicious when Betty gave to him at the airport. “Well, keep reading,” Irene urged.

Betty read that Max made her break her engagement with another West Point officer, who never recovered. “Lord,” Irene snorted. “We were never engaged. And he was after my money, not Max. Max didn’t even know who I was when we fell in love.”

Betty read again. “You refused to be a faithful loyal wife of an army officer and stayed behind in Connecticut, lapping up the good life and having affairs...you know Irene, Pres did tell me that you and Max almost divorced, but decided to, what did he say—‘withstand separation.’ And he never had one doubt that you were faithful to your husband...”

Irene said, “I decided that the boys’ health superseded the objective of a wife showing her faithfulness by exposing their children to all kinds of disease. Joe nearly died in Panama...”

The article became uglier. Max had used his wife’s money to buy good assignments. Though it didn’t, Irene said, explain how Panama Canal duty was in any way a plum. It held some glamor as the United States triumphantly united the oceans, but it was hot, disease ridden, and boring duty, punctuated by the screams of the howler monkeys in the surrounding jungles. The article reported that Max was court martialled for fighting with other officers over their wives, or their women. “No, desk drawer reprimands over defending my name and honor,” Irene said. “I can produce those.”

There was more. Irene’s money also greased the three boys’ selection for West Point. They even made one boy go who didn’t want to go, Jeff, who ended up last in his class. “Downright lie,” Irene nearly snarled. “He was near the top. Now Joe was actually nearer the bottom!—Max didn’t care, pointing out that U.S. Grant didn’t do so hot either and Eisenhower was not anywhere near the top anyway. George Patton was top of his class but he was also a snitch—Max got in his sights once and never forgot it.”

Then: Throughout the thirties, the Gallagher boys whooped it up at plum assignments—Joe, though testing badly, was still made a pilot, though he cracked up two training planes at Randolph. When Betty glanced at Irene for confirmation, Irene nodded. “But only one, not two. The plane had mechanical failure, that was proven and Joe was cleared from any fault.” Pres was too stupid to be a pilot, and so entered the infantry. (“Wrong, he wanted to be in the infantry. It was his first request.”) The youngest son was the only one qualified to be a good officer, but unfortunately, he was at Bataan—probably deliberately on the other side of the world away from his brothers and father, in the States and eventually in Europe. “Sympathy for the departed,” sneered the author of the article.

Back to Max. He abused his adjutant, the adjutant’s wife and his son, refusing to let the boy play with his own boys; subordinate officers’ children could not do such things. He tried to prevent his adjutant’s son from being selected and trained as an officer and a pilot. When this same boy came under the command of Joseph Gallagher, who was suspected of downing his own CO—by giving recognition codes to the Luftwaffe—the unfortunate young man went down over Poland, after being threatened for failing to achieve Gallagher’s objective. Death rather than dishonor... By now, Betty was looking a bit dazed. “Good lord!”

“It gets better or worse, depending on whose side you are on.”

Worse: Joe Gallagher also displayed behavior of a homosexual...gave preference to handsome young men...provided they progressed through his bed... Betty threw the paper down, though she was familiar enough with the strategy of turning a man’s manliness the other way around...a guy who preferred to be with his men... could only be hiding his real identity. “I seem to recall that Joe got married.”

“Yes, but like his father, married an heiress, whose own avoidance of marriage until she was thirty surely indicates something about her as well...of course, revived are rumors that she and Sandy, her husband’s handsome young aide—you met him in North Africa and at Bryncote--were screwing around—with some hints that Sandy was in both beds.”

Betty made a sick noise. “Irene, I’m convinced, I don’t have to read anymore—”

Irene quickly reviewed the rest of the article to the last, bitter, drop. Joe’s being nearly killed in London was in revenge for an affair with the wife of a Viscount who had since disappeared supposedly shortly after he made his accusation; his flying in the Berlin Airlift was a lark, as well as keeping busy with some very willing frauleins; moreover, he was obviously in cahoots with a Soviet officer who was suspected of poisoning certain members of the US military...he had arranged for Pres’ defection.

“Vorodenko,” Betty remembered, from Bryncote. “A bit startling, but nice.” She lurched up—went to the bathroom, and returned, a bit pale. “Defection. Not Pres. This thing, this article, is why you brought us here, right?”

“You and Ben love the cabin and the lake, I know. It might make this a little easier.”

“Oh, Irene, I’m so sorry...”

“Don’t be a sorry about a thing concerning you and Pres. All marriages have difficulties...some more than others,” she then added after Betty’s face sagged even further.

“Well, I failed Pres in certain ways...but dammit Irene, I think he failed me in certain ways too.”

Irene was silent for a time. “I understand,” she then said. “Pres is the only boy I ever cried over.”

“Why is that?” Betty asked Irene, hours later.

The two women had to leave their painful conversation to tend to the children. By seven o’ clock, the two boys had been fed and bathed with the nearly four year old Ben delighted by being washed up in the harvest sink, in a small tin tub. Betty, stunningly calm—but Irene knew the calm that can descend on you when you pass through a gauntlet, whether physical or emotional—paid loving attention to her two little men, admired Ben’s dragon, colored purple and green, and read him to sleep. Irene poured out two glasses of brandy and they sat out on the deck in the small light of a citronella candle to ward off the mosquitoes. Having brandy was a kind of test for Betty, whom Irene suspected of being a “morbid alcoholic”—her body didn’t demand drink as much as her emotions did. Betty smiled carefully at the amber liquid as they sat down in the twin deck chairs and continued their conversation. “Why did you cry over Pres?”

“Because...Pres could never really be himself. He was the oldest, the strongest, the most determined—and kind of subverted his own desires to serve me and his two younger brothers.”

“You always spoke of how helpful he was...”

“He was. He was a great help to me and it made life easier. But Pres wanted to please his father more than please me, I think. He and Pres were very close out of necessity. We had Pres and planned, like enlightened young people, to wait for a couple of years before having another. Well, I got pregnant again when Pres was only nine months old and when Joe was born, I had to take care of him, while Max took Pres under his wing. When Max and I decided that I would stay at home while he took duty wherever he was sent Pres took it hard, but rather than acting up or becoming a rebel he tried to take Max’s place. I think he felt—the way children do and you don’t realize or hear about it until years later—that he felt he was to blame for us not being together and then tried to make it up to me...and took over the boys—“

“I spoke with Joe—there at Magadar,” Betty interrupted. “He spoke so lovingly of Pres—I remember...he said that Pres would learn things and then come home and teach them, or something like that...Joe was just lovely about Pres!”

“Joe adores Pres. Always had and always does. But, Joe was also his own boy. If Pres had something he wanted to learn, Joe was there, all ears. If not, he went flipping off. Not cruelly, thoughtlessly perhaps... yes, thoughtlessly. Jeff was there every moment for Pres, even when he didn’t particularly want to be. I think he knew that Pres needed him.” Irene smiled, sadly as the long-gone Jeff came close in her memories. “Jeff seemed to have second sight...when Jeff received his orders for Clark Field, he had their initials engraved on that flask—that had served as the grail when they were boys--and gave it to Pres. It

was almost as if Jeff knew..." Irene stopped herself. "Joe was just his own boy which kind of fascinated Max when not driving him up the wall. Pres and Max were pals and partners, but looking back, Joe was kind of this golden boy to Max."

"And Pres resented it."

"He said he didn't when I asked him. Once I asked him at a terrible time—he was helping me with the dishes while Joe took off with his date, a girl that Pres fancied, but didn't let on—"

"Goddammit!" Betty lurched to her feet. "Teenage crisis. That's, that's—shit--What does he have to resent? Pres was a hero at Magadar—his men loved him and, and, he went on to command in Europe! Made rank by 35 and he's a general!—maybe his younger brother was a flyboy, and got his star before Pres, but that's, that's chickenfeed!—or chickenshit." She finished off the brandy with a gulp.

"It's Cain and Abel," Irene said, actually approving Betty's anger.

"I'm not very religious," Betty muttered. "My father thought that Christianity was...well, bunk."

"You don't have to be religious to know that story—two brothers, one who resented the other for being favored. It ended in murder. Like many myths, it touches on the realities of the human condition—family tensions of jealousy, envy—and even murder. Like Joe and Pres, they were different...one farmed...as Pres stayed on the ground. The other hunted, as Joe hunted out the enemy in the skies."

Betty stared at Irene, alarmed, the brandy making her imagination go jagged and Irene was on her feet, catching Betty's wrist. "Murder is not an issue here, but the problems between brothers are always with us. And the way I see things, Pres's disappearance might be part of this. I don't think he ran away from you Betty; I could see how he loved you. But the debacle with the Albanian mission, despite being successful, and—the shit—he was taking for promoting integration in the Army--and Joe's glamorous profile as one of the guys in the airlift, maybe was the final straw—for himself, not you and the boys."

"Is Pres really that childish?" Betty asked.

"We all have a stamping, screaming child in us... In Pres's case, perhaps the child finally got into control. Maybe it's due him. He put childhood away when he was eight."

"And perhaps not."

Her mother-in-law looked at her, glad to see Betty...finally, maybe...come to Pres' defense. "No, Pres is not...that childish. I can see or understand his envy of Joe...I don't rule it out...but could Pres be in some kind of official capacity? You know...undercover...as questionable as that word is."

"I have wondered too. In the kind of world we're living in, we can't rule out anything."

"Are you trying to find out if I do?" Betty asked.

"Of course not." Irene's voice was gentle with experience and wisdom.

“Then what are we—what’s the point of this newspaper article? I know there’s always backstabbing in Washington—but this is over the top.”

“Prelude to blackmail. I received a letter from this shithead demanding money or he would publish another article, proving that Pres went over to the Russians, or Joe Gallagher sold out his brother to the Russians for information.”

“Sold him out for what—I mean, what kind of information?” Betty asked.

“Heaven knows, or maybe hell only knows.”

“You’d pay him?”

“I don’t pay money for a pig in a poke.”

Betty looked at her mother-in-law with increased respect. Irene’s pretty, smooth face had become sphinx-like: mysterious and hard as stone. And this stone was challenging her.

They both heard a car pull up. Betty got up and peered around the corner. Irene recalled that the loaded pistol was in the secretary, kept locked against the searching hands of little boys. She stood ready.

“Who is it?” she asked, in a controlled voice

“I think,” Betty said, “it’s Ursula O’Brien.”

“Hallelujah!” Irene said. She met Ursula on the porch for a hug, and then hastened her into the golden interior of the cabin as the mosquitoes were rising. They closed the unscreened windows and turned on fans to fight the stuffiness. Ursula was soon chuckling over a jigger of brandy, “Well, old home week huh? I haven’t been here since that memorable midnight conversation back in May 1945.” She nodded to Betty who was politely waiting. “We slapped each other!”

“For good reason,” Irene assured Betty. “Ursula, you know Betty from the wedding at Bryncote, even though she was laid up after delivering Max. And Betty, we hope this lady has good news.”

“I do, indeed. I have an address.” Ursula pulled an envelope out of her purse.

Irene recognized a street in the Tenleytown area that could only be described as down at heels: once fine hotels going to seed, and attracting similar clientele. “As you said, follow the rat droppings,” Ursula said. “While my husband dickered with the FAA over Long Island flight paths, I started asking some questions of the people you suggested, and this address came up with astonishing speed.”

“Thank you. You know I would have done this but—“

“People would have recognized you and passed word along the rat line. Am I going with you?”

“You are going with **us**,” Irene said, nodding to include Betty.

“Go where?” Betty asked.

"To beard the rat in his trap," Irene said.

Betty nodded at the two older women. "I will arrange for a sitter. When are we leaving?"

"Day after tomorrow," Ursula said. "We will fly to Washington from the county airport. What are we taking in way of armor?"

"A gun, unfortunately. But we are also armed with the truth, or the search for truth."

### Joe and Ceile: A Time for Long Ago - Kinnelough, Ireland

They had only three days in Ireland, but those were a rare three days in their lives. It was interval between years of war, a harsh and fragile peace, separation both bitter and sweet, and stepping back into lives both old and new back in the States. It also laid open a few mysteries...some of which hooked onto other mysteries and remained mysteries when Joe and Ceile lay side by side in the Resting Place...

Stepping off the C-47 transport in wet, windy Belfast gave them delicious feelings of hooky, which grew warmer over pints of black beer, foaming with Guinness richness. "What shall we do?" Joe asked Ceile. "Have another round," she said. "And then find a car to rent." The pubkeeper, hearing their American voices, got into conversation with them and they learned about the brief but rich history of the US Armed Forces in Northern Ireland. President De Valera of The Republic of Ireland lodged a protest with the US Embassy that the Irish government feared invasion by the US Army, allied with Great Britain. However, when an American plane crash-landed near Galway, only the British officers on board were interned, not the Americans. Yank soldiers in Ulster were handed booklets alerting them to the political situation between the north and the south, and the IRA had beaten some American soldiers, incidents which drew a few lines in the sand. But, all in all, Northern Ireland was an excellent bridgehead for many American forces in training, quite a few of whom married Irish girls... Entertainers, on their way to the troops also routed through as did journalists. John Steinbeck and Ernie Pyle left autographed photos behind in the pub that that they were drinking in. They saw them on the walls.

The next morning, they first paid their respects at the United States military cemetery in Ligmabreeny; Joe recognized a name from the 511<sup>th</sup>. In a rented Ford, they traveled down criminally narrow roads flanked by insanely green pastures. They drove by stone cottages, some thatched. Cattle and sheep grazed in the heavy fields marked by rock hedges. The purplish blue sky was serene.

Clad in civilian clothes, Joe and Ceile enjoyed the scenery from the vantage of their automobile, but knew they were looking at a poor hard country, the fortunes of which had been whipsawed by the Norsemen, the British, the Spanish, and marked by the "troubles" of famine, poverty, colonial rule, and people fleeing anywhere to escape the draconian British laws, educate their children, eat. Joe jokingly apologized to Ceile for his people originating in Northern Ireland, the British free state since 1922, while her family originated in Cork, in the South. "Back in those days, didn't matter," she said, sipping tea poured from a Thermos.

She concentrated on the map when they stopped at a wet crossroads; Emiskillen was their first objective, and from there onto Oumagh, and then beyond. They were seeking a place called Kinnelough, which was not a town but the remains of a place the Gallagher brothers had left for the colonies. Joe had not carried this information in his head. The first night in Belfast, after a great deal of difficulty, got a phone call through to Washington, and when that went unanswered, nervously called Dusky Boughs, and then Washington again, and got his father...who immediately demanded, "Anything about Pres?"

"No, Dad," Joe said, and admitted that he and his wife were taking a private break to visit their old country...he couldn't remember the name of the Gallagher home place. Max overcame his disappointment to wish them luck in their search...and to have a good time in the old sod.

After stopping for lunch in Oumagh, and with a recommendation for a hotel of sorts, they drove into the shallow river valley of Eermanagh. Three times they stopped bicyclists, and once a farmer on a wagon to ask about the village that Max recalled as Brigitick.

“What?” Ceile said upon hearing the name. “But I guess everyplace can’t be called ‘Innisfree,’” she added, the name of the lake isle in William Butler Yeats’ famous poem.

Not one person could locate the place, and all spoke with deeply regional accents that neither Joe nor Ceile could fully comprehend. “They probably could not understand us, either,” Ceile remarked, consulting the map. “The place might have only been a hovel.”

The fine afternoon gave over to a sudden squall that would have put an Indian monsoon to shame. Through streaming water so heavy the windshield wipers could not fight back, Joe managed to glimpse a solid white stone house by the side of the road, adorned with a simple sign, in green and gold: Hotel.

“Ah, and what a wettin’ you pair lambs have suffered,” cried the proprietor of the establishment, ushering the soaked pair into the parlor where a small fire burned. “It’ll be tea you’re needin’,” and soon returned with a tray with tea and cakes. “Thank you, for being a lifesaver,” Joe said, taking his cup.

“Americans, you are,” he then cried, introducing himself as Peter O’Malley... of Savannah, Georgia. “Figure you’d pick up the drawl eventually,” he admitted in plain American.

“What is your story?” Ceile asked, directly but with a smile.

“I received a letter from a solicitor saying I had fine property left to me here, and since I had nothing in 1936 I came here and found the property less than fine. I fixed it up into a hotel getting loans on the story that I was a Yank millionaire—the first time I laid claim to such an identity—and it keeps me here, though I must say I miss central heating and making phone calls whenever you want, unlike here when you have to wait while the single girl in at the nearest telephone exchange has her elevenses and then her cuppa at two—one hour each. Would you like to buy a hotel?”

“Thanks, but no,” Joe chuckled, knowing the guy, for all his cheerfulness, meant it. “We’re here to see what we can learn about my family. Family members left here in 1690 to go to America. Since I haven’t signed in the name is Gallagher. I’m Joe and this is my wife, Ceile O’Briean.”

“The Gallaghers?” O’Malley asked. “Eoghain, Eamon, and, and, another brother?”

“Why, yes.”

“Well, wadda ya know,” he crowed and dashed out. Cups of tea in hand, they watched and listened to their host excitedly crank an old wall phone and wait...and wait...until he finally secured a voice: “Dion, at long last, we got a Gallagher here!—uh—” He listened to Joe repeat his name. “Joseph Gallagher, from the States. Yes, he’s spending the night!” He clicked the phone down and said, “You are, right?”

“We are now!”

While waiting for Dion Kilreen to arrive, Joe and Ceile were shown into a room, meticulously clean but Spartan with a bed, a desk and a chair, and an oil lamp. Facilities down the hall. The squall had passed and gentle sunlight was falling on the shoulders of a man who came wheeling in, managing a tandem bicycle by himself. Whisking his tweed cap off his bald head, he seized Joe's hand with a hearty grasp. "At last, one of the Gallaghers!"

"I guess," Joe laughed, surprised and excited. After introducing his wife, who was greeted effusively as well when she identified herself as an O'Briean originally from Cork.

By now they all had shot glasses full of Irish whiskey in their hands and clinked them together as they settled into chairs around the fire. Joe led the way, saying, "Are we that famous? Or maybe infamous?—there was a family story that the three brothers barely made a ship to avoid being hanged as horse thieves. When you give it some thought, considering that the nearest port is Ulster, the men after them must have put great stock in the horse to chase them so far...unless it is a family story, somewhat inflated by time and distance."

"The ship outran tenders put out to stop her. Documented by the watch whom the lord promised a reward if they could bring the brothers back though it was already too late, apparently, and the lord knew it. What else do you know of them—your ancestors that is?"

"Ahh..." Joe paused. "Well, my immediate family descended through the middle brother, Eamon. I know far more about their lives in the colony of Connecticut. My family, uh, 'estate,' was originally a tavern and an inn they built in the early eighteenth century near the town of Archer's Run. They lived respectable lives it seemed and their bodies were the first in the cemetery behind the house...the former tavern and inn. I guess all I really know is that they stole a horse...or horses from the local lord." Joe then even wondered about that. When he was a kid...the idea that his ancestors were horse thieves was exciting, glamorous!—but could be the bad guys in the Saturday matinee western. He wondered, for the first time, if the brothers left anybody behind—wives, siblings? Did they have to suffer for the boys' crime? "Can you tell us anything else?" he then asked Kilreen, busily stoking his pipe. "Was family left behind?"

"We know that their parents had died, well before the boys were fully grown. No, there were no other siblings, at least living. No wives or children were known of. Their farm had been sold for taxes by their English landlord who had built his fine large house on such money, and right over the village of Brigitick, which he first levelled because it was fashionably set on 'rising ground.' So the brothers either faced a hand to mouth existence or they had to be daring...yet they only stole one horse."

"A prize one, I would think," said Ceile.

"Actually, not. The saddlebags seemed their chief concern. The outraged lord was rumored to have made a deal with the devil to get back that saddlebag."

Joe did not laugh. Kilreen's face was not serious, but it was far from facetious. "Do you know what was in these saddlebags...?" Joe asked.

