PROLOGUE

October 15, 1991

U.S. Embassy, Tallinn, Estonia

“Very snazzy, Mr. Fuller.”

“Very retro,” replied the deputy chief of mission. “Not my tie,” he

added, giving both ends of the black bow a last adjustment. “Your

‘snazzy.’” He turned around to face Ms. Boyle. “It’s a long time since

I’ve heard that one.”

“I suppose I could say you look ‘baaad.’”

Ms. Boyle, Hawkins Fuller imagined, was just on the sunny side of

forty, old enough to know “snazzy” and young enough to know

“baaad,” though for that matter, even he, at sixty-six, knew that

“baaad” meant “good.”

She lingered a moment, the way women still did in the presence of

Hawkins Fuller, imagining when the full head of silvery hair had been

black, the way the eyebrows still were, in Gregory Peck–style

contrast. But Mr. Fuller was better-looking than Gregory Peck.

He, too, lingered for a moment, prolonging the familiar comfort of

admiration. “These,” he finally said, pointing to the stack of badly

printed telexes near the edge of his desk: “Very bad. Not ‘baaad.’

Just lousy.”

“I know,” sighed Ms. Boyle, who doubted that the embassy, still

being flung together, would be getting even internal e-mail anytime

soon. “But that guy’s been working miracles with the phones. They’re

twenty times better than last week. The ambassador talked to

Brussels and Washington twice today. Clear as a bell both times.

And here,” she said, darting back out to her desk and returning with

some regular mail from the pouch. “A primitive but reliable means of

communication.” She could see that the envelopes were personal,

so she set them down unopened and left with a friendly marching

order: “Don’t dawdle. Lucy will be downstairs in five minutes.”

He wondered how many years ago Ms. Boyle would still have

been saying “Mrs. Fuller” instead of “Lucy.”

“All right,” he replied. “And if I do dawdle”—he always did; the

shambling and the daydreaming made his good looks even more

appealing—“just buzz me, Miss Blue.”

Ms. Boyle looked puzzled.

“Ah,” said Fuller. “That one you are too young for.”

She left, smiling as she closed the door, leaving Fuller to pick up

the two bright-orange envelopes atop the pile of mail she’d just

placed on his desk: Halloween cards, a little early, from the

grandchildren in Potomac. Farther down the stack, a letter from

Lucy’s Realtor in D.C., about that house in Chevy Chase she was

determined to buy.

They’d be home for good in another year, and he’d finally take up

the half-time job being held for him at the Carnegie Endowment. Odd

to find himself here, in the meantime, helping out with the New World

Order. He was supposed to have wound up his career last spring,

after the six years in Bulgaria. It had never been that much of a

career, and he’d never much minded that, but as he looked out on

the darkening Gulf of Finland, he seemed compelled to make a fast

review of it, as if it were one of the checking-for-Alzheimer’s

exercises that Lucy wanted to add to their breakfast regimen of bran

muffins and Centrum Silver tablets.

All right: the six years in Bulgaria; the four before that in D.C.; the

four years prior to those at the U.S. mission to the UN. Which put

you back in the mid- and late seventies—some luck for that to be the

era when they finally got posted to New York! And yet, for all the

fiscal calamity and crime (that awful broad-daylight hour when Lucy

came home with a bruised cheek and no purse), he’d ridden the

handbasket through some interesting stops on its way to hell. At fifty,

he’d been too old, really, for the underground pleasures that were

suddenly so unpoliced. But his looks had granted him an extension,

allowed him occasional, plausible entry to the throbbing middle-ofthe-night world west of West Street. It had been some luck, a portion

of his lifetime’s worth, to have made it home from those forays

without so much as a hangover, let alone the time-released fate that

would now be necessitating one of those humiliating obits with their

mention of a “long illness” or “pneumonia” that even Lucy, behind her

newspaper and bran muffin, could manage to decode.

But I digress, he thought, resuming the fast, reassuring rewind. He

reached the six years in Austria (Nixon mostly); then the four in

Sweden, where the draft dodgers had more social status than the

embassy people, who ran down LBJ as much as they decently could

while shaking their heads and nibbling the host’s gravlax. And before

that? The fourteen years, 1952 to ’66, right in Foggy Bottom in the

State Department’s Bureau of Congressional Relations, where he

would have been happy to stay forever, until Lucy decided that he

should use his small accumulations of clout and connectedness to

effect a shift, at the age of forty, from the civil to the foreign service. It

was time for them to see the world, she had decreed.