“Do you believe the story?” Kilreen asked.

“Well, no, not exactly,” Joe said. “It’s not that I disbelieve you. But this is the first time I have heard about...saddlebags being of interest. We only heard about a horse being stolen.”

Ceile smiled at Joe’s effortless combination of charm, thoughtfulness, and wariness.

“Well, what those saddlebags carried—is not known, or clearly known. As all mysterious things, I’m sure it was exaggerated, including the two brothers riding the horses to its death, to the lord making a deal with the devil to get whatever it was back—which was rumored to be—well many things, from leprechaun gold to Spanish jewels. But recorded are many statements of fear and concern about the owner’s house, or, mansion. The English lord continued to live there, but his descendants left it, within two generations.”

Ceile had another question, which made some sense. “Were all three brothers riding the horse?”

“Ah! No, two rode the horse. One brother had been sent on ahead to Ulster to arrange for passage. The horse was then sold to pay for such. You can’t sell a dead horse. The lord arrived the next day in a coach and four seeking the brothers, and when he learned they had sailed—returned home.”

The late afternoon, like an Irish day, became sunny and Dion Kilreen suddenly shouted “Landlord! Mine host! You have a couple of bikes for these fine specimens of Irish descent. We have the time and the inclination to see Winnamaguh.”

“See what?” Joe asked.

“The fine mansion of the English lord. No need to call ahead; it’s a derelict.”

“Can they handle your tandem Dion?—you can borrow my bicycle.” He then thrust flashlights, or torches, into their hands.

For two agile people, the tandem took its toll on Joe and Ceile until they finally mastered balancing and pedaling with each other...after a spill, thankfully on a sweep of glistening grass. Joe had been through too much to be embarrassed, but he heard Ceile swearing under her breath. She asked to pedal first, and then was not very good at it; with Joe back in the front seat, and coaching her, they finally started down the gravelly road, narrow as a ribbon, and then, at a junction hardly to be seen, they followed Kilreen down an even narrower road, which was a little more than a track made by carriage wheels. It was not easy going, and Joe and Ceile kept up more out of stubbornness than desire. This was beginning to seem a picturesque but useless expedition, though its sudden strangeness was very attractive. The road wound down into a tiny river valley, and then climbed up a hill, which, when topped, Windy Magoo, set back some quarter mile on the rising ground, came into view.

Joe’s whistle said it all. The abandoned mansion, made of dressed stone, dominated the bluff. This was no made-over castle like Bryncote, but a graceful seventeenth-century mansion of classical dimensions,

with two stone pillars supporting the pediment. The gray walls extending on either side of the portico held six 12-pane windows. But not a fragment of glass remained.

“Can we go in?” Ceile asked. She and Joe climbed off the double seater and propped it against the front terrace. They were both fascinated with the house as any normal person is of an abandoned mansion; spooks and romance flowing from its windows, the growth closing in, the pediment carved with Maenads and Bacchantes shaking timbrels in celebration of a naked Bacchus who held a cup of wine.

“If you so wish,” said Kilreen, moving up the great steps. He had a hard time unlocking the chain on the door. He and Joe both pushed at it, and with a suitable groan, it opened out, releasing air thick with mold, dirt, and decay.

The interior of the ground floor was fairly well lighted as sun came through western windows. The light illuminated a handsome staircase and spacious salons, as well as ruin: fallen chunks of plaster, rotted woodwork, walls stained from time and weather. The only part that seemed to survive was a pure Baroque painting on the oval ceiling of the main salon: though dim with dirt and mold Joe, with two flashlight beams, could make out a florid tribute to Prometheus who had secured fire from heaven to gift mankind with it. Its central scene, Prometheus handing off a flower of fire to a young man, was ringed with six images of the beneficial nature of fire, and then six of its destructive side. Behind Prometheus lurked Pandora, holding the infamous chest of sorrows, sent to man by the gods in revenge for man now having their heavenly power of light and heat.

Ceile stared at the painting and said, “Prometheus stole fire from Olympus.”

“What?” Joe asked.

“Like the brothers...stealing something of incredible value.” She then paused, and squinted at the box in Pandora’s hands. She then made a face. “I can’t stand the mold. I will wait outside.”

Joe turned to Kilreen. “Do you know why the place was abandoned?—no more heirs, or enough money to get...the hell away?”

“It was said that no one who lived here was happy,” said Kilreen. “After eighty years, no family member ever crossed the threshold again.”

They could not proceed much further; to continue might possibly send them into the cellars through rotten floors, and being knocked down with something falling. With some relief they issued out to the massive terrace. “Ceile?” Joe called he did not see his wife. He felt a moment’s fear—and then heard Ceile’s voice calling from a thicket. “Here! Down here!”

“Are you all right?” Joe demanded, coming off the terrace and heading to a enormous clump of blackthorn. Kilreen followed him. Ceile, scratched, and delighted, gestured for Joe to join her. “Look familiar?” she demanded. Her eyes were dancing...Joe for a second thought he glimpsed a flicker of blue green light...

“An old Celtic worship place,” Kilreen said. “There are stories that blue green light arises from them, but I have never seen it...not that I wait around for such things. We need to go, there is rain coming.” They hurried back as they could and were caught once more in rain.

“Maybe the brothers fled because they got tired of being wet,” Joe shouted to Ceile as they pedaled furiously.

“Maybe the saddlebags carried the only towels in the county,” Ceile shouted back. Far from looking drenched and tired, she was glowing.

Ceile and Joe changed clothes and warmed up again at the fire in the tiny fireplace, and heard and smelled agreeable odors coming from the kitchen. They soon had pints of Guinness in their hands and Kilreen sat to the side, extending his feet to the fire and savoring his pipe.

“I’m going to guess what the brothers stole,” Joe suddenly said. “The flask.”

“The flask?” Kilreen asked.

“My brother Jeff found it in the old carriage house. Heavy, made of silver. It was about six inches. We pretended it was the grail until our parents found it and said it was too valuable to play with.”

“Are ye still in possession of it?—your family that is?”

Joe had to think... down all the months and years with their changes, the violence, the surprises both good and bad...back at the lone spot in the Black Forest, back in the fall of 1945, he had shared brandy with Pres, pocketed the flask—and then gave it to Sandy, who was staying in the field while he had to get the hell back to St. Laurent sur Mer. Irene had written him that Sandy had returned the repaired flask—and Betty gave to her husband at Washington Airport before...Pres disappeared. “Yes, but I am not sure where it is, at this moment.”

“Ah. Let me tell you one of the legends about the thing in the saddlebag. Some say it was the grail.”

Ah. “Well, a flask and a grail are similar in that both contain...liquid,” Joe ventured.

Ceile then asked about the name of the mansion, “Winnamaguh.” Dion then spelled out how the place was inscribed in county land records: Windy Magoo, though he also seen the name spelled Windo Magus. Joe saw her mentally studying the name.

After dining with Kilreen, who regaled them with other local stories, Joe and Ceile went to bed. As Joe was winding their travel clock, and Ceile warming up the bed, she suddenly sat up.

“I’ve been thinking about the little bit of Celt I know. Do you know...I think...Windy Magoo of Windo Magus might mean ‘white field’.”

“Yes?” Joe prompted, knowing there was more.

“My Aunt Victoria is a Whitfield. There were Irish connections...”

"I thought she was English...well, if her family were the landlords...and let's not go any further," she said, lying down next to him...

Afterwards, they stayed awake whispering about things...how Bryncote had a legend of blue-green lights, as did Windy Magoo...patterns of stars in a necklace...a flask, somewhere, which apparently had a terrific history...Joe finally said, "Oh, I'm tired," and shifted to his side. Ceile nestled in beside him

In the morning Kilreen came back to wish them godspeed and farewell. Ceile then asked, pointedly about something he had not named. "Was the English family built the house named Whitfield?"

"The muckamuck who built it had Helton somewhere in all the furbelows of a lord's title. However, his wife's maiden name was Whitefield. He named the place for her. Windo magus."

Ceile, on their way back to Ulster, finally recognized the images she had seen on Pandora's box: it was the same image as on the Turkish Necklace. The constellation of Orion...she could not tell if the Horsehead Nebula was also within. She held the information to herself. No reason telling Joe. It was just another mystery. Maybe someday, it would be time to talk about all the mysteries. Right now...she was tired, and wanted to get home, and check into this business of "living normally."

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Joe and Ceile landed at Mitchel Air Force Base on Long Island. The O'Brieans were on holiday in Canada at Cane's favorite fishing hole, so they took a taxi to the nearest LIRR station to catch a train to New York and then another to Washington D.C. Clutching their B-4 bags (the rest of their luggage was going to catch up with them via Air Force transport), they climbed off the train into Washington's cathedral-like train station the next morning. They had spent the night in New York, using the wonderful amenities to clean up and change into civilian clothes, and thus they arrived in Washington.

Before they took three steps toward the taxi stand, Joe's hand, clasped with Ceile's, then clamped. "Is that your mother?"

Ceile followed his eyes...looked, and then said, "Is that **your** mother?"

"And they seem to be with my sister-in-law."

"Well, come on," said Ceile, tugging at his hand.

"Did you tell them to meet us here?"

"Of course not...my mother should be in Canada with Dad..."

They both watched the three women whose body movements revealed, even at a distance, plans, objectives, nervousness.

"Ceile, you mind going on home..?"

"I do. That's my mother too."

“All right. Let’s go.”

“After them?—as in following them?”

“Yep.”

“Okay, Danzo,” she sighed but with some excitement. They fled out into the line of taxis...quickly...and Joe took a hint of pleasure in telling their driver to “follow that taxi” to which Ceile appended “Taxi number 8809.” Even the driver hitched up his bored shoulders at this request, and wheeled into traffic... Washington, despite being the capital of the world—in rivalry with Moscow—was surprisingly small, and quickly the taxi darted into the artery leading to Tenleytown. Ceile was eyeing the meter and mentally calculating if they would have enough to pay the driver. She glanced at Joe, whose gray-hazel eyes met hers, and they knew they were on the same wavelength; parents notwithstanding, money was still an issue; but hell, if they got through some of the things they had been through, money was...just money. But it was a reminder that they were in the civilian world.

When the meter clicked \$8.50, the driver eased on the brakes... “There they go,” he said over his shoulder, bringing the taxi to a stop. The first had turned into a small street fronting a row of old buildings slowly being torn down to lie in ruins before being replaced. “You’d be noticed if you followed them in there,” the driver said. “The clientele here rarely arrive in taxies, and two of them at the same time would prop up the worst wino into noticing.”

“Thanks,” Joe said.

“Should I stay?”

“Yes, please...in the back.” He hoped this would be a useful request.

They entered the hotel, part flophouse, part inexpensive lodging; former gentility lurked in the old velvet drapes and brocade furniture. The elevator was an old cage affair, and it was just coming down. Despite the stuffy smoked up interior Joe caught of whiff of his mother’s perfume which was a cross between roses and starched linen. Ceile inquired at the desk: “Three women? Where did they go? Which room?”

The desk manager looked troubled until Joe said, in his best imitation of a cop... “Tell us, sir.”

The desk manager only looked more troubled, but eased up with a five dollar bill that Ceile pushed at him. The desk manager then looked at the ten dollar bill handed to him by the gracious middle aged lady with lovely perfume, decided against asking for more. “Room 405. Don’t worry, no phone calls.”

“Good.” Joe took Ceile’s arm and they headed for the stairs.

The elevator took its time because Joe and Rigel were topping the landing as the heavy cage doors groaned and opened—on three women’s faces. They lit up with shock at seeing son and daughter.

Joe motioned “Quiet!”—and they nodded. The two parties had a lot to discuss and yet nothing but curiosity, on both sides, ruled the moment. “Okay Mom, what gives?” Joe whispered. “Ditto,” said Ceile.

“Josh McGraw is in Room 405,” Irene said. “And we have a few things to ask.”

“I have a few things to ask too,” he began.

“After us,” Ursula interrupted. “Ladies first.”

“About what?” Ceile asked.

“Me and my family,” Irene said. “It’s gonna stop, here and now—”

“All right,” Joe said. “You don’t need my permission Mom, but keep the door open. I want to listen.”

“We want to listen,” Ceile added.

The five people reassembled...and Irene, gloves off in more ways than one, knocked at the door.

Finally a voice called, “Who’s there?”

“Somebody you once trusted,” Irene said, briskly. “Josh, open up.”

And...he did. His tired eyes saw three women, attempted to close the door, but six hands took control and pushed themselves into the furnished room, soiled but completely, utterly tidy. Even the water glass at the sink glittered.

The man himself was untidy. Unshaven for three days, longish hair, and a soiled robe covered what was probably a naked body. His bare feet stood on newspapers, which formed a path on the soiled carpet to the sink, the closet, the bed. “Yeah?” he enunciated.

On cue, the women fanned out. Betty saw, through the slightly ajar door, Joe and Ceile waiting.

Irene pointed at the newspaper. “Your work?”

“Sure. When it’s not wrapping fish, it makes great toilet paper. Would you ladies like a drink?”

“Sure,” Ursula said. Then with a “give me that,” she seized the bottle and one of the glasses. She poured him a drink and offered it to him. He swallowed, meeting her eye. She nodded and he poured out a dab of the stuff for herself and the two others.

He sat down on the smooth bed. “So, talk, please...ladies.”

“My contacts have led us to you as a writer for the D.C. Insider.”

“Don’t like the family linens washed in public, huh...?”

“Not a bit if I trusted the laundryman,” Irene said.

“Ah, the power of metaphor...you...well, you want a retraction?”

“In that stinking rag?” Betty spit.

“She talks—so, you’re not drunk all the time?” Josh said.

“Far better than you,” she responded.

“Drinking or speaking? You’re as stupid as—“

Irene’s hand backslapped him, once across each cheek.

His hand flew to his face. “Do that again—“

“What? You’d kill me?” Irene taunted. “I’d kill you first.”

“Don’t think she won’t,” said Betty.

“Ah, go away,” he said, standing up unsteadily and turning around. Ursula merely went up to him and pushed him down; drink probably did the rest because he tumbled to the floor... and lay there.

“It’s a trick,” said Ursula when Irene went up to him and touched his shoulder.

“No worry,” she said, gesturing with her pistol. “I have him covered.”

“More elegant lines,” Josh said—slowly sitting up. “Ladies, I...I am too damned tired...”

“Sit on the bed,” Irene instructed him.

He did so. Irene, standing over him—right hand holding her pistol steady and sure, while her left tipped up Josh’s chin. “Talk,” she said.

“About what?”

“About why...you don’t seem to remember that I was your friend once. So were Joe, Pres, Jeff and Max. The summer of 1932, remember? You spent it with us.”

“Yeah, and went home in the fall—you know how I begged you not to—“

“You still had your parents,” Irene said, gently. “Your mother begged you to return.”

“Treated her like shit,” Josh said. “Mom, my mom. Shouldn’t have—“

“No. Josh, you had a life that could have been much better. Part of it is your fault, and part of it is others. But this—“ she showed him the articles. “We don’t deserve this.”

He was silent.

“Why?” Irene asked.

“Blackmail. Me. I’m being blackmailed.”

Irene breathed out and looked at the other two women. Both superbly strong in their own ways, they admired Irene’s cautious but sure disarming of the man.

“I won’t ask what about,” Irene said. “But it can’t be more terrible—than writing this kind of shit.”

“Want me to stop?” Josh demanded. He fumbled for and lighted a cigarette; Irene finally had to guide his second match to his lips.

Then, “Yes, goddammit, I want you to stop.”

“Stop what got me blackmailed in the first place?”

Ursula said, “We can find out and blackmail you. Maybe we already know.”

“I doubt it. All right...no more writing...but tell me how am I gonna support myself?” Irene took a one hundred dollar bill out of her pocket and gave it to him. “I may go and buy liquor with this.”

“Drink yourself to death if you want,” she said. “It would solve some problems. But...it wouldn’t make me happy. Only ending this will. And you can’t find happiness hurting people.”

“All right Mrs. Gallagher,” he whispered.

There seemed nothing left to do but to leave...into Joe and Ceile’s quiet faces. Joe’s eyes motioned them to leave. They nodded and took the elevator. Joe stared at them at all and thought he had never seen Betty so grave—and so beautiful. He winked at his mom.

“Joe, is it a good idea to go in there now?” Ceile asked.

Even though the door was closed, Joe heard the cock of a gun and without a single thought more he flung the door open to see Josh holding the gun in his mouth. “NO!” shrieked Ceile, but it was too late...but the gun merely clicked on an empty chamber.

Joe knocked the gun from his hands...and it went off, and Josh jackknifed, with a screech. Ceile snatched up the gun—and then cursed herself for touching it. She put it down, not knowing what to do. The hotel was already seething with cries and hums and feet dashing about. Three sets of eyes met each other and Joe made a sudden decision that he doubted was the best but his gut had proven right before. “Lock the door,” he instructed Ceile. She did so. She then ripped the case off a pillow, wadded it up and pressed it on Josh’s right leg, shot below the knee. Joe ripped another pillowcase into ribbons and she swiftly secured them.

“I think it’s only a graze,” Ceile said. But it was bleeding enough.

“Josh, no shit, we’re going out the window.”

“Okay. Dammit, get the gun.”

Ceile scooped it up and stashed it in her shoulder bag. She unlocked the door...

They fled down the corridor. The fire escape at the end of the hall rattled as they scrambled out on it, and further swayed when Joe released the gear for the stairs to drop down. "Josh, do what you gotta do but hang in there with us." Thank God it was only three floors down; to Joe, 20,000 feet seemed shorter.

They struck the greasy sour alley way. "Get the taxi," Joe instructed Ceile. She dashed off and Joe held on to Josh, who spewed a steady stream of curses. Joe slapped him. "Shut up. Stand up. Here comes our ride." The taxi came up slowly, avoiding ranks of garbage can and other debris.

"Ladies first," Josh managed to say as Ceile paused. She climbed in and then Josh followed, his face white. But his lips stretched into a grin to the driver. "Unpaid rent. Midnight flit, you know."

"Done it more than once myself," said the driver and continued down the alley, pretending not to notice that the limping guy had fainted, but remarking, "Gunshot wounds need to be reported. It's the law."

"Thank you," Joe said. "And you're right. We will report it."

"Yes sir, mam." the driver answered and drove them to the destination requested by the young woman. Washington could be a strange town—for good reasons, he thought, and swung his taxi into traffic.

### Irene: Nets Fine and Strong - Washington

Mrs. Hornblower, Irene's middle aged Negro housekeeper, through a basement window, saw a taxi easing into the narrow backway of the Gallagher's Georgian-era townhouse on 215 9<sup>th</sup> Street SE. Leaving the new washing machine to agitate on its own, she swiftly climbed the steps, hastened through the kitchen to the service door and opened it to see Mrs. Irene's son, his wife, and the taxi driver extracting a semi-conscious man... She had been expecting them due to a phone call from Mrs. Gallagher. "This way," she said, leading them to the library. The furniture was covered with dust cloths; she pressed the cover into corners of the Duncan Phyfe sofa and stood back.

"Thank you, Mrs.—uh--Hornblower," said Joseph Gallagher. She nodded. She had been told by Mrs. Gallagher that silence was needed on things that may be brought into and transpire in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century building, screened from the world by maple trees. But this was still a bit surprising.

The man, so pale that his graying hair stood in contrast, was placed on the sofa. The woman was calmly asking for towels, hot water, alcohol, and bandages. She was compressing the man's right leg. Mrs. Hornblower's hands were shaking as she located the needed items, and was grateful that Mrs. Gallagher had a well-supplied house.

Within an hour, Josh had his leg cleaned and wrapped up. No bullet. "Passed through," Joe said. He lighted a cigarette. "The investigators might find it. Trace it."

"One crisis at a time," said Ceile, nodding her thanks at Mrs. Hornblower, who had quietly entered and asked if they would like tea... "Coffee, please, and bring some brandy," Joe requested.

Some pills, dug from Ceile's luggage, sent Joshua McGraw into sleep. They both contemplated the face—aged beyond its years. His mouth, even in sleep, seemed bitter. "First time you've seen the guy in the flesh, right?" Joe said.

"I guess so," she said. "Now what?"

She and Joe threw some cushions on the floor, and he wished it were cold enough for a fire...Mrs. Hornblower had alleviated the stuffiness by turning on the window fans. Not exactly the most pleasant of homecomings to begin with, now it had ratched up considerably...and where the hell was his mother?—who had been with Ceile's mother and his sister-in-law. And while that worry was going on, Pres of course entered in...

"The coffee sir," Mrs. Hornblower said. She looked at the man on the couch. "He's my charge," the woman said. "I'm Ceile, and you are Mrs. Hornblower. Sorry for these circumstances."

"I am too," she said with sympathy. "I'm taking care of the laundry if you need me." Joe volunteered to carry the wash up to the roof, and she allowed him. When Joe rejoined Ceile, she was staring into the empty fireplace...he sat down beside her, kissed her... and she kissed back but both knew this was no time for relaxation. "As I have said before, Joe, why always us?" But she was smiling.

His head lolled on her shoulder. "I don't know...but wouldn't you find a quiet life a bit monotonous?"

"I may be ready for some monotony."

"So might I. And we need some for Frankie's sake."

Their lips were pressing on each other but they heard Irene's voice, calling quietly throughout the shadows beginning to develop in the house ..."Hello?"

"Mom?"

Irene fluttered with relief when Joe came to the kitchen. "Hi," he said, going forward and hugging her with a quick kiss. No time for apologies over a less than graceful homecoming except to say "We were going to surprise you—"

"And you did--Is Ceile with you?"

"In the library. We have a guest."

"Connected with a gun shot?"

"You heard it?"

"Yes. And we couldn't do a damned thing about it. But when we got into the lobby, the clerk was on the phone and missed us—maybe deliberately." Ceile by now had come forward to hug her, which she did gladly. Irene then said that Ursula was taking Betty back to the lake cabin where they would stay with the boys for a while. They escorted her to the library. Irene looked at Josh, and said, "That poor boy. Whom I could cheerfully kill. Forget I said that."

"Anytime, Mom," Joe said.

"Well, what do we do with him?" Ceile asked. She was checking his temperature by feeling his forehead.

Irene asked for a cup of coffee—with brandy—as she waited for Joe's decision. It would have to be his; he had brought the poor—jerk—here. "He has to talk. About a helluva lot of things."

"When might he be ready?" Irene asked.

"Not until the morning. I knocked him out pretty thoroughly."

"Well. Let's at least get him into some sheets." And soon they did, and Ceile recognized the scent of lavender on the dampened sheets as they cocooned Joshua McGraw...and started to keep watch. For themselves and for him. He had tried to kill himself there in that hotel room, and if he had succeeded, what secrets was he hiding, and what secrets would he have taken with him? They then addressed how gunshot wounds needed to be reported...Joe said he frankly bribed the taxi driver and the hotel clerk seemed to be pretending not to hear.

“Theories, Danzo?” Ceile asked later as she dried off in front of his tired but still pleased eyes. Already showered and in the nude from the muggy night, somewhat alleviated by window fans, he lay on the sheets, crisp with just enough starch. They were sleepy not just from the day but from a tasty dinner of hot dogs, corn on the cob, salad, ice cream and iced tea which they ate off trays in the library. Irene had volunteered for the eight to twelve shift when Joe would take over. Before withdrawing, Ceile checked Josh’s pulse, breathing and temperature.

“Josh might have just decided to end it. He might have been planning to do it all along and we gave him a push...a lot of people check into hotels to kill themselves.”

“Do you think he’s that ashamed of himself?”

“Maybe he’s just tired...tired of being ashamed. If he is. I don’t know. I don’t know.” Joe was balanced, rather comfortably, between concern for an old friend and not giving a damn about the guy, not any more. Too many years, too much shit. Josh had come to his Archbury command intending to be a “line jumper” and nearly fouled up two missions. Josh helped spray shit on Ceile back in 1945 when he blabbed to some idiot named Gerritsen for the seeming hell of it while Ceile recovered from her C-47 going down in Scotland—that made him angrier than the shit sprayed on him.

“Danzo..?” He wearily propped up his eyes which had drifted shut. She looked down on him and then shook her head. “Nothing. It will keep.”

“Good...” He drifted off. Ceile sat down next to him, eyeing as always his old wounds, and mentally kissing them. She lay down carefully, wanting him to get all the sleep he could before his zero hour shift, and she would take over at 0400. When she lay down and bid her mind rest...Frankie’s wistful face came up. Good lord, she was going to be a mother...

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“Going somewhere?” Joe asked from his chair. Nearing three, his eyes had glided down...and opened when Josh awkwardly unwrapped himself and rose from the sofa. He then collapsed back onto it.

Josh’s smirk was somehow still intact. “To hell, most likely.”

“No words about keeping a seat for me by the fire?”

“A good shepherd like you? Thanks,” he said as Joe offered him a cigarette. He smoked quietly, his face indescribable except to be half dead. Old. Blank. “This your place?” he finally queried.

“My folks.”

Josh lurched forward. “Surprised, happy, delighted...oh Lucifer hast thou fallen...”

“Who’s Lucifer? Me, or you?”

“Dad. My Dad,” Josh clarified after a moment.

Joe felt he was getting into a set up and moved back. "I'd like to give you some help, if you'd accept it."

"You once told me...you'd make me a better flyer than you."

"You prevented me," Joe said.

Josh subsided further into the sofa.

Joe spoke with care. "I always remember showing you those photos of my best pilots who had gone down. I think I put a bug up your ass."

"Yeah, with shortcuts to shortcuts to death and glory...so, what about it?"

"If I had been more experienced, I would have...done things differently. During that time, Britt had to do some ass-kicking—my ass. And he wasn't the first."

"Probably the happiest day of his life was when I went down—"

"Britt was sorry. I remember him saying something about 'if only bad things happened to our enemies.'"

"That was for Martha. She must have figured me out a long time ago and told him—probably you too."

"You weren't the only guy in the service who tried to turn the war into his own private dance—and Josh—the way I look at it, you got two bridges for us—and you survived as a guerilla in Poland, not exactly the fields of heaven. Yeah, you yapped like a coyote there—back then—in '45--but war does strange things to people."

"Oh, for God's sake quit being so damned—understanding will ya? God!" He lurched up. "Somebody pay you? To be so shit nice and charming and understanding—and, and—sickening."

"I've been called worse," Joe said.

"A lot worse in that garbage I've been milling out," he admitted.

"Let's quit the beating around the bush now. I never figured you to enjoy what you were doing—"

"Oh?"

"Maybe I'm wrong but I do recall Josh, some good moments when we were kids."

"Like what?"

"Like Marian."

Josh requested another cigarette. Joe lighted one and gave it to him and, to help him talk, lighted one himself. "I haven't thought about her in years—what happened to her?"

"Married the wrong man," Joe said. He gave no more detail. No point. He was not sure if Marian were alive or dead and which condition might be better for her.

“Oh.”

“What I remember is when, that summer at the lake—we guys were going fishing on the other side and of course didn’t want a girl along—but you knew Marian was going to be alone that afternoon and you said you’d stay with her.”

“I didn’t like fishing that much—and before you go on to think anything else, we played checkers that afternoon, that’s all. Beat me, ten to eight. And I don’t know what your point is—so I was nice to Marian—didn’t mean I grew up to be an angel—“

“But you weren’t a devil either, then and not really now—so Josh, what the hell is going on?”

Josh took his time finishing his cigarette. “Exposure.”

“Exposure for what? Come on, you’re gonna tell me, if you brought it up.”

“The incident in the janitor’s closet, for one. Surely you’ve heard of that, even across the pond.”

“That’s pretty well known among the circles who know.”

“Only a few know that I was not banging a girl in the closet. It was a guy.”

“Oh.”

“Free, white, and twenty-one—and willing as hell.”

Joe kept his face a blank. It made sense. Then lots of sense. Josh never had a string of girlfriends, just one or two and he treated them carelessly. He recalled the last summer Josh spent time with the Gallaghers at the cabin...the lake was lively with families, they were both sixteen, and there were lots of girls, suntanned, happy, and some pretty willing. The girls, well chaperoned, had visited their cabins and they visited theirs under the eyes of parents, but romance blossomed anyway...but Josh never once tried to steal Joe’s girl. He had clearly courted Martha Britt for his advantage, and though he had taken advantage of Phyllis, he hadn’t followed up on it either...and Phyllis admitted to Joe, after they had exchanged a particularly lustful kiss across pillows...that kissing Josh was like kissing her brother. And...Sandy once told him that Josh had suddenly appeared in the room he shared with two other men, and seemed to be drunk. When one of his bunkmates appeared, “Sorry, wrong barracks,” Josh said and went on his way but not after dealing Sandy a glance that seemed something more than an apology.

“So now what?” Josh demanded, though he seem to hardly care.

“Nothing.”

“You got me over a barrel. Pardon the image.”

“You’re being used as a catspaw. Tell ‘em to go to hell.”

Josh reared up, grabbed Joe by his t-shirt, hauled him to his feet to sling him against the paneled wall. Josh collapsed on the floor, sobbing with pain. Joe kneeled down and whispered to him to stay quiet...and then dashed up to get Ceile. Josh lay so still on the floor they both felt a moment's fear...and Josh came to and grinned, though it was pretty ghastly. "Get the lamb ready for slaughter," he said, extending his leg, with another sob of pain

"What slaughter?" Joe asked, once more lighting a cigarette for himself and then one for Josh. They were all streaming with sweat.

"What slaughter?" Josh mimicked. He winced as Ceile, without meeting his eyes, undid the bandages and examined the wound and start preparing fresh dressings. "Sure, what slaughter. Best three minutes of your life, so far, right?"

"Compared to your dad's life, Josh—I think you've done a lot better than he did."

"That goddamned bastard."

"I felt sorry for you," Joe ventured. "When we were kids."

"Baseball glove and all?"

"I'm sorry about bringing up that glove. But I couldn't understand why you did it."

"I wanted to get back at somebody and chose you." Josh said. "Fuck stupid as that was." He lurched and sweat broke out on his forehead when Ceile gently swabbed alcohol on the wound.

"Guys, how about some coffee, hm?" This was Irene speaking, from the door.

"Coffee sounds great, Mom," Joe whispered.

Coffee...breakfast...after having swallowed another pill, Josh sat on the sofa quietly, his eyes on the Oriental patterns of the library carpet.

He heard speaking in the dining area and called, "If I'm under discussion, come here and talk with me." Joe and his mother came in. "A cooked goose might emit some loud squawks."

"We hate loud squawks," said Irene.

"Who told you how to find me?" Josh asked.

"A reporter's sources, and all that," she said. "You know, we didn't come to kill you. We came to find out why you were writing such things about us. Josh, I know there are issues between your—father—and me—but I liked your mother...and you too, once...upon a time."

He teared up. He stopped. Then the tears rushed the battlements. Irene rose and seated herself by him. Not for anything did she have three boys who more than once caved into her gentle inquiries and admitted their disappointments, their failures, their fears. He wilted onto her linen lap and cried, and

cried, and cried...and finally Irene bent over him, soothing him. Joe watched from the door, and fought tears back himself. He finally turned away, and encountered Ceile. She put her arms around him and gently kissed him. "It's good to cry for an enemy," she said.

"Neither a friend nor an enemy," Joe said, leading her out to the back stoop. The cicadas were already chattering in the maples and morning traffic whispered. "You've been incredible."

"Naturally," she assured him but with a smile. "But what a homecoming."

"It's a dual one. For us and for Josh. Mom always said he was welcomed. He finally took her up on it."

"Want some company?" said Josh through the screen door.

"Anytime," Joe said.

The guy looked like hell but he was different. He clambered down between them and kept his eyes from Ceile until she said, "I'm here too and in a forgiving mood."

"Okay. For your silence, what do you want from me?"

"Your silence for one thing. No more shit in ink. I don't matter but my family—"

"Done. Happily. But there's gotta be more for you keeping silent."

"In front of her?" Joe asked his old friend.

"Why not?"

"One year at the Point I roomed with a guy—like—with—all right, like you."

"Oh, really?"

"Yes."

"How'd you find out?"

"When he trusted a roommate he let him in on his secret. He requested me and two other guys to keep this confidential. And we did. And let me tell you that guy ranked high in our class. He was a boxer with a great left jab. He was—a great dancer too, and all the girls wanted to dance with him..." Joe smiled. "But there was no doubt he was a fine officer and he went on to serve with distinction, and died in Italy."

"Bully for him."

"And I knew there were pilots at the 918<sup>th</sup> that—if they did their work and did it well, and kept their, uh, desires off-base, then I never thought anything of them."

"So—what do you want from me?"

"Goddammit, your friendship. But there's a price."

“Name it.”

“What was your father up to when my brother hooked up with him?”

“Maybe it was vice versa.”

“Whatever. What are they up to, then?”

“You need to ask...Dave Creighton.”

### Harvey: Eagles Departing with Tireless Wings - Archbury

Constable Whitcomb had said something poisonous had crept into Archbury. Something poisonous seemed abroad in the world—how could it not be after the Nazis had commodified genocide? But Harvey and Melva were touched and then amazed at the outpouring of sympathy—a particularly strengthening phone call came from Bryncote, from Sydney, who offered to rebuild their destroyed property.

Melva was the one who said no.

For two reasons: she was so saddened by the loss of her first real home that she told Harvey—gently, not angrily—that it was time for him to go to his home, to the United States—and take his wife with him. “Are you sure?” Harvey asked. When she nodded, he added, “If you change your mind, that will be all right too.” The second reason: a local philanthropist paid them a handsome sum for their property because the unnamed man wanted the digging for the Norman keep to continue—and excavations indicated that the keep extended under Troyroys.

So the die was cast. For the next two months Harvey and Melva, living in the small house, worked hard at securing their work and passing it into able hands. Harvey was grateful for now Captain Adsley’s presence and abilities, and Melva mentored the nurse-midwife that Burnham was able to hire to replace her. In addition to farewell lunches, rounds of drinks, and the like, Roy Burnham arranged for a farewell party for his stalwart midwife and her husband at the Star and Bottle. The pub did not have the party facilities offered by the Cup and Vine, and the celebratory dinner was ordered in from the Distinctive Tea and Luncheon Shop, which served a rather undistinctive supper of boiled chicken, potatoes, Brussel sprouts, and some pickled cabbage. At their invitation, Elspeth Trethels came. While they ate and bespoke toasts, and dabbed at a few tears, everybody was curious as to why the back of the bar was covered with a blanket.

Finally, James Eckstone, the pub owner, who had seen many soldiers, Brits and Yanks and Canucks and Frogs and Poles come through his pub, and also seen and heard years of tears, laughs, punches, slaps on the back—finally the wild free for all in February 1945—came out to personally toast Colonel Stovall. Stovall had been a “perfectly bloomin’ joy” to work as he arranged for restitution...and now, he said, “In memory both sweet and sad, to the Colonel and his missus, I dedicate this—and to all the Yanks, dead and missing and living...” With his wife’s help, he fumbled down a bedspread and flourished a hand at the right side of the bar. Harvey put on his glasses to take a good look—and his throat swelled up: the missing portion was now a beautifully carved image of two B-17s one abreast of the other, propellers spinning. He followed the frame around and saw, on the exact opposite side, was a carving of a fireship, heading toward the Spanish Armada, to save England. “A way to remember you Yanks,” said Eckstone. “For all time, or until we have another donnybrook, like the last time, eh?” After a moment, he said, “I paid for that bit o’ fine carving out of my own pocket, I did—you Yanks gave me good business durin’ the war, and later paid for repairs with nary a word, thanks to you, Colonel. I’m sorry to see you—and your missus—leave us.”

“Thank you,” said Harvey, shaking Eckstone’s hand; the man’s eyes were damp. “A wonderful tribute.” Other towns in the southeast of England went on to honor their American wartime “visitors” with beautiful stained glass windows in their local parish churches, some of which Harvey saw in later years. He loved them all, but the sight of the B-17s, forever in flight, taking war to the enemy, helping to frame the bar of the dear old pub, remained with him, as he and Melva left the Star and Bottle for the last time and went on to the United States.

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August. Melva’s paperwork processing her as a war bride had long since been completed, and she had the extra advantage of being able to return home with her husband, rather than traveling to the United States by herself, as many “war brides” had done, from India, England, Italy, and Germany.

Together, they leaned over the railing of the Queen Mary, preparing to depart, from Southampton, en route to New York. Visits from Joe and Ceile, Lucas and Terry Merriwether with their little boy. Molly Staller came too—she was now Elspeth Trethel’s housekeeper at the Cup and Vine as well as taking care of her shattered mother with warmth and energy. Jackie was flourishing. Roxanne Mahoney, who still proudly kept her name, had been asked to manage the home for the brown children the Women’s Institute had endowed. Elspeth sent her farewells with flowers, signing with “From Dale Evans, to her Roy Rogers.”

Erika Bridgestone had said her goodbyes too, but in the company of Merriwether, at the Langham, three days earlier, by appointment. “Harvey,” the younger man said to him, “keep quiet about what you’ve been through with secret documents and weird visits, and you name it. When I started trying to put it together, I was told—‘Weeds and get the fuck out of them.’ When I get that shoved in my face—there’s one helluva secret that I’m not invited into. So, mouth shut. Both of you. If I need you, I will let you know.” Erika nodded to Harvey’s silent question. “I’m going home too, on Anson’s dime.”

The ship magnificently cleared the harbor. Harvey and Melva watched from the deck, and then unpacked in their sea-green suite. Talk was light; the future seemed heavy. Harvey would return to his junior partnership in the Providence law firm of Pottle and Johnson, as well as a house he had not seen in six years. Melva was leaving behind a burnt wreck, but also work she loved, and Harvey had been honest about being unsure of her future doing such work in the States.

Yet, Harvey was relieved that the decision had been made. He needed to go home. And he was bringing his wife home—not his “new wife,” but his wife. Harvey had contacted his cousin, Will Stovall, who had tirelessly managed the house and its renters, to make sure that all evidence of Rachel was gone--no clothing, shoes, and other possessions were to remain. It had been a hard letter to write. An easier letter had been sent to Pottle, to say that he was returning home from his overseas service, and was inquiring if the offer Pottle had made years earlier, that Harvey would always be welcomed to return, was still...in effect. Yes, it was, Mr. Pottle Esq. had written. Indeed, the firm was involved with affairs which Harvey would find challenging and meaningful.

But he would continue with Byron Mahoney's appeal. His execution had been prolonged, due to letter-writing, and a few words from the right senators, and interest from the Oval Office at the White House. He had hired himself as Mahoney's attorney, pro bono, and informed him so. If Pottle and Johnson objected...well, he would cross that bridge when he came to it.

For the first two days, Melva and Harvey enjoyed their crossing, thankfully calm as autumn beckoned. They got to know each other better in this exclusive time together; Harvey confessed he loved cowboy movies as they watched *Red River* in the ship's theatre, with him enjoying the story of the great Texas movement of cattle to the markets, and the tangled relationship of the hard-bitten ranch owner with his beloved but rebellious adopted son. Melva loved cribbage and Agatha Christie. They danced a bit after the second seating dinner, and both agreed that it was not their favorite thing to do. By the fourth day, as they rapidly approached New York, Melva grew nervous, and Harvey grew oddly homesick—for the first time since 1942.

The morning they sailed into New York harbor was bittersweet; Lady Liberty was filmy in mist, standing, Harvey felt, as if waiting for him to come home...not really, but Harvey felt tears burning his eyes.