And that was it, a life span so well recollected, he decided, there

was no need to do the date ranges for the early sojourns in Oslo and

Paraguay, let alone Harvard and the navy and St. Paul’s. Nope, no

Alzheimer’s for Mrs. Fuller’s little boy. Tomorrow morning he’d tell

Lucy to skip the muffins and to scramble some eggs in an aluminum

skillet.

He wondered: When they got home, would there be bus service

from Maryland down to the Carnegie on Massachusetts Avenue?

During his last period at State—’81 to ’85, Reagan I, thank you very

much—he had never gotten the hang of the new Metro, whose

underground rumblings had, in any case, never been permitted to

disturb Georgetown. He was wishing that Lucy would just let them go

back there, and forget about this pile in Chevy Chase, when he

noticed the small white envelope addressed in a feminine hand with

the neatness of his wife’s generation.

One of her Wellesley pals? Maybe, though he couldn’t recall any

Russell in Scottsdale, Arizona. Only after another few seconds did

he see that the letter was for himself and not his wife. So he slit it

open—and soon heard himself saying Christ Almighty.

Dear Fuller,

Tim Laughlin died September 1 in a Catholic hospital in

Providence, Rhode Island. He was 59 and had been sick for

some time. I heard from him often—almost never saw him, but

counted him a good friend.

I don’t know whether you pray (I myself don’t), but if you do, I

know that, even now, he would appreciate your prayers.

Whatever the case, I thought you should know.

Yours sincerely,

Mary (Johnson) Russell

It had been more than thirty years since he’d talked to either one

of them, and it was easier, now, to think of her first.

She had never called him Hawkins. She’d thought it a

preposterous first name and told him so, said “the last shall be first”

and that he would be “Fuller” with her, under any and all

circumstances. He’d replied that she didn’t know the half, that

“Hawkins” was really his middle name, “Zechariah” being the first.

And they’d laughed, she with the sharp glint in her eye that

sometimes made him call her La Pasionaria, not because the glint

was passionate but because it declared, so plainly, that you, Z.

Hawkins Fuller, shall not pass. It wasn’t the castle of sex from which

Mary Johnson had barred him during their long non-affair; that had

never really been at issue. It was any sort of confidence she had

barred him from. It was her trust.

He put her letter back in its envelope, and the envelope into a

drawer, a different drawer from the one into which he’d put the

grandchildren’s cards and the Realtor’s letter.

Poor, sad, merry little Tim, he thought, looking at the clock. AIDS,

of course.

He stood up and walked into the outer office.

“You beat my summons by ten seconds,” said Ms. Boyle. “She’s

downstairs.”

And so she was. Almost as slim as she’d been at Wellesley; her

hair, now a silvery gold, in the same thick little pageboy she’d always

worn; her outfit the one she’d explained to him at breakfast. A

robin’s-egg-blue jacket over a white blouse above a black skirt: add it

up and you had the Estonians’ new, which was to say old, tricolor

flag. No one would expect the number-two man’s wife to go to this

sort of trouble, and no one would fail to notice how much prettier she

was than the number-one man’s wife.

“So,” said Lucy, smiling brightly as she brushed down a couple of

unruly stalks in her husband’s eyebrow, “Ms. Boyle tells me the mails

are coming through.”

“Yes,” said her husband. “Neither rain, nor sleet, nor geopolitical

convulsion…”

Lucy continued to smile, brushing Hawkins’ lapels and enjoying

the way two or three of the Estonian wives here in the reception hall

were noticing her spousal attentions. Perhaps they were deciding

she and Hawkins looked like that older couple in the Ralph Lauren

ads. Hadn’t a Polo shop opened up in Tallinn? Almost everything

else already seemed to have arrived.

“Your Realtor wants us to go a little higher,” said Fuller.