"She's huge," Melva whispered, her awe approaching fear.

To Melva, everything she saw in the next few days was huge—the skyscrapers of New York, the plates of food, the bathtubs, the stores, the cars, the laughter, the voices. They didn't linger in New York too long; they soon entrained from Grand Central to Rhode Island, which, Melva gladly said, was "the tiniest state in the union—but since it's part of the mainland why do you Yanks call it an island?"

"The original settlement was on an island off the coast," Harvey said. "Colonized by an Englishman demanding complete liberty in religious thought—even to not believing in God—in 1636."

They got off the train at the station on Gaspee Street, and Harvey was overwhelmed with sights, sounds and smells of Rhode Island, of Providence, of America. Shaking off his emotions—some painful, some happy, they took a taxi to the square two-story house on Rossiter Lane; Harvey helped lug their immediate baggage to the front door, and there they stood.

The door was locked.

"Oh, shit," Harvey heard himself blurting. That detail was overlooked. Was it an omen?

A moment later, Melva spotted a corner of white paper underneath the door mat—a note, telling them where the key was hidden. They found it, and Harvey opened the door...and did something he and Melva had never done...he picked her up and carried her inside. Without a single chest pain. But he was glad she was so light!

Home, Harvey thought. Yessirree, home. He lowered Melva to the polished maplewood floor.

She looked around, appraisingly. It was two in the afternoon according to a fine old grandfather clock that chimed, sweetly, in the parlor. Afternoon light streamed, just as he remembered, through the

western window of the kitchen. Harvey froze at the sight, and the sound, both so familiar, even though he had neither heard nor thought of them in nearly seven years...

Now what?

**Joe: Many Directions, One Root – New Mexico, summer**

On an August afternoon, Joe steered his car slowly down a blacktop county road in northeastern New Mexico, and twice missed a turn-in: he found it on his third pass when he saw a faded sign reading “Back o’ Beyond”—nearly concealed by weeds, cooked up by late summer thunderstorms. Joe stopped and consulted his map, bought at a gas station in Silver City, two hours east. He didn’t expect his destination to be on the map, but the coordinates were right. He turned in, and carefully drove his rental car down two strips in the dirt, and they should lead him to Dave Creighton—and Heidi, and their daughter Joanne. As he slowly rolled the car along, he wondered if David had grown a beard and was spitting tobacco juice. But this rural retreat was fairly near White Sands, and Trinity, where the first atomic bomb was tested. And, there had been numerous UFO sightings in this area...

He drove up to a substantial tin-roofed adobe cabin, shaded with enormous cottonwood trees. Heidi emerged from the open door to wait on the porch. Even from the car he could see fear cross her face...and how it evaporated—nearly—when, upon his climbing out of the car, she recognized him.

“Ah, Joseph,” she said, when he came up the steps. “Well, how do you like me as New Mexican princess?”

“You look wonderful,” he said, and meant it. Once a nurse in Germany, a courageous underground agent, a survivor and a hollow-eyed victim who had amazingly crossed into life again, she was a different woman. She was wearing jeans, a cotton shirt, sandals, turquoise earrings, and her hair had recovered its glory. But fear was on her face as she said “But you are here to see Dave, yes, of course.”

“Yes, I am...Well, who is this?” he asked the three year old girl who came up to her mother’s side.

“This is Joanne,” Heidi said. Urged forward by her mother, she stared at him shyly. Joe said, “I am happy to meet you,” and gave her a trinket, a little leather moccasin on a keychain that he had bought at the gas station in Silver City. She stared at it silently but with a smile. Her mother urged her to give her thanks and she did, in a whisper. His heart caved in for his own daughter—daughters--but he propped it up. Pres was alive, might be alive... and Dave Creighton could tell him things, at least according to Josh.

He drank an offered glass of water. Then, following Heidi’s directions, Joe went around the cabin and found a trail which led him upwards into a pinon forest, fiercely aromatic in the hot sun. As he made himself walk calmly, the trees shook slightly with a hot wind, pushed by swelling thunderheads. There was an intoxicating smell of rain.

The path led to a lake. In the middle of the lake was Dave, fishing from a light boat. He looked up when Joe hailed him.

“Howdy,” he said when he rowed to shore. Joe helped him beach the craft. He flourished a gig of trout. “For dinner tonight, you’re invited.”

“Thank you. First, we need to talk.”

“Joe, you know that can’t be.”

“Be about what?”

“Whatever you want to ask me.”

He smiled, albeit uncertainly, until Joe decked him.

Standing over Dave Creighton, who lay there, nursing his jaw, surrounded by trout, and blinking, Joe recalled how many times he had folded his fists, kept them rammed into his pockets—though he let them go three times: when he seized hold of the taunting Komansky’s lapels—and himself right into a possible court martial. Lesson learned. He had merely pushed down the drunk Troper. He nearly forgot the lesson with Hollenbeck—God, how close he came—but gleefully let the lesson go when he landed a haymaker right into the face of Colonel Schotten ...in Mont Ste. Marie.

Creighton stood up and said, “You’ve been wanting to do that since 1943, I’ll bet.”

Since the gloves were off, Joe said, “When you said you’d rack me if I tried to prevent those saboteurs on the base from loading that ammunition—goddammit, my men would have died—and Ilka—you dangled her like raw meat in front of a vulture—”

“And we got the job done. And Ilka returned to Poland.” He then lightly jabbed his finger in Joe’s breastbone. “And you kept your eagles.”

“But I hated it.”

“It’s not your duty to hate, just obey. You’ve done it since. In London. In Normandy.”

“Obedience sucks.” Joe knew the answer wasn’t worthy of him but he had been ready for years to play hardball with Creighton and for once, say what he felt.

“Yeah, it does.” His eyes glinting like anthracite, he added, “I could get have your stars for that.”

“Go right ahead,” Joe shouted at him. “I didn’t want ‘em and I’ve been wanting to let ‘em fly off for four years now—and if you think—”

“What I think, what a lot of people think,” Creighton shouted back. “And what you think—taking those stars off in disgrace would break your heart, your parents’ hearts and you know it.”

“Don’t threaten me with my family honor--”

“And don’t come threatening me. Think you’d get me in a nice soft frame of mind with the wife and the child being around, right?”

“You got your family! What about mine? Dave,” Joe pleaded, “you know something about Pres.”

“Who says?”

Joe kept his mouth shut for the moment. "I'll beat the hell out of you if you don't tell me something. And don't throw family again into my face. My parents—and my wife—agreed that if I had to suffer disgrace of some kind, they'd support me whether I got egg on my face or ramrodded into a court martial they'd stand behind me!"

"You got a strong family Joe," Creighton said.

"We'd be stronger for Pres," Joe said. His hand was throbbing, the one that had decked Creighton. The rain was now nearly on them; the sky was a shivering wall of cloud of silvery gray; the trees were writhing. "He left the plane bound for New York to go to Kansas City. Then his trail goes cold. You know something."

"Who told you this?" Creighton said.

Joe let him have it. "Josh McGraw."

"That bastard?"

"Tell me what's going on. Please. I won't interfere. Just tell me something."

Creighton never saw Joe's face so angry, strained, pleading. But he said, "No."

Rain raced on the wind. Joe's voice became low, deadly. "Then make it mine. I'll swear to whoever that I beat it out of you—threatened your family---Dave, please!"

Rain plopped furiously on the lake and within twenty seconds a curtain of water fell on them. By then they were running down the path, drenched and nearly blind, and met Heidi running to find them, an alarmed but quiet Joanne in her arms. They returned to the cabin, all drenched. Heidi lighted a fire in the hearth as temperatures fell thirty degrees. They all changed their clothes, with Joe pulling dry dungarees and shirt from his suitcase. For Heidi's sake, they sat companionably, drinking brandy as Heidi fried the trout in a spider on the coals, and baked tinfoil-wrapped potatoes. Telling his wife he fell on the run home, Dave kept an icebag on the bruise rising on his lips and right cheek. The storm roared and crackled and the electricity failed. Joanne, at Joe's invitation got in his lap and Joe told her about the gods of storm who want to make little girls cry...and she wouldn't let them. Thunder was a wonderful sound, not scary. He liked it. She didn't cry. She wanted to sit by him when they sat down to dinner.

He bunked on the couch that night. Heidi worried about him driving down a dark rural highway strewn with tree branches and other debris. They said their goodnights, and Joe was brushing his teeth at the kitchen sink when Dave joined him. "I told Heidi that we have things to talk about. Yeah, we do. Now first: Josh McGraw told you that Pres was collaborating with Dave McGraw, right?"

"Yeah." Joe felt like a storm cloud, all stormed out. "And you were involved."

"Yes. Yeah. But involved in that I was tracing McGraw, Dave McGraw. You know all along he's been on my radar. The story I got was probably shit, but he claimed to others he knew where the Amber Room was hidden. Some of his post-war stunts indicated he was on to something, even if it wasn't the Amber

Room. If I could follow him, I don't know what the hell he would lead us to, but it something of incredible value. God forgive me," Dave said, "I exploited Pres' disgrace to use him as an agent. He agreed to it Joe. He knew what he was doing.

After some time has passed, while the two men watched the flames flicker down... Creighton said, "How about a trade off?"

"Like what?"

"Like me finding out what I can about Pres..."

"What do you want from me?" Joe asked.

"Work on the henges."

Joe went a little dead inside.

Creighton, looked both hard as a diamond...and embarrassed, it seemed. "There is some kind of conspiracy of silence about those things."

"You feel left out?" Joe snapped.

Creighton's eyes became anthracite. "Hardly. I've seen enough and know enough for three lifetimes. But these henges—I can't trace down anything reliable on them—"

"Why is it so important to you?" Joe asked and saw Dave glancing up the stairs. Heidi passed by the landing, guiding their daughter to bed. "I know that Heidi saw a henge," he then said, softly.

"Yes, and she occasionally has nightmares about it. And whenever I start asking around Washington, even the most cautious of questions, wham, down comes a wall. With warnings. Okay, maybe I feel a bit left out, but the way that thing, or things seemed to be sunk into deep dark well scares me."

"Why?" Joe asked this carefully, neutrally.

"Is there some kind of cadre operating in Washington, planning to exploit these things?—for whatever they do. Joe, what do you know? —because I know about that trip you make to Yugoslavia. Hell, I was there that night you got the orders, and saw the photographs at the hearing. Then a few more sightings. And then...nothing."

"Maybe because it is nothing. Failed Nazi weaponry."

Creighton heard something in Joe's voice that he thought he could have sworn was not...

"Is it? A complete failure?"

Joe knew he was not going to be let go until he talked. And it might be a relief..."Since I can't get in my car and get the hell away until morning...okay, here it is. Here something is. Those photos I took in Yugoslavia were of two harmless or failed henges. What I didn't do...I didn't take photos of a henge that

Illych, or Yellich, took me a long ways to see. It was horrific.” Joe began quivering in the memories of the smells, the sights, the sight of that uncompleted henge... The sickening ringing in his ears. The desire to get the hell away. The pleas of Yellich...don’t take a photo. Don’t speak of this. Know of it in order not to speak of it. To Creighton’s expected questions... Joe related how the henge was being built and experimented with...and how Yellich had watched the henge being sabotaged. Joe finished... “It was poison...it had poisoned the site, poisoned the earth—”

“What the hell was it for? To ruin landscapes?”

“If Yellich told me...I didn’t hear. My head felt like a big bell. I felt sick. All that mattered was to get away. We had to, because those scientists were arriving and we had to get them back to England.”

“So you handed over incomplete information.”

“Yep.” Joe clipped his response out.

“Well, mighty interesting. Let’s leave it at that. But whatever it is, it’s a ball of fire. And I want to know who’s—protecting it, trying to keep it under wraps—and if those doing so are working for our best interests. To put it mildly.”

After a moment, Joe said, “Okay, quid pro quo? If I help you with the henges...you help me with Pres, right?”

“Right.” Creighton did not look smug, or angry. Rather, a bit abashed. “To seal this deal, as it were...I received an unconfirmed report that Pres is in Siberia. Not as a guest. As a prisoner.”

“Nik get that information to you?” Joe asked, after a while...during which he struggled with joy and shock. *Siberia...*

“Can’t say. An agent got it through.” He drained his glass and stood up, his sharp eyes tired and full of empathy. “Okay Joe. New steps, big steps. I’ll start probing for more information about Pres, but you know the caution I have to take. Now you...”

Joe listened to what he had to do. It was all vague, but Joe knew that David Creighton would turn his plans into practical reality. “Dave,” he finally said, “did you somehow plan this?”

“No. It’s falling out the way it is falling out. I admit that you coming here with pleas to find Pres got you into my grasp, but we’re both getting into places where we’re not welcomed.”

They shook hands.

There was nothing left to say or do but turn in. Another storm came up, crumpling out thunder and flashing on the windows, and another shower fell. Dave went to bed. Joe lay on the sofa, enjoying the fire, enjoying the whisky burning through his blood and carrying his thoughts into...a very unsure future. He could see, sense, know...that his work for NATO was going to end. Had to, for his brother.

In the morning, after breakfast, Heidi and Joanne said their goodbyes. She then let her husband and their guest continue to his car by themselves. She went inside, beckoning for Joanne to follow. Joanne paused and blew kisses to Joe, who blew them back.

Joe opened his car door—but met Creighton’s face. “From now on,” he said, “let’s do as we spoke last night. Don’t call me even if you learn anything. Wait for my call.” Before Joe lodged any kind of protest, Dave added, “I got one star on you—but my real power comes from what I know, the people I deal with—and what they expect of me.”

“They could rack you,” Joe murmured.

Heidi appeared on the porch. “David,” she called. “There is the phone...”

Creighton, understandably, turned away from Joe, strode into the house. He returned after a few minutes. Joe could sense a change.

“In little tiny pieces,” Creighton said, resuming the conversation without a beat. His anthracite eyes edged back slightly. He nearly smiled. “Back in 1945—I could have passed on this. But a few months investigating a Nazi superweapon sounded great. After four years, it stinks. And I can’t leave. It’s not for glory, Joe, it’s to probe into what I think is some kind of conspiracy.” His eyes started to glitter again.

“Don’t,” Joe advised him. “Dave, I’ll be good. I’ll wait. And I’ll... do as requested.”

“I’ll do my best about your brother. Now, get out of here.”

Joe climbed in, settled into the seat, and turned on the ignition. He had one last question: “Do you think this has anything to do with the Amber Room business?”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” Creighton admitted.

Joe had a long drive to Albuquerque and so got underway as soon as he gassed up at a country crossroads. He was driving out, with a sparkling windshield, and through he saw another car drive in...and though the face wore sunglasses, Joe felt...thought...it was Thibodeaux. Joe could not turn around; he was expected in Washington. But Thibodeaux, Tib. Joe ignored some stories he had heard about the Major. If they were true, so what? The man did great work.

### Harvey: Homecoming Must Render an Account - Providence, Late Summer

Two days after Harvey and Melva's arrival in Providence, on a rainy morning a door to an impressive suite of offices opened... "Our conquering hero!" cried Hazel Dubry, standing up at her reception desk, at Pottle and Johnson, which now occupied the entire twelfth floor of the Morgan Guaranty Tower. She toggled all her switches. "He's here!" She then came around her desk to unabashedly hug Harvey Stovall, scratching her face on his ribbons. She didn't at first notice Melva, but when she did, kindly took her umbrella, wet with rain. "Look at those ribbons!" she exclaimed.

Harvey suddenly felt embarrassed at wearing his uniform, which made him perhaps appear as if he were the returning soldier, showing off his fruit salad. "Civilian duds next. This afternoon I buy a new suit." He found his suits mothballed away in garment bags, and, though Harvey was no fashion plate, he knew they were outdated; the newest of the suits had been made in 1939—ten years ago!

Friends and associates poured out of their offices, behind desks, and away from the water cooler to surround Harvey Stovall, shake his hand, slap his back, welcome him back, calls to see his new office, questioning him about the Nuremberg Trials—and nodding to greet Melva Stovall who did not take umbrage as friends and associates welcomed—happily—back a man gone for years on an adventure of a lifetime, as one of them put it. Hazel the receptionist made a point of speaking with her, saying, nicely, how surprised they were that Harvey had returned a married man, but how wonderful...! Finally, Mr. Jacob Joshua Pottle III issued forth from his paneled office, and rather stiffly welcomed Harvey back, congratulating him for his fine work, his loyalty, and then motioned for everybody to join him in the large meeting room for coffee and pastries, a nicely democratic gesture. Since Harvey had departed in 1942, Pottle senior, who had inherited the firm in 1903, had passed, leaving his now 58 year son "JJ" in charge. When Harvey shook his hand he suddenly recalled Pottle Junior's somewhat browbeaten life as he assiduously cultivated his father's respect, while trying to budge the old firm into some new directions.

Theo Suttler and his wife came in, provoking a shout of pleasure from Harvey; Theo had been his best friend at work and they had corresponded over the years he had been gone. In pre-war days their families had been close. Maribeth and Rachel exchanged recipes and shared hairdressers. Harvey and Theo had golfed at Trigg Links, and their sons had been friends, and Mike had even dated, though not seriously, their daughter Pamela...who had a sorry story, Theo admitted. A common story it seemed—meet a soldier, fall madly in love, marry—left with a child. The guy returned... and while physically okay, but had been shaken up by too much war, and maybe too much freedom to go home and just return to his father's building business. Their daughter had finally come home with a dislocated jaw and a bruised back from a fight over him seeing other women and their divorce was pending, to their pleasure; Pamela was too strong to stay with somebody who beat her. Theo's son, Barry, had returned from the Aleutians after being bored and frozen to death for three years, but was finishing law school, and getting ready to marry a schoolteacher. "Ah, cripes, Harvey, this probably reminds you of Mike. Any word, anything?"

"No, and it's all right," he said although yes, it twisted like a knife—for his loss, for worry what he had been involved in—if he had been involved with anything.

“Being a pilot is brave work,” Suttler said. “You flew too, you wrote.”

“Yep, got away from the typewriter a couple of times...hard work but it was good to get into what those guys at the 918<sup>th</sup> were doing—maybe it’s just as well that kind of warfare is obsolete. It was the Dance of Death.”

With an appointment pending at the bank to review financial records, and have Melva’s name put on their joint banking account, Harvey looked for his wife, and found her smiling blankly at Maribeth Suttler’s words about “showing you around to the better dress shops...”

Melva did feel a bit tatty around the well-dressed secretaries and the beautifully groomed Maribeth who looked as if she had just emerged from the hands of a beautician, dressed out from her nails to her feet, and perfectly made up face. But Melva really wanted to talk with doctors, nurses, anybody who could help in her beloved work. But, Rome wasn’t built in a day, and she was a foreigner she reminded herself, and nodded to the women who were all being perfectly friendly and happy for Harvey being back, and with a wife. But she still felt intimidated.

They left. In the plush elevator, Melva suddenly struck the button for the third floor—“An obstetrician,” she said, reading the names on the plates.

“What?” Harvey said. During their ocean voyage, their moments of freedom, lurking excitement of moving, the leisurely movement of the ship and other things had kicked their love making up—

“Horse’s mouth, that sort of thing,” she said, pulling him along the corridor to the glass door of Dr. Peter Boxworth, gynecologist and obstetrician. A nurse, looking like an icicle in starched white from crown to shoe, refused to let them speak with Dr. Boxworth without an appointment, but the man came forth. Momentarily between appointments, he graciously took them to his office.

“Midwife?” he said, incredulously, thinking that they were seeking help in either having a baby, or they were going to have a baby, despite the parents’ somewhat advanced years.

“Yes, my wife, a registered midwife, had years of experience with baby delivering and natal care in England,” Harvey said, frankly using his uniform and his commanding abilities to lend credibility to his wife. Melva seized the initiative, described her work (in her most elegant voice), and inquired how to become a licensed nurse and a midwife in the United States. She knew midwifery was antiquated to many doctors, but it was still a valid practice in England--

Dr. Boxworth made some phone calls, wrote down some numbers, and even directed her to the Chair of Nursing at Brown University. With great charm, he issued them out. “Well, you’re getting on with it,” Harvey said, proud of Melva’s poise and confidence in her quest.

But when Harvey went back to get the umbrella they left behind, he saw Boxworth’s eyes denting into his with an expression of “Brother, buddy, you got a problem there...midwife? You’ve got to be kidding.”

Well, Harvey thought, as he rejoined his wife, he was only one doctor. And Melva was experienced, with credentials, so surely things would turn out all right.

“Getting on with it,” became Melva’s rallying cry, as she was suddenly, if voluntarily left alone in Harvey’s house—their house—as Harvey donned a quickly made suit, cut in 1949 lines, and was picked up by Theo Suttler. The neighbors, most of whom Harvey still knew, were welcoming and friendly, offering her rides until her husband purchased a car, asking her about England, remarking on her accent (“Oh, I love it!”) of which she suddenly became very conscious. Maribeth drove her to the grocery store one morning; her beautifully tailored dress contrasting with Melva’s five year old blouse and tweed skirt. She gaped at the abundance, but bought sparingly; she felt that she was still a visitor, not a resident. To get over this, Melva determinedly started making phone calls, using the numbers Boxworth had found for her, and finally spoke with the chair of Nursing Department—who gave her more phone numbers to call. She found people interested, unbelieving, kind and puzzled—but all seemed willing to help though they were not sure how. When Maribeth picked her up once to go shopping for some new clothes—Melva knew that her wartime wardrobe needed some replacing, the woman eyed her and over coffee, asked her point blank—what was bothering her? Melva blurted out her problem: “I have been told I am too old to return to school.” She expected Maribeth to be surprised. She was, with her beautifully penciled eyebrows drawing together. But she was sympathetic too and remarked she had been a working woman once herself...a bit wistfully.

To entertain herself, Melva listened to the radio, trying to get used to what seemed to her flat American voices, wondering a bit at the slang, and wondered what she was listening to when she encountered the broadcast of a football game. She also viewed, with great curiosity, on a trip downtown to visit Harvey’s dentist, the sight of a television box in the window of a hardware store. At the moment, it featured a test pattern, which several people stared at. To her surprise, Harvey came home a few days later, saying that a television would be delivered the next day. “What for?” she asked. “They said the same thing about radio,” he told her. The two stations they could find, when they were on, featured a lot of boxing, some awkward newscasts, but there was live drama in the evenings—Melva particularly enjoyed a young actress who appeared frequently – she was lovely and had a wonderful Irish name, Grace Kelly.

She and Harvey talked every day at breakfast, and at dinner, and she assured him she was fine, not a bit lonely though alone.

But she was not alone in the house. Rachel was not fully departed. The closets and drawers had no trace of her clothing and shoes, but she could sniff Rachel’s sachets. Then Melva opened up the medicine cabinet in the downstairs bathroom and when she pulled out a small drawer, found a bottle of her perfume, and a container of prescribed pills, over eight years old. Not sure what to do, she left them there. Mike’s room had been left alone. She quietly entered it late one rainy afternoon and found it tidy, almost bare. There was a balsa-wood model of The Spirit of St. Louis sitting on a row of books—which ranged from histories to the Hardy Boys to *We* by Charles Lindbergh. She saw a pressed down portion of the bed, where Harvey had sat, briefly. She wondered what he thought when he visited his son’s room.

She sat on the same place and remembered the few times Harvey had spoken at length of Mike—how he received the telegram about his son when he was standing on the Archbury tower, horrified as the outcome of a 918<sup>th</sup> mission became clear to him...the young, recently promoted pilot whom he had chosen to lead the group had fouled up the heading; Nazi fighters and flak had been deployed well that day, the hapless young man had died... When Harvey received the telegram, he didn't read it until urged to, and then did...and then denied what it was telling him; jumping in a Jeep and tearing away. That night, over belts of whiskey, he admitted the truth to a young, sympathetic but completely out of touch young officer that MIAs were rarely found. The only positive thing—he got into the air again as a pilot.

Harvey had recently told her that despite some once classified records being released, he did not really expect to learn about his son's fate. He had learned that Mike had undergone special pilot training at Monmouth, where the Army Signal Corps was based. But that was all.

Melva left, closed the door, and went downstairs to light the gas fire in the hearth, start dinner. She snapped on the old waist-high radio for company and poured out some brandy...and looked around at the tasteful furniture, the pictures on the wall, even the anti-macassars on the chairs flanking the hearth---and didn't hate them, but knew they did not belong to her and she had a feeling they never would. She refused to think of Troyroys. It was a ruin. Last she knew, the Archbury council was planning to tear the wreck down and investigate the old Norman-era keep below.

Heavy rain commenced, and she stared out the picture window onto the wet street, the old street lamps, cars wheeling past lighted windows glowing through the trees. She sniffed her good hearty soup in the kitchen, and the brandy, which she had never been fond of until sharing it with Harvey, was penetrating...and on the radio Frank Sinatra crooned "Old Man River," which Harvey had told her was a song celebrating—and mourning--the Mississippi...and she found tears slithering down her cheeks, as she missed their less comfortable, less elegant home in England, not this pleasant warm palace that was home to ghosts—which did not hate her, but seemed, she felt, to regard her curiously. She dried her tears and welcomed Harvey home a few minutes later. She didn't know that he sensed her moods well enough to know she wasn't quite—happy—but knew her well enough not to dig.

Later that evening, Harvey, as he lay awake in bed, worried about his wife.. Though she stayed busy, wrote letters, and made phone calls...he knew she was frustrated as no door opened to her. Would one ever? If not, could she be happy?—here, with him?

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In the fall, Harvey was in the midst of his work, chasing away his own feelings of ghosts, and worse, feelings of boredom. Two cases were divorce; another was for child support, and the other one had to do with property transfer; a widower now being divorced by his second wife was struggling to keep certain rural properties which she said he had pledged to her; his children were complaining that their father was demented when he rewrote the will. In the meantime, he reviewed, during his lunch time and at home, the case of Byron Mahoney. He still waited on the news of the automatic appeal, a work of nine months duration—which meant that those involved were aware of the Negro press reporting, as well as the more liberal white newspapers.

“Harvey, we got something big coming our way,” said Theo Suttler one morning as they took their break at the coffee shop in the lobby. “It will probably secure us full partnerships.”

“Like the Negro gentleman suing the hospital refusing to admit his wife?—what happened to that?”

“No. Pottle decided against the firm taking the case.”

“Oh.” Damn. Pottle Jr.’s potential had been sidetracked.

“I was disappointed too,” Theo said. Then he broached an uncomfortable subject. “You’re not happy here. I don’t blame you. After strong meat with the Nuremberg Trials, then cornflakes with the Providence hoi polloi.”

“Justice needs serving everywhere,” Harvey said.

“Yeah, but a lot of people need more justice than jilted mistresses or people needing easements.” Theo folded his arms and looked at his old friend. “Harvey, I can’t tell how I admire you. Going to the war. Dealing with a son’s loss. Flying—sometimes I think I admire that most of all. You couldn’t pay me to fly. If I had gone to war I would have been happiest foot slogger that ever commanded a desk. Well, you gonna stay? As full partners, we might be able to make some suggestions.” Harvey remained neutral. Privately he was feeling trapped, though he had means of escape by, as Theo had indicated—by leaving.

As for Melva questing for her nursing credentials in the United States she was keeping on. Taking buses, and asking questions, she arrived on the campus of Brown University, and asking more questions, approached the nursing school and spoke with the chair, a Dr. Lisa Petersen, who was impressed with her forthrightness, but surprised at her credentials as a midwife—and that she wanted to keep practicing it, so she needed accreditation, and she could not learn how to gain it.

“What do you think?” Melva asked.

“Tell you the truth, I’m not sure,” she answered. Melva understood that midwives, who were still employed but only in rural areas, were not merely considered antiquated, but also dirty, badly educated, and a relic of old times that the atomic age had obliterated. However, district nurses in some of the less populated western states, such as Montana and Wyoming had midwife training...but doctors were being demanded. Melva understood some of her opinions; midwives did have legends attached to them, and one of their ancient practices, of sealing the birthing room from air, and making the mother somewhat drunk on caudle did not secure the profession any honor. But she represented a liberal carrying on of old traditions, with modern medicine and methods, and there was still a place for them—though maybe not here. Not anywhere in this bustling country, always looking to the future. “Let me ask around,” she said.

When Harvey asked her about applying for her American citizenship, she demurred...for a while. Harvey began to worry that his wife might someday take herself back to England.

He worked on making her more comfortable. As soon as Harvey bought a car, he drove her one day in late October to his boyhood home outside of Woonsocket in the northern part of the state. He taught her to drive, and she successfully passed her driving test. He encouraged her to get a library card. They talked about a vacation they would take in the summer-- and what would she like to see in the United States? She said she would think about it...and didn't want to tell Harvey she felt about as big as pinpoint. She would grow used to things, she kept telling herself, but as the days and weeks went forward, she felt something...and became aware that she didn't want to leave the house—and yet she wanted to flee from it. She wasn't sure how to talk with Harvey about this. Oh, she knew that he was aware of her discomfort, but not how far it went until one day she asked him if she could set up an easel in the western end of the sloping attic room, and do some painting. She painted watercolors before the war, and enjoyed it; in her belongings shipped from England were a box of paints, still usable, and a collapsible easel and a bundle of brushes....

“The attic?” he said. “Broiling in the summer, freezing in the winter. Rachel used the western corner bedroom on the second floor... He paused. “My—wife--used it as a sewing and ironing room because the light was so good. Good for painting.”

“It's so immaculate I wouldn't want—artist's studios, if I can lay claim to such a pose, are pretty dirty.”

Harvey smiled, encouragingly. “Well, do as you wish, sweetheart.” She ended up doing nothing.

Harvey was going through his private correspondence one Sunday afternoon in November, and as he sometimes still did, listening for the sound of a big-bodied plane... He found, he later realized by amazing coincidence, two letters that would change their lives. The first letter was typed but very friendly, with an interesting invitation. He wrote back immediately, in longhand, at his home desk and actually drove to the nearest post office to mail it.

The other letter had his name and address a little scrawled. The return address: Boyntonville, Alabama. Harvey tore it open and found it written on old Army stationery, somewhat soiled with packing and unpacking. He had a hard time reading the writing, but halfway through began to shake—and at the end, resisted grabbing the phone to start calling—somebody—anybody—at JAG. Not yet. But soon.

The next morning the boom lowered as the something big was dropped into his and Theo's laps: the firm of Pottle and Johnson was being retained by Durant and Nash...to appeal their convictions for the Kronberg jewel theft. Harvey's thoughts went cold and sour at the assignment. Those idiots, Harvey thought, did something unbelievably stupid, got caught and convicted and had to pay for it, period. He defend them in their second appeal?—not in a pig's eye—

“But Stovall, one of the reasons they are retaining our services is because you are with us—you have a reputation from JAG that's hard to beat—“

“Sir, I can't.” After a moment, he added, quietly, “And I won't.”

“What if I give you two days to think about it?” Pottle said, after a long moment, during which Theo Suttler broke into a visible sweat.

“Sir, I must request a few days off for myself. Dock my salary if you will.”

Pottle actually nodded. Harvey wondered if he had made his request easier, or harder. “Do what you have to do then. Suttler can begin the case. Give me your answer when you come back.”

As for Theo, he said to Harvey, a bit sadly, “Go on, you old war horse.” He didn’t like the assignment either but would start work on it.

Harvey took him for a quick drink at the old nearby watering hole and Suttler was expecting the worst and in some ways got it when Harvey told him what he was leaving for. When Theo simply regarded him, without anger but without admiration, Harvey said, “If you’ve ever thought about starting a private law practice—I might be interested.”

“Private...” Suttler said. He looked out the heavy frame of his window, down on the busy street and said, “Tempting. Harvey, did you see *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street*?”

“Yes—Melva loved it. The man, the boyfriend, he was a lawyer, right?”

“Yeah, and when Maureen O’Hara was horrified when he quit his law firm to defend Santa Claus at a sanity hearing he said something like ‘the best part of the law are the hopeless cases.’”

Suttler got the message. “Sixteen more years here, and I’ve got a nice retirement—“

“That’s nearly a fifth of your life,” Harvey pointed out.

“I don’t see things as clearly as you do— seeing the war close up can change your ways of thinking...”

“I was an adjutant.”

“And a pilot. Seeing things from on high must make it all look pretty small at times.”

“Some things become small. Other things become larger.”

“Harvey, colored people—are—“

“Are what?”

“As good as we are in some ways...in other ways, no—now don’t tell me—“

“They’re not as good as we are in many ways—but dammit, with education—with the same opportunities—the same rights being respected--yes, dammit, they could be.”

“You’re headed for trouble.”

“Most likely.” However, they shook hands as they parted, and Suttler said, “I hope you come back Harvey. For eight years I missed you because you made seeing things straight pretty easy.”

Melva understood the set look in Harvey's face when he told her, without details that he was flying to Alabama "on business" and then returning by way of New York City. The night before he left he toyed with the idea of making love with Melva...it had been nearly a month...exhaustion, business, Melva's increasing disappointment, Harvey's worries over his steps into the unsure areas and put them both off. When the moment came, Melva's wan tired face...well, he would be home soon.

Well, here's to the grail Harvey thought as he put on his overcoat the next day, kissed and hugged his wife, and stepped into the taxi that would take him to Green Airport. He had to enter the forest, on his volition, at his own point of entry, and accept what he encountered, what would happen to him.

It occurred to him...that he had never placed the Toby on his fireplace mantle. Maybe the Toby knew something he hadn't. It didn't belong here either.

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Harvey flew into Birmingham and took a bus to Hackleburr in the northwest portion of the state. It was no more than a crossroads in the soft green countryside dotted with old houses seeming to melt into grass and kudzu. Harvey had to request the stop, and the white driver, who had crabbed periodically at his talkative Negro passenger in the back, stopped, swung the door open for him and Harvey had barely alighted on the damp soil when the door slammed and the bus trundled off. After walking for a half mile, and feeling a bit nervous as he passed by inhabited cabins that he knew shielded interested eyes, a passing farmer driving his decrepit tractor, pulling an empty flatbed, answered Harvey's hail. He then learned that Hackleburr was three miles off a smaller east-running road, and the driver was kind enough to give him a ride. Harvey crawled onto the flatbed cart and three slow miles later dismounted the rattler, thanked the good Samaritan, and grasping his valise, walked to the only building.

Silvery with age, it still seemed sturdy, and there was not a scrap of rubbish anywhere. A telephone line, carried pole after pole from a distant point, was strung into it. A mild mannered dog trotted around the back and watched Harvey as he approached. He stepped through the open door into a neatly whitewashed interior that, like any country store, was ribbed with shelves, bolstered by counters, but with a spotty array of merchandise. A sign indicated that it was the post office of the area. "Help you sir?" said a small Negro woman. She had stuck her head out of a backroom and when she saw Harvey, she came into the main room of the story, calm but apprehensive. Harvey knew she feared seeing a white man in such an isolated place.

"I am looking for a Jonathon Buckhouse."

"What you want with him?"

"He wrote a very important letter to me," Harvey said, drawing it out of his light jacket.

She saw, as Harvey learned later, her stamp as the postmistress. "You that Colonel Stovall he talks about."

"I'm Mr. Stovall now, mam," Harvey said. "I must speak with him. I wrote that in a letter I sent."

“He home ‘round seven from the sawmill.”

Harvey could only wait, buying a bottle of Coke, a can of Vienna sausages to munch on, and she later softened and fried him an egg and he ate in the kitchen of the small home attached to the country store/post office. She even showed him around the small cabin, which had no running water save for the pump in the kitchen. He was interested in her son’s room, particularly the books and the pictures tacked to the unpainted board walls. During that long afternoon people came and went, picking up mail and buying a few things. They were friendly when they arrived, calling out for the postmistress and then falling silent finding a white man there. He felt very white, enormous and very intrusive. Harvey, old man, he told himself, this is kind of what it must be like if you are a Negro amidst nothing but white people.

He sat on the front porch in the middle evening and watched fireflies threading their lights, and saw a dark figure moving towards him. Harvey stood up: “Mr. Buckhouse?”

He recoiled and then, grabbing his breath said “Yes...suh?”

“Mr. Stovall,” his mother said, coming out on the porch. “He wait a long time.”

“I didn’t knows—know—you was, were, comin, sir.”

“Didn’t you receive my letter? I wrote back immediately.”

When he was silent his mother spoke up. “Mail move slowly here.”

“You sorry now you wrote this letter?” Harvey asked him when they were alone in the kitchen. The young man was short, well proportioned, and taut with fear. “I got the impression you were trying to get some justice for Captain Mahoney when you wrote this.”

“I guess...I figured—you wouldn’t bother with it.”

“You must have gone to a lot of trouble to get my name and my address to think that.”

“Yes--sir.”

“Can you help Captain Mahoney?—Well?” Harvey said, his voice rising slightly.

“I’m not scared of you,” the young man began.

Harvey nearly said “That’s not the point,” and then recalled his own uneasiness being the only white man in the area. “I’m no longer in the service. You aren’t either. I have no power over you.”

“No sir, you don’t.”

His voice invited Harvey out the door. Harvey sat back in the kitchen chair, folded his arms and said “I’m not walking out into the dark to walk three miles to a lonely road. I came this far.” Then, taking a

chance, he said gently, "Son, I'm sorry for everything...That sounds so goddamned patronizing. And my words can't change a thing. But if you can change the fate of Captain Mahoney—you should."

His index finger traced the pattern on the table's oilcloth. "Another man's fate gets heaped into this."

"Yours?" Harvey asked.

"Nah—no. Unless—the Air Force could still get me even though I left the service."

"You left to avoid trouble?"

"No sir. My pap died. Mama needed help."

Harvey's next question was harsh. "Were you going to leave Mahoney holding the bag?"

"If you think for one minute that I did that rape—"

"No, I do not. You have no resemblance to Captain Mahoney, and the fraulein was most insistent that he was tall with broad shoulders. But I didn't come here expecting a confession like that either." He took out the letter and read the pale inked words, every one of them spelled correctly. "There are things I can tell you about the situation Captain Mahoney got into." Harvey waited for the young man to respond. When he did not, Harvey then said, "I saw your room. I saw pictures of you in Germany—at Tempelhof. You looked happy."

He sat down in the second kitchen chair. "I loved being in the Air Force. Well—no, I didn't love it but I'd rather be there than here—almost anyplace but here." He stood up. "I was damned proud of my two stripes. I sent money home—that's how Mama got that telephone line strung in. And Cap'n Mahoney once told me I could get more of 'em on my sleeve, he believed in me—and I couldn't stand up for him at the right time."

"What was this right time?"

"When they were haulin' him off for rapin'—claiming he raped that white gal."

"Could you have sworn he didn't do it?"

"No. I couldn't swear—I mean, I couldn't swear to where he be--was. But I got to thinkin' that I knew who mighta done it instead."

Harvey was quivering with excitement but kept his voice steady. "You knew of another suspect?"

"No sir. Meaning...I know it now. Or, I got to thinking about it after...Captain Mahoney got sent up."

"Who?"

Buckhouse sat back, looking up at the rough ceiling, the old tin stove and then his eyes flared at a rumble of faraway thunder. "I wonder if he be speaking with me," he murmured.

Harvey spoke with great, great care. “You have loyalties to them both,” he finally said. “Captain Mahoney and this other...suspect.”

“Yeah, dammit.” He stood up, knocking the chair over. He righted it. “Get into the bigger world—and things became helluva lot bigger, that be sure...Mama,” he called. “Make some of that tea you once told me—fooled me—it would make me tell the truth.” He looked at Harvey. “For us both.”