“Our Realtor, dearest.” She performed one last primp, pulling down

Hawkins’ right cuff. He, too, knew that she was showing off their

extended youth and vigor, as if freedom were a good brand of

moisturizer they had wisely chosen long ago. This is what you’ve

been missing for fifty years, she seemed to be saying to the

Estonians, less from patriotism than personal pride.

Fifty years? thought Fuller. More like all but twenty of the last five

hundred. Who hadn’t rolled over this place? First the Swedes; later

the Germans; only after that the Russians.

Having at last let go of her husband, Lucy now clasped both hands

of the foreign minister’s wife, exclaiming over her like a sorority sister

who’d finally made it back for a reunion. Fuller took a glass of

champagne from one of the waiters and moved away from the center

of the room.

Though guests were still arriving, the American ambassador had

already begun his toast to the embassy’s reopening, and all at once

Fuller thought he could recall a party he’d gone to maybe thirty-five

years ago, at the Estonians’ “embassy” in Washington, a sad little

outpost shared by one of the other two captive Baltic nations. A

handful of unlucky young fellows from State had been sent into a

room full of smoked fish and stained suits to keep company with the

exiles, to smile at them as if they were a girl with polio that everyone

pretended would one day, somehow, get up out of that chair and

walk again. Was it possible he’d brought Mary Johnson that night?

Then taken her home in a cab and kissed her, on the cheek, before

ten p.m.?

The ambassador was speaking of the long, unbroken “legal

continuity” of U.S.-Estonian relations, as if the crippled girl had in

some manner gone on dancing all along. But now they could all

welcome her “peaceful return to the family of nations that are free in

fact.” Applause, while Fuller mused upon how this return had very

nearly not been peaceful at all. The Lithuanians, the first to flex their

muscles after the wall came down, had driven Gorby into a real

Stalinist snit, and Tallinn was lucky to have escaped the nasty

thrashing, however futile, he’d dished out to Vilnius.

Now the ambassador tried a bit of wordplay, sparsely appreciated,

about the speed with which Estonia had gone from being a “captive”

nation to a “most-favored” one. He went on to recount the

astonishing events of the past two months: the failed coup in

Moscow; the U.S.S.R.’s panicked recognition of the Baltic nations’

independence; the UN’s offer of seats to the three of them. The

ambassador continued on, even as a murmur of bored chatter began

to rise on the periphery of his audience. Fuller felt a tug at his elbow,

from a young man eager to introduce him to a “formerly persecuted

intellectual” who was now helping to draft the constitution. And once

the ambassador officially subsided, this same avid introducer told

Fuller it was “a great imperative” that he should meet the grizzled old

man now being pulled toward him.

“Yes, of course,” said Fuller, smiling and shaking the old man’s

hand. He understood that here was one of the “forest brotherhood”

who after the war had refused to come in from the cold and accept

the Soviets’ dominion, preferring instead to remain hidden in the

woods. Not guerrillas, exactly; more, Fuller thought, like those

Japanese soldiers who would turn up on a Pacific island, decades

after the war, still hanging on to the fresh shirt they were convinced

they’d wear on the day the emperor took the Americans’ surrender.

Of course, these forest brothers had known the war was over, and

still they’d stayed out there eating bark and twigs—a mystery to

Fuller, who was pleased when the old man, looking hungry even

now, relaxed his grip.

The guest list sent over by the Estonians had been

overwhelmingly indigenous, whereas State, good sports as always,

had made sure to add a dozen or so of the old occupying Russians,

like the one Fuller was being introduced to now, a florid, white-haired

man who’d spent the last thirty years running a phosphate mine—

and five hundred people’s lives—in the northeastern part of the

country. Fuller heard “phosphate” and made a joke about the fizz in

his second glass of champagne; the Russian smiled

uncomprehendingly, until a young man from the Foreign Ministry

who’d just joined them translated the English remark—into Russian.

Fuller realized that after three decades here, this amiable

backpedaler, who had raised his glass higher than anyone else to

the ambassador’s toast, knew fewer words of Estonian than Lucy

had made it her business to acquire on the plane to Tallinn.

“Mr. Deputy Chief,” said the young Foreign Ministry man, “my

pleasure it is to present Mr. Lennart Meri.”