It took time for her to build up the fire, pump water for the kettle, and to find the tea. She finally served two cups to them with dignity, and gladness, for she knew something had been eating into her son since his return from Germany, a place across the ocean which she had never seen and had been both fearful and impressed when her only surviving son had crossed them in service of their country.

As they imbibed, Harvey thought about the ritualistic tea ceremony in Japan which he had seen demonstrated at the World’s Fair in 1938. Buckhouse smiled a bit as he pointed to his mug of tea. “I had been up to trouble and swore up and down I hadn’t. Mama served me this tea and after I drank it she said it be ‘truth-tellin’ tea.’ I did—but only how I’d be meetin’ Maria Jane behind the juke house. Well...”

Buckhouse’s story was an interesting if sad tale, though Harvey admitted to the sadness later—he was riveted on what Buckhouse was telling him. The young man, under Captain Mahoney’s supervision, had thrived in his life and work in Germany, glad to see the world, glad to work, and gladder of Mahoney’s kind but firm supervision of his men in their building and rebuilding of the runways. And yes, they were impressed when he showed them pictures of his wife. Mahoney said he had a future in the army, particularly since it was desegregating. But he missed the countryside of his home and took walks around the surrounding areas...and one afternoon his head swiveled to see a face like his peering down at him through pine boughs. A few days later, he kept his chocolate ration and walked the same route...and finally said, “Hey, man, know you be there...come on and talk, will you?” holding out his morsel. Pretty much to his surprise, the fellow, after a few minutes, emerged from the trees.

He was in the remains of GI fatigues, including a sweater and a cap. Though neatly shaved and calm, he still struck Buckhouse...as a deserter. And the guy was...from 1945.

The fellow finally invited Buckhouse to his dwelling—which was a cave of sorts, but more of a rocky overhang in an obscure portion of the rural area. Over the years, the fellow had built some walls with salvaged brick, scrounged blankets, made camouflage and found some cooking gear. He had rigged a small stove for himself and there he had lived since leaving his unit in March 1945.

“What was his name? Did he give a unit, anything?”

His name was just “Benny.” He had been a relief driver for one of the Red Ball Express units, a truck convoy that was not as celebrated as it should be for how it helped secure victory by supply—moreover, about 75% of its personnel were Negro. After a while, Benny admitted to Buckhouse that he was a deserter. Had been after his unit came under fire one night and for six hours they didn’t dare move. When he finally could he just stood up and walked away. “He wasn’t proud about it, but didn’t seem ashamed of it either. But he was scared—not just of being a deserter but scared of rain, thunder.”

Harvey recalled that on the night of the rape there had been an unusual but not unknown “thundersnow.”

Benny didn’t seem violent. Or crazy. But he was...kind of slow. Had to search for words and at times seemed to forget what he was talking about. “He seem—seemed—kinda crazy, you know?”

“Well, perhaps retarded,” Harvey said. He knew the armed services had recruited men who shouldn’t have gone into the Army; slowness, lack of common sense, fear, problems that were mildly described as “mental instability.” “Did he tell you anything?”

“Not a thing. But I—well, he had some girly pictures where he lived. I mean, we all like girls, don’t we?”

“Yes,” Harvey said. “I do.”

“Well—the point is—that this guy, this Benny—I got to talking to him about things and he said that he got to go to a local house—the girls would give him some if he had some cigarettes or chocolate that he stole. Took me there, too—well, I didn’t like the look of the girls...thanks to Mahoney, he gave us some straight shit about things... But I recall that we got to the place walkin’ through the lower end of the park where the girl got attacked.”

“What did Benny look like?”

“Tall. Broad shoulders.” He paused. “Hell, we don’t all look alike.”

“We need a picture of him. We need a lot of information.” Red Ball units that moved through the area-- personnel—names of MIA or deserters. They needed to conduct a sweep of the area. Was Benny still living? Did he leave enough of his camp behind to show that somebody had lived there?

The next day, after a breakfast of coffee and cornbread, Harvey and Jonathon walked to the highway and caught the south-bound bus for Birmingham. He asked his mother to call the sawmill, and if they fired him, they fired him; he didn’t like the job anyway. At one point in the bus, Jonathon had to move to back, and he did so. Harvey moved back with him.

They found a public recorder who at first objected to Buckhouse. Harvey flexed his command voice—and his courtesy-- and Jonathon gave his deposition. He suddenly added “He talked about hittin’ some girl in a park and trying to drown her.”

He signed the affidavit. They went to a diner, and the black patrons both observed and ignored Harvey as the two men sat in a booth and were honest with each other. “You’ll get him off, right?” Buckhouse said, trying to be casual and failing. Harvey told him, briefly, that his deposition would get the wheels rolling—and said to the young man, whose intelligent eyes would not brook fables—that a great deal depended on finding the right information, getting the right people in their corner to help them—the right judges, the right setting. “Justice for all,” the young man snorted.

“Son,” Harvey said, again trying as hard as hell not to sound patronizing, “a lot of things said in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution and the Bill of Rights and the Pledge of Allegiance are

ideals, not what's real and available. But ideals can be objectives and I think there are a lot of people here wanting to reach them—including me. Now—are you going to college?"

Buckhouse wanted to. "Being in Germany made me realize that how the hell much there is the world. One weekend—me—I—and some guys went to Cologne—they looked for girls but I went to the church—the Cathedral. Saw places like that in books. Now saw it for real and you know—I got so excited I kinda felt like I was almost sick. I want to know more."

"Do it," Harvey said. "You'll hear from me. We may have to bring you north. Good luck."

Buckhouse shook his hand. "Good luck to you, sir. And Captain Mahoney."

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Harvey undertook the long flight to New York. After getting into the massive city, he checked in at a hotel and damning the expense, started making phone calls. The first was a difficult one but he hung on until he ran down Lucas Merriwether, and asked a favor—slice through the red tape; he had new information about the Mahoney case—Major, listen to me...and I can't lose my oak leaves, because they're already off. Merriwether promised to arrange a search for the guy—possibly by MPs, because the Army had no special branch or unit to hunt down deserters.

The next morning at Pennsylvania Station he boarded a train to Connecticut. He was both apprehensive and excited, and amazed that affairs were working out almost perfectly—professionally, domestically and ethically. He called Melva to tell her his movements. He then plunged into another remarkable round of events...

Ursula O'Brien, whom he had met at Bryncote, was waving at him when he got off the railroad at Bassingbury. Then followed two days of talking, interviews, tours, meeting strangers whom Harvey almost immediately made into friends. Ursula finally drove him to the train station, and smiled as Harvey leaned back in his car seat, eyes closed with weariness. "You were wonderful," she assured him. "But agreement takes some days. I don't think anybody would be against you being appointed chair of the new law school, but they have to well, flex their muscles and little provinces of power."

He finally got home, both exhausted and exhilarated. Melva was overjoyed to see him—and he admitted that he was overjoyed to see her... but now overjoyed. It had occurred to him that in his absence she might pack her bags and leave.

On Monday, Harvey entered the offices of Pottle and Johnson...ready for anything. He had loyalties to the firm, but he also had loyalties to himself. He tidily disposed of his correspondence; returned phone calls with apologies, worked on three cases and then at 1:00 in the afternoon, after making sure that certain phone calls would be charged to his home number, dialed numbers in Washington, he then made a list of things to do.

At 4:00, he parked himself in the chair before Pottle's desk. Before he said a word, Pottle poured for him and himself glasses of whisky and water. Harvey then explained what he intended to do. Despite

everything he had been through, his hands were cold with nerves. He would not represent Durant and Nash. Rather, he would represent Byron Mahoney. He described the case.

“For the first time, the furniture manufacturers of Leven and Ostowitz are ready to retain us,” Pottle said. “Because you were at Nuremburg.”

“But what about Mahoney?”

“If the firm undertakes the defense of a black rapist—already convicted rapist—then we stand to lose the Bischoff estate and—several others by fall out. Harvey, I think Negroes have been handled some dirty deals, but I can’t endanger the firm—sixty people—by this case.”

Harvey not only loosened his tie, he unknotted it. “Then...I resign.”

After a few sips of his whiskey and water, Pottle Jr. sighed and said, “Thank God for people like you, Harvey Stovall. Give ‘em hell. And save that boy’s—man’s--neck.” That evening Pottle received his resignation. He left with some trepidation, and so was glad when he learned that Leven and Ostowitz had gone ahead with retaining Pottle as its law firm.

The next day, Harvey Stovall figuratively rolled up his sleeves and got busy. Becoming Mahoney’s civilian lawyer was no mere phone call; there was protocol, and signing of a great many papers. He also commenced communication with Mahoney. He reported on Jonathon Buckhouse’s account of the soldier “Benny.” He said, “I heard rumors of a guy like that in the hills—what does he look like?”

Harvey explained Benny was being investigated as they spoke. He had been identified as Private Benjamin Josiah Ronalds, gone AWOL in April 1945 from his Red Ball unit. His family was being sought; photographs were needed to learn if he were indeed, tall with broad shoulders.

### **Sandy and Margaret: A Season Together – Los Angeles, Thanksgiving**

In the blessedly quiet second-half of 1949, Sandy and Margaret had busy springs and summers; Margaret worked on finishing her masters at USC and Sandy took his classes. She kept up her volunteer hours at the veteran's clinic, and simply refused when Sandy inquired if she would quit... the guys there... "Hey, you met me there," he pointed out. "So I don't need to meet anybody else," she said, and kept going. She dropped her tennis partners, but still gave weaving lessons, and never felt better in her life. They found time to visit, sometimes long enough to make love, and got to know each other more and more. More than once Sandy had a feeling that all was going to be okay. No more strange visits. No more clandestine meetings in dark rooms under stadiums. Crusard was safely retired, somewhere, and there was no follow-up with Heinzma—or with Blair. He got the sad impression that nobody really missed or lamented him.

Thanksgiving, 1949—and no invitations to fly to the east coast for television interviews. Ever since that merry, festive, crazy Thanksgiving in November 1945, Sandy had kind of clocked his life by the date. It was not just about turkey and cranberries laid out on an elegant or less than elegant table, it was honest to God feeling happy and grateful for blessings which had increased so much in his life! In 1946, he and Ray had been invited by the Armers to join in their Thanksgiving; in 1947, with Ray gone and the Armers out of town, he had to make do on his own and he recalled how miserably lonely he had been. In 1948 he had once more been on his own when some overtime duty kept him busy, and the Whitfields, including a regretful Margaret, had left him behind for Thanksgiving in Inglewood.

He decided that 1949 was going to be his best Thanksgiving since the Goodge Street bash in 1945. He had found a wonderful girl...after two of them had gone their way, but he had learned from them, including how yes, losing people scared him. Then he found the third woman, truly right for him.

And he decided that he had to take control of his life. Since February, he had been drifting. Despite classes, Air Guard duties, paying attention to his future wife...he had drifted from difficult currents into dangerous ones. He had defied those shadows once, now he would defy them again.

A month before Thanksgiving, Margaret announced to her mother that Thanksgiving this year was going to be different. Rather than joining Elona's half-sister Louise and other family members in Inglewood for Thanksgiving dinner, they would invite them to come to Altadena. "Why?" her mother had demanded, hearing of this in mid-October when, on a rare Sunday evening, Sandy joined them for dinner of the usual pot roast, mashed potatoes and gravy, and string beans with pearl onions. It was always tasty, but always the same. Sandy had come to understand that Ethel Elona Whitfield was rigid in habits. Margaret, Sandy and Arnold smuggled tidbits to Felicity.

"Because it's time for the family to meet my future husband," Margaret announced. Her blue eyes, set under arched eyebrows, challenged her mother to challenge the situation. For some reason, Elona had been reluctant to make her daughter's intentions public though she and Sandy had been engaged for nearly a year. Margaret had rather enjoyed living quietly with their intentions and their arrangements but that had to change.

Elona said, "But—uh—well, Louise's husband loves chestnut dressing—I don't know how to make any."

"We could get the recipe from Aunt Louise and make it or she could bring it."

"We don't have enough plates or tables—"

"We'll borrow what we need."

And so it went until finally Margaret said, "I will prepare everything. Sandy will help. It'll be wonderful."

"But you're engaged—you need a ring."

"I have this," she said, pulling out the tiny daisy which had rested on her throat for nearly a year. "It's all I need. We need." Margaret and her mother cleared the table and retreated into the kitchen, from which issued some anxious words. "Elona's stuck in her ways," Arnold admitted to his future son-in-law. "And by the way, I've never seen Margaret act like that—thank God. She's been pretty timid a lot of her life."

"Well, we both agreed that we didn't need engagement rings," Sandy said. Mother and daughter came back into the dining nook, both with red eyes but Elona's eyes were redder. Arnold said his goodbyes; he was substituting for another officer that night. "Honestly, that woman," Margaret hissed after she and Sandy withdrew to the kitchen to wash dishes. "And I know, be happy I have a mother."

"Well, yeah," Sandy said.

They finished. "And the rest can damn well air dry," she then announced. "We're taking a walk."

It was a mild night in early November, and they walked down to the little park at the bottom of her street. They sat and talked and were just happy being with each other for over an hour. They straightened up when a patrol car came by. Arnold unrolled the window and said, "Margy, your mother's kind of worried. Best you two get home."

"Okayyyyyy," she sighed and they climbed the shallow hill. Light made the curtains golden in color, and they suddenly parted to expose Mrs. Whitfield looking for them. Margaret sighed. "Sandy, will you take me far away from here when we marry?" she demanded.

"I'll try," he said.

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Thanksgiving proceeded with cooking, situating tables and chairs, finding plates and silverware, and more cooking; frayed tempers, Mrs. Whitfield's distress, offers of help...and to their amusement, they saw her finally retire to a living room chair, with the sympathetic Felicity at her feet, and upon whom she administered a quick stroke or two. Then the families on both sides arrived, slamming car doors, carrying some covered dishes; there was laughter, shaking hands, and a feeling on Sandy's part of wanting to break and run as a host of relatives' eyes landed on him as he passed through on his way to

place things on the table. He and Margaret were taking a breather at the kitchen doorway when there seemed a disturbance of some kind. “Lady Macbeth,” Margaret said. And then, “Banquo’s ghost...”

Margaret’s paternal cousin Duvina, twice divorced, had apparently remarried. Her husband, tall, and wearing horn rimmed glasses with thick lenses, stood next her. Her seven year old kid, named Gordon, dashed around them looking for food, bailed a cup at the punchbowl and then two more. He dashed outside, ignoring his mother’s uninterested shout at him to behave himself.

“Uncle Arnold, Aunt Elona,” Duvina announced, and hugged them. She then kind of swished at her cousin, visible at the kitchen door. “And cousin Margaret—this is my husband, Lazlo Boblice...although you’ve met before, yet?”

“At your mother’s funeral,” she whispered, and then got her voice up to hide her shock. “Mister, uh, “Vuvh—uh, what?”

“Boblice,” he said, glibly. It sounded like “Vavlitz.” He shook Arnold’s hand and actually kissed Elona’s hand. “We were married about two months ago, Duvina and I.” He then kissed his wife’s hand. “I dream of taking her away to Europe, to my homeland...we will soon.”

“What do you say to **that**, Margaret?” Duvina asked.

Sandy had seen politer baiting on the playgrounds of his youth, broken glass, chain link fencing and all. “I am happy for you both,” Margaret answered. And she was, truly. Better her, than-- she silently recalled how three months ago the guy opening the door on her as she washed her hands in the ladies room at the funeral home, apologizing profusely, and refusing to go--after she accepted his apology. She then stepped around him and left, and he followed, still murmuring apologies, including an invitation to take her out for tea, afterwards. She fled to the visiting room and preferred looking on her Aunt Billy’s waxen face on a satin pillow. She then sat with her dad, who was Billy’s younger stepbrother. That night she received a phone call from the guy—how the hell did he get her number?—and a few more during the next few days. Three more slams of the phone seemed to convince him. And then he apparently turned Duvina.

Back at the Thanksgiving dinner, Margaret turned to bump into Sandy whom she had not realized had moved up behind her. Duvina asked, “Are you Margaret’s boyfriend?”

“And how,” Margaret said, taking his hand and trying to step back into the kitchen. “May we meet him?” called the husband.

“Margaret,” reproved Elona.

“All right. Meet my fiancée,” she said, gesturing at Sandy.

“Margaret!” snapped Elona. Though never quite fully approving of her daughter’s fiancée, she made introductions to make up for her daughter’s rudeness. Sandy smiled and nodded, Margaret nodded and she and Sandy went into the kitchen. Duvina smiled at her aunt on her dad’s side, such a saccharine,

gee-I'm-sorry-for-your-poor-unmarried-daughter's-manners, that Elona's hand itched to smack her face. "Please don't be concerned," her husband assured her. "Duvina has told me—"

"About what?" Elona demanded.

"That your daughter is shy," he concluded.

"Who is that guy?" Sandy asked Margaret as they stood outside on the kitchen stoop, getting a breath of fresh air from the heavy, turkey-soaked air of the kitchen.

"Who the hell knows," Margaret said. "Gives me the creeps. Well, let's finish dinner. And Ho-ney—I'm sorry, I didn't treat you very well."

"You have reasons," Sandy said. "I can tell."

The turkey was ready. Margaret pulled it out to cool; with his sleeves rolled up, Sandy beat the potatoes and checked on the gravy and they both tasted the chestnut dressing. The screen door then opened and the boy named Gordon cruised in to stare at Sandy. "Hey, you that guy from Jim's mule farm?" he asked. "No," Sandy said, taken off guard. "Well, you sure sound like an ass!" and then ran off, letting the screen door slam behind him. Sandy merely stared after him and turned to Margaret when she spoke. "Jesus, we're a motley crew. That kid should be beaten till his tongue hangs out."

"Could have been worse," Sandy said. "And I probably said the same dumb thing when I was his age." Then the complex business of getting the food to the tables took place, with Elona helping, and actually singing the praises of all the work her daughter had done...When they were finally seated the boy did not join them at any of the three tables set up; he grabbed a piece of turkey and took off. Duvina tried to be the toast of her table; her husband laughed agreeably at her sallies. Sandy, between bites he hardly tasted, glanced at the guy and he seemed...changeable. One moment he seemed rather handsome; then next moment, overly lanky, with dirty dishwater hair. His eyes were unseeable through the thick lenses.

After dinner Elona and Arnold volunteered to clear the tables, letting Margaret and Sandy to relax with the relatives—though they did not find it relaxing. Largely because Arnold stood up after the meal and before the pie and coffee to clank his spoon against his water tumbler and say, "I love announcing that my daughter and her fiancée are founders of this feast! Sandy and Margaret, stand up and let it be known that you are engaged!" Sandy stood next to his best girl and smiled and shook hands with some of the nearest hands, and wanted to run, of course, but did not, of course. Margaret was a little put off too, mainly because people were saying, "Where's the ring? Where's the ring?" She said, "There is no ring." Surprised glances were traded about. The only thing that pleased Margaret was Duvina's smirking look as if saying "Well, you're getting married at last." To somebody wonderful, not that piece of shit, she thought, looking at Boblice. She then wondered at her hard thoughts and her four letter word—well, she was tired. The friends and relatives finally broke away from the table to smoke and talk, and go outside to enjoy Elona's garden—and finally Duvina and her husband were departing, taking their goddam kid with them... They volunteered for the actual washing of the plates and pots and pans, which

Elona and Arnold had cleaned out and stacked up. For a while, they had to help with the goodbyes, as relatives were leaving. Most of them seemed genuinely happy for them.

Margaret then said, "Hang the dishes for a while, let's go on a walk." He liked escaping the humid kitchen for the chilly late fall air, and even better, with his girl, alone for the first time in hours. They were tired but satisfied with the day...and chatted about the afternoon until they saw Duvina, waiting at their car, its hood up. "My husband went back to get help," she said. Sandy's engineering skills took over: what was wrong? What happened? I see...did it sound like... "I think I can fix this," he said. "Daisy, go back and find uh, Lazlo." He called to Gordon still in the back seat: "Wanta see?"

The kid stared at him. Sandy always recalled the blank look he had on his face—and the hand gesture. Of course, he hated the kid's guts, but later told himself that the kid probably had good reason to be acting like a little shit.

Duvina kind of smirked as her cousin's fiancée chose to stay with her. Margaret riled, but merely said, "Of course." She trotted back and found Lazlo coming from the back lawn ...and he brightened when he saw her. "Your father wants to see you, he's in the garage," he said. "Huh, what?" she demanded. "Come on," he said, taking her wrist and starting off to the detached garage—before she had a chance to dig her heels in, figuratively or literally, her father did come out of the garage side door. Duvina's car whipped around the corner... Boblicee stopped and smiled, first to his wife, and then to Arnold.

"Easy fix," Sandy said as the man thanked him and slid behind the wheel. They drove off.

"Arnold!" called Elona from an upstairs window. "The toilet!" He headed off to help get it flushing right.

Sandy and Margaret got into the kitchen as quickly as possible where mounds of dirty dishes and cooking pots and pans made perfect sense. He and Margaret threw herself into the work until finally Sandy asked, "Daisy, something wrong?"

"Baby, I'd love to take a shower. I stink of gravy and giblets."

"No, you don't—pumpkin maybe or maybe the green bean casserole." She hugged him and left and he concentrated on the remaining stuff.

"Alexander Komansky, drop that roasting pan and step away from the sink," announced Arnold, coming into the kitchen. "Sir!" Sandy acknowledged. But he rinsed it and set it up to dry. "What is it?"

Arnold looked so serious that Sandy felt a moment's panic. "Sorry, got the cop face on," he said. "But I want to show you something." Sandy and Arnold left the kitchen and walked down the back lawn. He led them behind the extended garage. Arnold motioned him to a door at the back, and opened to a small home, with its windows open for airing. In the light of Arnold's flashlight, Sandy saw a tiny kitchen, an equally tiny living room, and Arnold told him a bathroom and bedroom were to his right. It was all a little derelict. Arnold explained that he had created the apartment in the twenties and rented it out, and then in the thirties, allowed some desperate relatives from Elona's families to live there while getting back on their feet. During the war he had rented it to military and aeronautical personnel until

1946. "You and Margaret are planning to marry in 1951, and then you are going to work while you complete your Ph.D. Well, I want you to go ahead with your Ph.D. Don't wait. If you and Margaret want to live here, then you can do so. Margaret can teach, and you can complete your degree."

"That's very good of you sir," Sandy finally said. "But why?"

"I just want to make sure that you launch right. You see, I never intended to be a cop. I wanted to be an engineer too, long time ago. Thought I could marry and complete school, and decided I could take a few years and become a traffic officer. Well, those few years never ended. And so here I am. Let me help you not get stuck like I did. The rut I'm in has compensations. But who knows what might have been?"

"Have you talked with Margaret about this?"

"Not yet."

They returned to the house to find Elona doing the final cleaning of the kitchen. Sandy and Arnold moved the furniture back. As Arnold ran the carpet sweeper, Sandy emptied out ashtrays. "One thing for sure, Duvina and that creep husband aren't coming to the wedding," Margaret announced, coming into the dining area to return water tumblers to the breakfront. Showered, and with a towel around her hair, she already looked better.

"Fine with me," Sandy said, a bit brainlessly but sincerely.

"Duvina always had stupid tastes—her first husband was twenty years older than she was, and her second, that kid's father, was a bigamist. I think he's in jail." Neither saw that her hands were trembling.

When Arnold and Sandy hauled out the trash to the compost heap and the alley way cans, Sandy said, quietly, "Thanks for your offer sir. I'll let you know by Christmas. We BOTH will let you know."

Decision made, Sandy thought. Yes. He would get in just under the wire, but he would get in.

Margaret had not written in her journal in several days. When she commenced, she filled up the notebook and commenced on another, her clenched hand aching by the time she finished.

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Christmas soon came, and this time the family, including Sandy, drove to Inglewood. Duvina and her husband were at the get-together, as well as Gordon, who whined a lot. Margaret stayed by Sandy's side so much that it was a little noticeable; it was marked up to being wildly in love. Opinion varied about the guy with the Polish name; some of the younger females described him as cute with wonderful blue eyes; oldsters remarked he was standoffish, even a bit snobbish; a few others thought "Margaret Komansky—what a handle." But even Margaret, for all her concentration on keeping away from Polebiate, knew that Sandy had something on his mind.

Back in Altadena that evening, the lovers sat in the kitchen to munch on grilled cheese and finish off a bottle of wine. Margaret soon knew by the clench settling into her fiancée's forehead that things were

afoot. She resisted laying her fingers on his forehead...and then did so. "Ho-ney, you got the Panama Canal between yours eyes. What's up?"

He took her hand away...and kissed it, on the palm. "How ready are you for a big change?"

"Ready enough."

"I've had an offer. To be commissioned a naval officer and trained to fly."

"Well!" she laughed. "Should I join the Navy too? I did try once to be a Wave—"

"If you did, no, you'd be—"

"Sandy—ho-ney, I was kidding. But, my heavens, tell me more. Ah, does this have to do with your wanting to get married right away...? You said something to that effect a few days ago."

He nodded and explained. Over a year before, he had been contacted by the Navy in what was called a "direct procurement." That service branch was bolstering its post-war ranks by offering commissions and jet pilot training to engineering students who had flight experience. The Navy had to kick up their aviation program to protect their carrier fleet, and, bluntly, the Russians having the bomb meant the US lost its nuclear superiority. He then said "My experience with the multi-engines in the Air Guard got me in their sites. I turned them down but six weeks ago I received the offer again. I have to accept in three days."

"You're accepting it then?"

He gathered her hands, which were ice cold. His were too. "Not without your say-so."

"What would happen next?"

"I'd go to Pensacola in Florida for training."

"Where am I then?"

"You can join me in June. As my wife. After I finish basic training I'd come back, we could marry and you'd come with me. Or...we can marry in the next three weeks."

"Could I come with you in January as your wife?"

"We couldn't see each other for the first four or five months. And I don't know where you'd end up living and I couldn't help you. But while I'm there, I'd like to know you are my wife."

A little shakily, she put her palm on her cheek, then on his cheek. She got up, found the new gas company calendar that advanced the century into the fifth decade, hopefully less disastrous than the fourth. She pointed out Saturday and Sunday, January 17 and 18. "How about then?"

"But I don't want to go to City Hall, I want a real wedding but we've got to keep it simple."

“That’s all I want too. But holy cow, we’ve got a lot to do.”

“This first.” He swept her up in a kiss. It was late, and he left, and she sat in her bedroom. Put on your breastplate, she thought. And so she did, though chiding herself that Wonder Woman would not get all tied in knots over a wedding.

She told her parents in the morning. Elona cried, “Are you pregnant?”

Expecting this, Margaret simply said, “No,” and explained the situation, including how she would stay at home for six months while Sandy trained to be a US Navy pilot.

“Oh,” her father said, understanding why Sandy’s hesitation at his offer. Elona then didn’t seem to care about her future son-in-law’s seemingly odd decision as her daughter’s wedding became reality. “We need to—oh, dear, arrange for the church—“

“I—we--want to marry on the back lawn. In the garden. And I want Tyler Freds to marry us,” naming the Chaplain of the Pasadena Police Department.

“He’d love it,” Arnold said. Freds had been very helpful to Margaret and him as they both dealt Margaret’s sudden miscarriage, and the subsequent concealing it from Elona.

“What if it rains—“

“It won’t. And if it does, we’ll move inside.”

“But a train on the grass--“

“No train. Just a simple short white dress and a hat with a veil.”

“Invitations—they need engraving—“

“We’ll write out invitations in longhand or make phone calls.”

“But, Margaret—“

“Mama, we can always elope.”

“No, not that again—why is he going into the Navy? He was already in the Army—“

“Well, now he’s joining the Navy. Now—Mama, our wedding couldn’t happen at a worse time, I guess. I start school in four days. Therefore, you’ve got to take care of a lot of it. I’ll do what I can, but...here, I will write out a list of things for you to do—and for me to do—“

“And me too?” Arnold asked. “We’ll do our best. Get upstairs and get that list made, and I will wash the dishes!” By noon, Margaret had a detailed set of instructions, typed on her little Regal typewriter, in her mother’s hands. She then raced out to buy satin and a pattern for her wedding dress and meet Sandy for some coffee. That night, they began writing out invitations longhand, and the first one Sandy addressed was to Harvey and Melva Stovall, Rhode Island. He also invited Barbara Corbusz...the letter

would come back, and he finally learned that she had actually been assigned to the US naval hospital in Yokosuko, Japan.

The next day, he cast the die—he formally withdrew from his classes at Cal Tech. He sent notes of apology to Drs. Nowell and Sloyd, explaining his decision.

He waited for something to happen. A knock on the door. A phone call. Nothing—except a courteous note from Dr. Nowell encouraging him to return to his studies when he could—and an invitation to spend their honeymoon in his cabin in the Sierras. Sandy was still waiting for something to happen when Margaret joined him for an all-night packing session at his apartment, a week before the wedding. He was going to store his few things in “their cottage.” As he emptied a closet, Margaret worked on emptying the drawers.

“Wowwww.....”

He looked around to see Margaret staring at Antonia’s portrait, still in its Woolworth frame. “You prefer *me* to her?”

“Of course.” Dammit, he should have gotten rid of that when he moved...

She studied it. “I thought you said Aurora had brown hair.”

Ah. “Well, that is a picture of Antonia...I was with her before Aurora.”

“Who was Antonia?”

Sandy knew that she knew he had girlfriends, not just one. But this was the first time she had seen Antonia and yes, her beautiful dusky blonde hair, lovely face, and slightly almond shaped eyes contrasted with Margaret’s dark hair, pretty face and blue eyes. “Where is she? Do you know?”

“Perhaps in Greece. She’s a journalist for Anson.”

“Say, what is it about you and journalists?—first Susan and then Antonia—Aurora too.”

“I’m not sure and let’s not get into that!” He took the picture from her. “I’ll get rid of this.”

“Thanks. No, wait. I mean, what happened with them both?—sit down, Ho-ney, talk to me.”

Sitting down next to her on the bed, he said, “We wanted different things is all. Or needed...They had work to do—out in the world. I have work to do but I wanted a home.”

“She’s really something,” Margaret murmured, studying the picture.

“She was...and you’re something too,” he said, rocking her back on the bed.

“Like what am I something?” The question, which came out after a very long kiss... was part affectionate teasing, part very, very serious.

“Well...” Sandy called on his poetic abilities: “Antonia was like a thunderstorm—sweeps in, lightning and thunder—exciting, at times wild—exhilarating but you didn’t know what was coming.”

“I see. How would you analogize me?”

Sandy was glad he recognized the word. “The golden light in the window, behind curtains.”

“Oh.”

“When I was a kid walking down streets looking for a dog to kick I would see homes with curtains golden with light from inside. I haven’t thought in years...how much I wanted to be behind those curtains.”

Margaret said, quietly, “In many ways we know very little about each other.”

Sandy was realistic enough not to deny her words. “It’ll be fun learning then.”

Antonia’s picture was put into a box though not discarded. She found no pictures of Aurora. Margaret kind of wanted to meet them both. As she worked, Margaret had a sudden thought: Maybe I should become a journalist...but not right now, not even to think about. Too much to do, and school was already in session, and there was a wedding in fourteen days. That evening she had her first fitting for her wedding gown. It was based on a McCall’s pattern for a basic cocktail dress that her mother was skillfully adapting into a streamlined wedding gown.

In the wet wee hours of the first day back teaching, Margaret’s phone rang. She had arranged for her own phone line a few months earlier and it made life easier. “Daisy, can I see you right now?”

“Where are you?”

He was a block away, using a public phone. She said yes, got up quietly, and let him in the backdoor. They glided up the kitchen stairs and into her room. Sandy had never visited Margaret in her bedroom--while her parents were home. But his first need was to get warm! “Come on,” she said, opening up the bed. “In a minute,” he said, stripping off all his clothes, laying them near the heat duct, and sliding in. She got in beside him. “What’s up?”

“Do you really want to take a chance and marry me?”

“God, of course,” she said, feeling almost sick with fear. “Are you having second thoughts—”

“Of course I am. I wouldn’t be asking you such a thing.”

“Wedding jitters?” she asked.

“Daisy, you already know that I’m involved in things, weird things, things that may come to visit very suddenly. Are we in peril? I don’t know. Are we safe? I don’t know that either.”

“Do you believe in destiny?” she asked instead.

Sandy recalled Betty's words to him, at the El Paso airport. "If I do or I am—destined for whatever the hell—I want you to be part of it. Maybe you're the destined one that I am part of."

That memory of blue light on waters... "Oh, I'm going to miss you."

"Nothing like how I'm going to miss you. And I'd better get out of here," he said. "No condoms."

She seized his mouth and kissed him like there was no tomorrow. "Leave me pregnant. Please." They stared at each other as they struggled. "Not a good plan," she admitted. Smilingly placing a pillow between them, they slept...and Margaret had her dream again. And again, the dream went further...rather than ending with the sound of her father's voice cutting through the blue mist that seemed to be protecting her, and trying to kill her...the mist built into hills, then mountains, then mountains beyond imagination. Snow was slathered down their terrible, wonderful crags and she seemed to be coming into... a kind of landing... the dream evaporated. But she was left with a vision of a mountain...which she recorded before dawn, unable to sleep. She went through her teaching day with logy eyes.

He slept for a couple of hours and got up in time to get out of the house in his dry clothing. Arnold never told them he saw Sandy stealing away that morning. But, they would be married in two weeks, he knew for sure. How glad he was that Margaret had found her right guy.

Life was measured by ticking off things to do. Sandy had to sell his car. He moved out of his apartment. He received documents and directions from the Navy. He had to get his black suit altered, five years old and somewhat out of date. He called his uncle to invite him to the wedding. He bought a modest wedding ring with money from selling his car. He received a reply back from Harvey....of course we will come!

He received more orders. He had nightly dinner with Margaret and her parents, and together they reviewed the plans which though simple, were complex enough with rental chairs, a buffet lunch being brought in by Mrs. Whitfield's sorority, and ten dozen other details. A cake had been ordered. Music? Margaret's childhood piano teacher could play the wedding march on the piano in the living room, with windows open. Honeymoon?—they had a bit of time, but not much money, so they accepted the invitation for Dr. Nowell's cabin.

Mrs. Whitfield was by turns elated and worried. Felicity followed her around, and seemed happy, but growled when Duvina, accompanied by her husband came to be fitted for her matron of honor dress. Margaret was not there either time—which disappointed her husband it seemed. Mrs. Whitfield said nothing, though her choice of Duvina was curious.

### Joe, Ceile, and Frankie: Put Your Hand in Mine - New York City, December 20

Joe was pacing the floor at Gate 18 of LaGuardia airport with such impatience that Ceile laughed. “You look like an expectant father!”

“Hm? Well, I guess I am. We both are, Mom.”

A telegram received four days earlier before announced that Master Frank Savage Jr., accompanied by Sydney Archer would be arriving on BOAC flight 28, from Heathrow to LaGuardia. Joe had been expecting such a notification for days, and when it finally came he whooped with excitement and then grew very sober...in the presence of Irene Gallagher, with whom he was living living. He had already told her—asked—begged—to help take care of Frankie. Ceile had to go to Texas, which is where she was when he made the phone call, telling her he would yank rank to get her a leave to come to New York and greet their son.

“I don’t mind, at all,” said Irene. “But after all you two went through to adopt him, for both of you to go away...”

“He will join Ceile in Texas, in the spring, when school’s over.”

“And where will you be?” Irene said this pointedly.

“Mom, I have duty,” Joe said. He did not say this protestingly. He said this with calm sincerity. And a feeling of fear. He had sent out feelers, dropping the word “henges” as much as he could into any ear that seemed to be perhaps interested. He met with blank stares...which could be, he knew, the most interested.

“Duty that you can’t refuse I can see. And it must be something—terrible perhaps for you to be leaving almost as soon as your son gets here.”

“You’re right Mom.” That’s all he said. But he heard the word “son” and knew that Irene was wondering if Pres would ever...

Irene figuratively set her jaw, and kept on going...including seeing Joe off to New York City, into which Ceile would fly and meet Joe. There they would greet their adopted son...and her and Max’s new grandchild, she chided herself. A new one, and older than either or her two grandsons. She knew that Ceile was both elated and fearful, and Joe tense and excited. Also, Irene, as requested, kept quiet about the adoption. No shame, or embarrassment; they just wanted to be left alone with their new son, without making the news—and it could happen, with the PRO sending out releases of “General adopts former CO’s son...”

At LaGuardia, the plane finally arrived out of gray skies. They watched eagerly and finally saw Sydney escorting Frankie from the plane...but it was Viscountess Adelaide Vivyan escorting him rather than Sydney, whom, they were told later, had been ordered to stay home by her obstetrician. The Viscountess and Frankie immediately went to passport control, which involved at least an hour...Joe and

Ceile were nervous now that Frankie was here, and almost in sight that some problem would rise with his status as an adoptee, in the company of a non-relation...who hopefully was sober.

Finally Adelaide and the six year old Frankie came through the doors. For a moment, Joe feasted on the kid's face: alert, shy, amazed...He took off his cap when he saw Joe and grinned...shyly. Joe and Ceile had actually talked about this moment. No rushing, no hysterics. Keep it quiet and easy. The boy had left England and his home, or homes, for another home, in another country—actually half his own--and it was best to take it in steps. "Adelaide, thanks so much," Joe said, putting aside his inevitable questions, though he could see her face clear and smiling. He then kneeled to Frankie. "How about a hug?"

He threw his arms around Joe and then Ceile. "Did you like the plane ride?" Joe asked.

"Yes, but it was so long!"

"Are you hungry? Tired?" Ceile asked.

"Hungry, Miss Ceile!"

"Well, let's get your luggage and be on our way," Joe said, scooped Frankie into his arms, and they proceeded down the concourse, happy, elated, nervous, and scared to death.

And wary of Adelaide's presence even though she told them of Sydney Archer being told not to undertake a transatlantic journey. However, she seemed calm, even rather resolute.

They first went to their hotel in Manhattan, the Milford Plaza, which had comfortable, clean suites. On the way there Frankie pressed his nose against the cab's wet window, trying to see the tops of the buildings that towered over the sidewalks. Christmas made the twilight streets festive, and he gaped at the foodstands, the bustling restaurants. After checking in and entering their two rooms with an adjoining door, Adelaide suggested bedtime, but the look in Frankie's face showed his excitement and his desire to do everything! After he had been to the toilet and they had tea in the restaurant, they left Adelaide to her rest—perhaps drinking--and they stormed the city...to see Macy's, with its towering façade decked out in green and gold; they watched the skaters at Rockefeller Center. Frankie had his first hot dog from a vendor, enveloped with steam from his oven. Then pointed shyly to what he wanted them to buy for him: a black teddy bear with an open, friendly smile in his mouth and golden eyes. Ceile was delighted. Any other six year old might have gloried in the plastic guns and other instruments of war.

"Well, now what?" Joe asked, holding Frankie high in his arms to look around. No answer. He had suddenly dropped off to sleep in the muddle and roar of a New York sidewalk. Joe and Ceile only smiled, caught a taxi and took him home and to bed.

"How you doing, Mom?" Joe asked his wife tenderly, after they undressed, slid his pajamas on, and tucked in. Ceile placed the teddy bear next to his golden head.