Fuller had been briefed on this polymath: a writer, a film director,

and now the foreign minister himself. Meri was, Fuller now assured

him, handsome enough to be in front of the camera as well as

behind.

“And look who is talking!” replied the minister. In another minute

the two of them were arranging to have lunch—“anything but you

Americans with your breakfasts!”—at the Stikliai Hotel.

A man who’d been with the more conservative wing of the Popular

Front interrupted them. An advocate, until recently, of “autonomy”

rather than full-blown independence, he was in as much of a rush as

the Russian phosphate boss to ingratiate himself with the new

reality. Fuller, displaying the same wide, whitened smile he did for

everyone else, welcomed the gentleman into the circle that was

forming around him.

“You see, Mr. Vice Ambassador,” said the Popular Front man,

more for the foreign minister’s ears than Fuller’s, “it was what you

would call a ‘neat trick’ for us to declare independence once the

Soviet parliament finally pronounced the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact

and the 1940 annexation to have been illegal all along.”

“Explain that to me,” said Fuller, in the same bright tone Lucy was

using to ask the phosphate boss’s wife how she managed to keep up

with her grandchildren in Moscow.

“It was easier for them to admit that we had never been part of the

U.S.S.R. than to let us secede,” said the man from the Popular

Front, making sure his explanation registered with the foreign

minister. “That,” he elaborated, “would have created a bad

precedent. One that many other of the Soviet republics might still be

wanting to use.”

“Nothing succeeds like secession,” said Fuller.

The foreign minister smiled, but the Popular Front man, not getting

the jest, began to fret that he had scored no points after all. Fuller

gave him a friendly tap on the arm and thought: The Jesuits. That’s

what Tim would be saying, with his strong, high laugh about the logic

that had just been offered. The Jesuits would love that, Hawk!

To Fuller’s relief, the musical program was about to begin, peppy

alternations of Cole Porter and Baltic folk songs that Ms. Boyle had

helped to pull together. She was at it even now, setting out the

enameled-eagle party favors they’d been unable to find all afternoon.

After twenty minutes and a fast vodka tonic, and while the Russian

phosphate boss applauded the conclusion of “Friendship”—just a

perfect blendship!—Fuller left the room. He knew that Lucy would

cover for him.

In half a minute he was out on the cobblestones, stepping off into

the night, happy with the autonomy—if not exactly independence—

that he’d always taken as his right. Lucy might make him drive her to

see the sights in Narva next week, and come June she’d have a

houseful of dull friends over from the States to see the White Nights;

but however late he came home tonight, it would be all right. She

lived, he knew, in a perpetual White Night of her own, pushing the

clock back to whatever hour she decided he had come in at after all.

It was really too cold to be out, and Fuller was still wary of walking

here at all. Hard to imagine there were no longer Soviet troops on

patrol. Actually, there were still some, not due to leave for a year or

two more, by which time the Estonians would also have gotten rid of

the rubles they were using even now. Awfully good-looking, some of

those Russian boys he’d seen. Sweet faces, trying to look so hard

under their stiff caps. Alas, how quickly those faces aged and

sagged, the way it was with every good-looking Jewish boy he’d ever

had back home.

Fuller looked up toward a small, pearl-onioned dome, not far from

a stone staircase connecting the city’s old and upper towns. A strong

wind was blowing across the gulf, maybe all the way from Finland,

that country so like himself, for so long half free and quite

comfortable, somehow exempt from the fuss of near-apocalypse.

A young man was passing in the opposite direction. A student,

Fuller supposed: slightly built, hands in big overcoat pockets, puffing

a cigarette. Suggestive of another era; one imagined a book of

censored poems inside the overcoat. Fuller looked back over his

shoulder and, sure enough, found the young man doing the same.

But Fuller’s smile unnerved the boy, who soon continued on, eyes

front, toward his destination.

Fuller was drunk enough that he might have nodded, tried his luck.

But he’d realized, even before the young man averted his gaze, that

all he himself wanted right now was to look at the small receding

silhouette and imagine that it belonged to someone else, another

boy, whose memory was proving persistent tonight, like that last

Porter tune, which even here, in the darkness, he couldn’t quite

dislodge from his head.