“Just fine...Dad.” They both knelt by the bed, looking at their son. They exhausted and amazed. They let the moment fill them, and they enjoyed it because today, that moment, they were alive and together. Any moment, a phone call might come, giving Joe his sub-rosa orders. Ceile had not been told of the exact situation, but she sensed a new tension in Joe since he had returned from a sudden trip to New Mexico. His silence now signaled “Weeds” and she took the signal seriously. Take what they could, from every moment, from now on, till...the next morning, as a matter of fact.

Adelaide apologetically invited them to breakfast, having it served in her connected room. She seemed collected and perfectly sober, and midway through their eggs and toast, she asked, “You do remember the message that I wrote to you on the tea table?”

Yes, they did. They were not puzzled over no follow up, but then again, Joe said honestly, “You were acting, erratically, it seems. But your life had not been easy, with a husband gone and a baby coming...” He passed over the scandal floating over both and her drinking... “Have you learned anything?”

“A little more about his connections with MI-6. The man who has been advising me...can’t make any connections yet between that and his disappearance. But he believes the roots exist in your wedding, back in April 1946. Meaning...I understand there were official activities going on at the time that only few were aware of. I was told to keep quiet. Keep away from things as much as possible. But there are other mysteries going on that Percy seemed involved in and I feel...were responsible for his disappearance.”

Ceile asked an insightful question of Adelaide: “Then your carelessness and your—rumors of drinking—was that an act then?”

“Yes. Luckily, I was able to convince Ethan to prevent Sydney from flying, due to her condition. It seemed the one way to speak to those whom Percy trusted...Is it true that you spoke with my husband in the afternoon at those barrows?”

Yes...of course,” Joe said.

“And he did not name the man he was to meet, the one from Cambridge?”

“No. At the time it didn’t seem necessary to ask.”

“Of course not. But did Percy at that time...perhaps speak about a sword? Some ancient sword?”

Joe shook his head. Adelaide then recounted what Chauncey told her: during that April wedding, that “crazy party,” plumbing problems had dislodged a fragment of a sword from a hiding place in the cavernous attic. Percy had regarded the fragment with great interest; perhaps there was truth to Arthurian treasures being secreted in great house. “And then the necklace found on Mr. Stovall’s property and returned to us...and whatever happened to my darling Percy...I feel is tied up in this. General Gallagher, I’m frightened, puzzled, and don’t know what to do. Is this...something...your government...perhaps our governments...?”

"I have no idea," Joe admitted.

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The roads were cleared of snow, with heaps of the stuff on the roadside. Irene's new Buick, which Joe had borrowed, whizzed carefully down the asphalt to Archer's Run. They had seen Adelaide off on her plane back to England; and had understood when she wiped her eyes when saying goodbye to Frankie. He hugged her, and thanked her beautifully, with wisdom beyond his years. They all waved goodbye as she left to return to England, a suitcase full of little gifts for Frankie's friends at Bryncote.

But as Joe drove, his brain whirled with stories, mysteries, links...something had to break, he thought, curling his gloved fingers over the steering wheel. Something...

"Joe," said Ceile and he came back to his task, driving home his two beloveds. "How about some coffee, hm?...and hot chocolate for this young man."

"Your wish, my command," Joe said. Ahead glowed the neon sign of a restaurant and diner. He pulled in, and waited while another car pulled in and drove to the back. They were soon seated at a booth in the diner section. Frankie gazed around at the gleaming waffled backdrop of the kitchen where a cook and waitresses worked, and nodded when Ceile asked him if he would like some cake. Joe had taken a few sips of his coffee when he saw a reflection in the shiny steel over Ceile's head.

Tib. He shriveled inside, as he always did when fighters were spotted, the flak blossomed up. He got hold of himself, once more recalling Savage's kick in the ass.

"I need to make a phone call," he said after a few minutes, getting up and heading down the gleaming hallway, and a door opened...and a hand gestured to him.

Joe neither ignored nor acknowledged it. Inside he was quivering; his face was immobile as he excused himself to use the men's room. He walked down a short hallway connecting the diner to the dining room.

He entered into a room that local groups met in; Joe noted plaques for the Lions Club, Rotary, and Junior League of something or other. Tib stood, both close and distant from two men who were dressed in black. Completely neat, though both looked tired and even a bit worn. The taller, older man had probably suffered burns at some time, the way the skin under his left eye and under his chin was rumped. His associate was younger, bright blond hair, half his slender face concealed by his dark glasses.

They were calm and so was he. But he recalled when he was in France, escaping along an already imperiled underground. He and Liane Colet, normal citizens crossing the reservoir bridgeway had just passed the young sentry who suddenly shouted at them to stop!...did they have a match? He had panicked so much that Liane flustered out a story that he was sick, and he nearly was.

Joe felt like he did then...like throwing up... "Let's be quick, please," he said. "My family is waiting."

"You seem to want to meet us."

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Duty. To my country...and to my family.”

The two men were silent to this. Then, “You do know that you have crossed into certain territories. You are not free to cross back and pretend nothing happened.”

“What the hell does that mean?” But it was quietly said. “My wife and my child are waiting for me...”

“What child? You have no children.” The younger blond man was speaking; Joe recognized a Russian tint to his voice.

“Adopted. We just--it’s his first Christmas with us.” Joe made himself shut up; it sounded as though he was appealing to the guy’s sympathy, but he was, dammit, he was.

“One moment.” The older man left and returned after a moment. “Handsome lad.” He didn’t ask for any more details.

“Yes.” There seemed a thaw in the room. Joe then said. “During the war I hated most when we flew without knowing what the hell we were doing. When we had an objective, it helped.”

“An objective then. We need allies.”

“Is that an invitation?”

“No, and it’s not a threat.”

“Then what is it?” Joe asked.

“Sheer impudence,” the older man said. “Wait for us to contact you.”

Joe stood his ground. “Is this about the henge?”

Their answer was a closing door. Tib followed them, and then returned. “Thanks,” he said. “We need these guys as our friends.”

“Strange way to meet them.”

“The older man was most insistent on we following you here.”

Joe had nothing to say. “Regards to Creighton,” he said.

In a few more minutes Joe rejoined his two beloveds. They finished their coffee and Frankie finished the slice of cake Ceile had ordered. They left. Then another two hours to his parents’ house—empty, but the caretaker, Cal Hopkins’ nephew, had the fire blazing and the lights on when they drove in...and in the morning, they would buy a tree at the nursery and decorate it. After they had taken Frankie to his

bedroom—which had once belonged to his Uncle Jeff, who had died, good Lord, nearly ten years ago—and helped him wash up, and tucked him in, they descended into the familiar library, poured brandy, snuggled on the old leather couch. “Well, let’s have it,” Ceile said. “Who was that guy?—I saw him looking at Frankie.”

Without hesitation, and without speed, he told her a great deal of the story...largely centering on how he and Creighton had allied to search out answers for the other: knowledge about Pres, and knowledge about the henges.

“I thought those had disappeared into the Pentagon,” she said, after she had grown excited...and then solemn over the news that Pres...was alive, according to rumor, but even a rumor was something. She had sensed for a while that Joe was in possession of a secret...which both elated and disturbed him, but she had attributed this to Frankie coming.

“The photographs have but they and the henges—well, I don’t know shit about the henges except they need to be found, identified, figured out, disposed of.”

“Can I be part of it?” she asked.

“God, no. I shouldn’t even told you what I did. I’ve probably put you into some kind of danger.”

“Well, then we face it together.”

“There’s more to us we than just us two now.”

Ceile’s eyes glazed and then hardened—for a moment—realizing her new role. The woman at home, tending hearth, tending family. But she was still a soldier...and a soldier understood duty.

### Harvey and Melva: Homecoming Must Render an Account: Providence, December 18

Harvey had departed for Washington; in his hotel room he phoned Ursula O'Brien to tell him how to find him. Thank God for friends; Maxwell Gallagher, and other generals put in their phone calls and by evening, a locked wheel was moving—which precipitated a series of steps but finally, Capt. Byron Mahoney would appear before JAG again, in another appeal. No date was set, except for 1950.

Ursula, to whom he related this, backed his efforts one hundred per cent—and promised to get a scholarship for a deserving young man in Mississippi.

He came home, tired, exuberant—and glad, because he knew Melva was home; a phone call and her happy voice told him that his marriage was all right. Knowing that Melva loved a good curry-- in London you could find a curry joint every two blocks—he finally found an Indian restaurant on the riverfront and brought home curried chicken and two more containers of shrimp and crab puffs—and a bottle of wine. Melva joyfully exclaimed over dinner after she finished kissing him. In his absence, she had picked up a small tree and had enterprisingly decorated it with a string of lights and ornaments bought at Woolworth's—familiar to her as the chain also existed in England. Harvey exclaimed with pleasure when he saw it, and realized he had not given a thought to finding a tree and digging into the attic for the Stovall ornaments...he was just as glad he hadn't; that would have been another way of telling her she was living in a home “not her own.” And now...

As they sat down to their spicy food, over which they clinked wine glasses, he then said, “You remember Ceile's mother?” he asked. “Tall vigorous woman?—at the wedding?”

“Of course!--ah, did you see Joe and Ceile again?”

“No—but I met with her—mother, head of the Fitzjon Foundation.”

“And?”

Harvey talked like a millrace. The family owned the Orion Aircraft company; and Ursula Fitzjon O'Brien, independently wealthy, administered a foundation based on her family's fortune...and after negotiations with Bassingbury College, growing like the proverbial weed with all the GIs going to college, the Foundation had endowed a law college that he, Harvey, had been hired to chair. Chairing from the get-go meant he and others would develop the college, write up the charter and by laws, recruit professors, decide on classes, and undertake a thousand other steps.

He had been in conversation with them. It was perfect, pitch perfect—not only was he a lawyer, he was a skilled administrator, and had a vision shaped at Nuremberg that law, while not perfect, was one of humankind's finest instruments for defending the guilty and protecting the innocent, including the Negro citizens of the United States...and they would move to Bassingbury.

“What about your—work?” Melva demanded.

“Resigned. Recent events have told me that I don't belong there anymore.”

“Oh.”

Harvey heard the single syllable, but did not fully get its dimension. “We need to move to Bassingbury ASAP; I think the house will sell in five minutes; my cousin was always getting offers--”

“Harvey, what about me?” she interrupted.

He waited before speaking. “Melva...I know you haven’t been happy here.”

“Well, not exactly, but...”

“But...?” Harvey probed. The wonderful dinner was going cold on the table.

“Why didn’t you tell me about your interview?—you’re thrilled with it, so why did you hide it?”

“I wanted to surprise you.” Harvey did not murmur or obfuscate, but he felt the gray edge of apology in his words—edged with scarlet anger.

“Goddam, that you have—how can you just do something like that without asking me?”

“I seem to recall...that you once bought a house without asking me.”

“I couldn’t get through to you—”

“You didn’t even tell me you were thinking of such a thing—then wham, one deteriorated house—”

“I thought we were happy there—”

“DID YOU?”

He was shocked at his voice. He and Rachel had never raised their voices like this, not once in the nearly twenty years they were married.

Fury sparked in her eyes. “If you have to ask me that—dear companion in life—dammit, I won’t answer you—you can go to hell you---aghhhh,” she roared, throwing down her untasted wine on the patterned carpet, pushing her chair away from the table and dashing upstairs. He darted up to follow her and he heard a door slam, somewhere upstairs—it didn’t sound like theirs.

Harvey blotted up her wine, firmly finished off his own, waiting for her to come down and for them to have dinner and make up. He was already sorry for what he had said...and yes, she was right. He should have said something.

He finally went upstairs and tapped on the door of the guest bedroom—and heard her sobbing. Melva never cried; she had stayed dry-eyed through the loss of the house in Archbury.

He returned to the dining table and ate without taste or pleasure. He tucked the leftover food away. Then, akin to how he laid down belt after belt of whiskey back in 1943, he got pretty shit-faced drunk that night, to blunt a lot of pain that he had given into the temptation...not to confront issues.

And what a terrible thing he had said to his...wife.

Well, he had to take up that job. No going back, as Pottle and Johnson had washed their hands of him though civilly. He would sell the house. Melva was never happy here anyway.

Harvey drew a deep breath, proud that he had finally laid Rachel and Mike to rest.

A moment later, he knew he had not; certainly not about Mike.

Then he brushed the dead aside for the issue at hand; two living people had a crisis in their marriage.

He slept as best he could on the couch, and at dawn, around seven, he rose to his feet, and walked upstairs. Hours of fury, then doubt, then sorrow, swimming in waters of mystery--then a feeling of wanting to make up—start all over again—what did she want to do?--finally guided his feet and his thinking. He would apologize to Melva—for accepting the job without telling her, for bellowing about the dead issue of her buying the house in England. It was gone anyway. He hoped their marriage was not the same. He would open his heart and his arms, and say, whatever she wished to do, he would do, but Captain Mahoney's defense had to come first. This was a man's life.

To his knock, no noise. He pushed the door open, and found the room empty. He returned to their bedroom and found it empty, though clearly she had packed clothes and left, down the kitchen steps and out the back door.

The car was still in the driveway. But she could take care of herself.... He fixed some coffee, lighted the fire...and weighed alternatives.

All thoughts shriveled when the phone rang.

"Hi, sweetheart," he answered. But his hand shook as he clutched the headpiece.

There was silence, though Harvey could hear noise in the background. "Harvey, please come and get me at the train station," she said.

"You bet." He drove down to the station on Gaspee where they had once alighted with trepidation and hope. Harvey was smart enough to know that this was scarcely the end of the situation, driven in when Melva silently got in, did not watch as he placed her valise in the trunk, did not kiss him when he slid behind the wheel, and stared glumly out the streaming windshield all the way home. There she climbed the stairs, dumped her ill-packed valise next to their bed, and took a long bath. She came downstairs, her red hair wrapped in a towel, and looking so beautiful that Harvey could have...not the time. He brought her toast and coffee and too old to act like a puppy seeking forgiveness, quietly read the newspaper until she was ready to talk. But first, while she had bathed, he had found the Toby and placed it on the mantle. While he read the newspaper and waited, he kept glancing at the Toby.

When she was ready, he immediately folded the newspaper, and said, "Honey, I am sorry. Tell me what you want to do...and we'll do it."

“I know that position in Bassingbury means a great deal to you. You were a different man when you came home and then I stomped on it—“

“With good reason. I should have discussed the position with you before going.”

“Why didn’t you?”

Harvey spoke slowly, honestly, softly. “I guess, Melva, I still don’t know you very well. I wasn’t sure what you would think. And I gave into the temptation of—avoiding the subject—and doing it—and hoping that you’d welcome the chance of leaving a home that you probably don’t consider your own.”

“Well...you’re not wrong you know.”

“Bassingbury will be new to both of us. We can choose a house—a house completely new to us both—a house that we both like.” But he knew a house, new or otherwise, was no solution to their issues.

She was silent.

“Melvy, do you want to go back to England?”

She rammed her mouth and chin into her folded hands. She then raised her head, folded her hands, twisted them, and looked at his wide, tense, blue eyes. “Not without you,” she whispered.

They joined hands. But this did not make things fine and dandy. They were still pretty much where they five minutes ago, a year ago. But at least she had agreed to go to Bassingbury. And she didn’t want to go home... In light of this, the Mahoney court martial receded, if only slightly. “It really is a matter of who you are with. Back in 1948—that dinner party...and I realized that with the ladies—with their men—it was whom they were with. Well, I’m with you—and a lovely home—“

“Full of ghosts—“

“No. Rachel and Michael are here but their ghosts aren’t here. And you’re here—but—“

“Melvy—the ladies you spoke of—you know, they were with their men but their work went on. Pat Bates was still forecasting—Irina was part of Nik’s work, and Ceile—there always a need for a nurse. When you came here, you got cut off at the knees.”

“Yes,” Melva said. “I did. I thought I could handle it.”

“So...what do we do now?” Harvey ventured. He referred to the next five minutes and next two, three, five months and more, into the future...

Her answer was surprising. “How about... going to a wedding.”

“Hm?”

She went to the study, and came back with an envelope, addressed to them both.

Harvey found it to be a handwritten invitation to the wedding of Alexander Komansky and Margaret Anne Whitfield on Saturday, the eighteenth day of January, 1950, in Altadena, California.

“Well, that’s quite a change. They were going to marry in 1951.”

“There’s a note on the back. I didn’t read it.”

Harvey did so and bleated a laugh. “He’s joining the Navy!—to be a pilot—I’ll be damned...ah... and he and—Margaret want to marry before he goes into training—and he wants me to be the best man—huh, well—well, shall...we go?”

Nausea came over her—and she rose, heading for the downstairs bathroom. Concerned, Harvey followed her. When she was finished, he sat her down on the toilet seat, wet a washcloth and tenderly patted her face. “I probably picked up something at the train station,” she said. She was all right, but her face was pale. “Well--?” she then asked.

“Well...ah...what?”

“Moving to Bassingbury. I can’t be left behind here.”

“You wish to?”

“Of course I do. Move to Bassingbury.” But her voice was not joyful.

“And about...going to California for the wedding?”

“Of course. You’ve spoken of him highly. This won’t prove a problem with Bassingbury?”

“I’ll cross that Rubicon when I get to it. I need to make some phone calls—and I’ll get busy with plane tickets.” He knew this trip and the festivity was putting off their own problems, but he embraced it. A wedding was a good time to renew vows in their minds and hearts. “California, here we come,” he announced the next day and identified their flight day and time. Melva smiled at his excitement...as her stomach rocked with nausea again.

Out of the corner of his eye, Harvey saw the Toby Mug...and wondered if he really saw it winking at him.

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Another phone Harvey made...led to several more before he finally tracked down Joe and Ceile in Archer’s Run, on December 22 as they enjoyed a holiday with Frankie, with Joe going back and forth between Washington a few times, and Ceile was due back in Texas on December 27. When Joe answered, he said, “Joe, it’s an old penny!”

“Harv!—Ceile, it’s Harv—well, what’s up—“

Ceile, in the middle of getting their dinner on the kitchen table heard Joe say, “Well, that is news—yeah, yeah—uh, no, we haven’t received an invitation Harv, but that’s not surprising. Not a word all right?”

Well, I'm afraid he might say no..." After a few more minutes, he hung up and grinned at his wife. "Well, Alexander Komansky is getting married, on January 18, and we're attending."

"After all this time--? Joe, did you ever write to him about Bryn?"

"No, because I was waiting for your go ahead. But I once promised to drop everything and be best man when he wanted me."

"I remember that vow. You were nearly under the table from too many brandies."

"Meant it then, and mean it now. If he throws us out, he throws us out..."

"Who is he marrying?"

"Oh, I forgot to ask...Wait, Harvey told me once he had proposed—to a girl named..." He paused.

"Uh...Margaret...Whitfield."

"Whitfield?" Ceile asked, as if confirming the name. Joe nodded, already seated at his desk in the kitchen, brought there because the kitchen had the best light at this time of year. He started flipping calendars and consulting notes and reaching for the phone to start getting his schedule straightened out, moving meetings, and making requests... "My queen, can you join me in California?"

Ceile smiled, glad he recalled that she had duty too. "I will arrange it," she stated. Joe grinned in relief and she knew that he knew...that Sandy might be nicer if they were to arrive together.

Frankie, delightedly reading comic books before the fire in the den, came happily into the kitchen for dinner and found his new parents cheerful and yes, a bit nervous. The next evening, he sensed his father was even more nervous. His new mother was not nervous, though she was a little preoccupied he could tell, though he didn't know the word "preoccupied." He didn't also know that his mother was thinking about how she was related to the Whitfield family through her aunt, married to her uncle the Senator, and now here Sandy was marrying a Whitfield. And they had visited Windy Magoo in Ireland, meaning Whitfield, after the wife's name... What about it? she would ask herself. The name was not that uncommon. Though the name was there to stay in her mind...

And Frankie did not know, until years later, that Joe's nervousness arose from a letter in afternoon mail. No stamp, or processing.

Though alone, he still opened it cautiously, and had read the words: "Pres escape Siberian prison."