He wondered what time it was in Scottsdale, and whether the

embassy’s new phones were as good as Ms. Boyle said.

PART ONE

SEPTEMBER–DECEMBER 1953

In the era of security clearances to be an

Irish Catholic became prima facie

evidence of loyalty. Harvard men were to

be checked; Fordham men would do the

checking.

—DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN

CHAPTER ONE

September 28, 1953

Tim counted four big fans whirring atop their stanchions in the

newsroom. Every window here on the seventh floor was open, and

summer had officially departed six days ago, but that was

Washington for you. When air-conditioning might come to the Star

seemed to be a perennial matter of sad-sack speculation among the

staff: “When hell freezes over,” went one answer Tim had heard in

his three months here. “Because then we won’t need it.”

Miss McGrory, one of the paper’s book reviewers, arrived with a

bottle of whiskey, which she set down next to the punch bowl and

cake, whose single chocolate layer and frosted inscription, “Happy

Trails, Sheriff,” would soon be cut into by the retirement party’s guest

of honor, Mr. Yost, a pressman who’d been at the Star since 1912

and took his nickname from a weekend job he had as a constable

over in Berwyn Heights.

More people drifted in. “We could use a piano,” opined Miss

Eversman, the music critic. She’d covered Liberace’s concert two

nights ago at Constitution Hall and was telling a police reporter that

the pianist’s mother had been in the president’s box with one of

Liberace’s brothers, Rudy, who’d served in Korea.

“So she’s got one boy who’s a soldier?” asked the reporter.

“Maybe she’s got hope of grandchildren after all.”

Miss Eversman laughed.

“Forget Liberace,” said Mr. Yost, who’d started to reminisce about

his first years here at the paper. “I remember seeing Wilson himself

—that’s Woodrow Wilson, not Charlie, to you youngsters—up in his

box at Keith’s Theatre. You wouldn’t have figured it from an egghead

like him, but did that man ever love his vaudeville. You could sell him

any player-piano roll the minute it came out.”

“We really do need a piano,” Miss Eversman sighed, as the

national and managing editors walked in. Mr. Corn and Mr. Noyes

took up positions off to the side of things and remarked to each

other, a bit shamefacedly, on the smallness of the spread.

“Well,” said Mr. Corn, quoting the late Senator Taft’s famously

impolitic advice about higher food prices: “Eat less.”

The party was making Tim feel nostalgic, and thus a bit foolish,

since he’d been, after all, only a summer hire allowed to stay on

through September—or, more exactly, this coming Friday afternoon.

They’d put him in the city room, even though he’d never been to

Washington before June and knew nothing about the District as a

place where many citizens lived life quite oblivious to the federal

government. His placement, he’d come to understand, was typical of

the Star, a paper both venerable and feckless, produced each

evening by an eccentric, occasionally brilliant staff. He had liked it

here and would miss the place, but given the shortness of his tenure

he wasn’t sure he should even take a piece of the cake once it got

cut.

A small stack of the paper’s early edition lay atop an open drawer

of the file cabinet he was leaning against. Ambassador Bohlen was

flying home from Moscow to talk with Secretary Dulles, and this

morning Louis Budenz, a Fordham professor and former red, had

testified to the McCarthy committee that, in his “humble opinion,”

parts of an Army-commissioned pamphlet about Siberia—something

put together to educate the Far Eastern Command—contained large

chunks of Soviet-sympathizing stuff that had been taken, without

footnotes or refutation, from Communist writers.

Cecil Holland, the reporter who’d written the Budenz story, now

saw Tim reading it and asked, “Laughlin, you just graduated from

Fordham, didn’t you? Ever study with this guy who says the army’s

been indoctrinating itself?”

Tim smiled. “I had somebody else for Economics, Mr. Holland.” He

grimaced. “I think I got a C-plus.” Holland laughed and walked over

to claim a piece of the cake that had finally been sliced.

At Fordham, Tim had mostly studied American history and English

literature, and his plan in coming to Washington remained, even

now, to combine his major and minor into a job writing for a politician,

though throughout the city’s hot, depopulated summer he’d made

little headway finding anything on Capitol Hill. Well, he’d have plenty

of time and motivation come Friday afternoon!

The party conversation had turned to Senator McCarthy’s

imminent wedding. “What kind of guy picks lunch hour on Tuesday to

get married in a church?” asked the financial-page editor.

“A guy who’s busy taking over the world,” answered Cecil Holland.

“That’s why he’s marrying a girl on his staff,” added the police

reporter. “Maximum efficiency. She’ll be able to crank out the press

release for Joe’s firstborn as soon as she’s cranked out the baby.”

“Well, from what I hear,” said Miss Eversman, “McCarthy’s mother

might be more surprised by all this than Liberace’s.” Everyone had

heard the rumors.

Would the president show up for the wedding? People began to

take bets. Ike’s contempt for McCarthy was by now well developed,

but it would be hard, some argued, for him not to put in an

appearance, now that he was back from vacation, and with St.

Matthew’s being only a few blocks from the White House.

Miss McGrory, who appeared to regard this talk of McCarthy on

the order of a frog in the punch bowl, returned to an earlier subject

and insisted that they didn’t need a piano. She patted Mr. Yost’s arm

and dared him to get everybody started singing “Oh, You Beautiful

Doll”—Woodrow Wilson’s absolute all-time favorite, the retiring

pressman had reminded them.

Tim, who had been to all the West Side weddings of his

uncountable cousins, right away felt Irish instinct trump shyness. He

joined in as soon as Mr. Yost and Miss McGrory got things going,

and within a moment, even as he remained alone with his thoughts,

was singing the same words as everyone else:

Let me put my arms about you,

I don’t want to live without you.

His job at the Star had come through the nephew of an old pal of

his dad’s from Manhattan Criminal Court, where Paul Laughlin had

worked during what everyone in the family now called the old days—

the ones before Mr. Laughlin, nearing forty, put himself through

LaSalle, by correspondence and then at night, completing his

transformation from process server into accountant, making possible

his family’s move from Hell’s Kitchen to the unimaginably big and

bright new rooms of Stuyvesant Town. Those rooms seemed even

larger now that Tim’s older sister, Frances, the Laughlins’ only other

child, had gone off to Staten Island to live with her husband.

If you ever leave me, how my heart would ache,

I want to hug you but I fear you’d break—

While singing these lines, Tim realized that most of the partygoers’

eyes were on him. His pleasing tenor voice—a surprise to those

who’d heard only his soft, polite speech with its occasional stammer

—had risen above everyone else’s in volume, though to anybody

paying attention to the lyric, it seemed far more likely that any

hugging to involve this five-foot-seven, 130-pound young man would

result in his breakage, not the girl’s. Realizing what had provoked the

attention and smiles, Tim blushed and lowered his voice, while

everybody else raised theirs for the song’s big finish:

Oh, oh, oh, oh,

Oh, you beautiful doll!

Mr. Yost led the revelers’ applause for themselves, and when it

subsided, Mr. Brogan, Tim’s boss on the city desk, announced: “It’s

clear to me that we kept too much of Laughlin’s light under a bushel

this summer. I wish we’d had more for you to do, Timmy.”

Tim smiled and thanked him. Since June he’d mostly typed and

done rewrites, bringing the perfect grammar of the nuns to the fitfully

produced copy of the oldest city reporters, who teased him about

being a college man, and about a pretty girl named Helen, another

summer hire who answered a phone in Classifieds and sometimes

stopped to chat at his desk.

They might have kept on teasing him now, but they didn’t really

know enough about this conscientious, if cheerful, boy, and so the

spotlight soon moved elsewhere. Tim shrank back into himself as

Cecil Holland redirected the conversation to—what else?—the

senator from Wisconsin.

What would McCarthy do next? people wanted to know. Holland

advised them to watch what was going on up in New York: Cohn had

been running subcommittee meetings there, taking testimony in

closed sessions when he wasn’t snooping around Fort Monmouth

over in Jersey. You watch: McCarthy would soon be taking shots at

the army for whatever security breaches he could discover or invent.

“I’m gonna love you, like nobody’s loved you, come Cohn or come

Schine,” crooned the police reporter, reprising a song spoof from last

spring, when McCarthy staffers Roy Cohn and David Schine,

colleagues and pals (some people said more), had gone on their tour

of USIA libraries in Europe, ridding the shelves of anti-American

books by American authors.

No one ever talked half so much about Eisenhower as they did

about McCarthy, Tim reflected; the senator was as constantly on

people’s lips as FDR had been when he was a boy, even if the only

other thing Roosevelt and McCarthy might have in common was the

admiration of Tim’s father. Paul Laughlin still revered FDR (Mrs. R

was now another story), as he had since the First Hundred Days.

Before the arrival of the New Deal, already the father of two babies,

Mr. Laughlin had spent plenty of afternoons playing stickball on the

pavements of the West Fifties, unable to scare up any work pushing

dress racks or plastering or even delivering groceries to widows in

their Ninth Avenue walkups. But by the end of ’33, Paul Laughlin had

become, according to the family joke, “the oldest man in the CCC,”

upstate for weeks at a time, cutting down trees or planting new ones

for what was at least half a living wage. Some kindhearted

supervisor took notice of his hard work and referred him to a pal in

the courts, where he worked his way up toward something like

security and, at last, the cessation of sleepless nights.

Nothing—not even Grandma Gaffney’s cutlery-tapping recaps of

every Father Coughlin broadcast—had ever put Mr. Laughlin off

Roosevelt. He remained true to the president’s memory even when

the war ended and the accounting money started coming in and he

began bringing the Journal-American instead of the Post home to

Stuy Town, which he eventually took to reminding them had been

built by a private insurance company, not as a government project.

By the time Tim was finishing high school, he’d gotten used to

hearing his father say that Bishop Sheen—fine anti-red that he might

be—nonetheless had a foolish sympathy for some of the labor

unions. And a couple of years after that, once the television came

into the living room, Dean Acheson could not come on it without Mr.

Laughlin announcing, in sarcastic imitation: “I will not turn my back

on Alger Hiss.” The line always made Tim and Frances laugh, as if

Acheson were not a person but a corporation with a trademark

pledge, like “Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco.”

But for all that, Tim saw no reason why his father—the mildest of

Cold Warriors, really, looking eastward not so much for invading

Soviets as for the house he now hoped to buy in Nassau County—

wasn’t right about the fundamentals of politics.

Mr. Brogan, Tim now noticed, had been buttonholed by Betty

Beale, one of the society reporters.

“Miss Canby isn’t pulling her weight?” asked Brogan, laughing.

“You shock me, Miss Beale.”

“Joke if you want,” said the reporter, to whom the women’s-page

editor was a constant thorn in the side. Miss Beale took her own

work seriously and made a point of actually going to the events she

covered, not just relying on a phone call to the hostess to ask what

cabinet wife had “poured” for which white-gloved ladies in

attendance. “I cannot do this wedding alone,” she now told Mr.

Brogan. “We need more than one piece out of it—something for

tomorrow’s edition, something for the next day, and something for my

weekend column. You know, Mr. Brogan, tonight McCarthy and his

fiancée are having a buffet supper at some friend’s farm out in

Maryland, and thanks to Miss Canby there will be no one present

from the Star.”

The city editor continued listening as Miss Beale thrust home. “It’s

McCarthy, Mr. Brogan. It may be just a wedding, but surely this spills

into your bailiwick—and even Mr. Corn’s. May I please get a little

help?”

Brogan looked around thoughtfully, until he spotted Tim, still

standing against the filing cabinet. “How about making use of this

fine fellow, Miss Beale? He can spell, he’s got a few Hibernian

freckles, and he can even sing. Surely he can get the goods on an

Irish wedding.”

“How about it, cookie?” Miss Beale asked Tim. “Do you think you

can get the names of the people in as many pews as possible? And

get as many quotes as they’re willing to sling along with the rice?

The reception’s at the Washington Club right afterward. You can go

to that, too.”

Tim moved away from the filing cabinet and said sure. It was the

only word he’d ever spoken to the still youthful but formidable Miss

Beale.

“Good, then,” said Brogan, having settled the matter.

“Better than good,” said Cecil Holland, who’d overheard the

exchange. “If Laughlin ever gets hauled in and investigated for

anything, he can always say, ‘But, Joe, I was at your wedding, for

God’s sake!’”

The bottle Miss McGrory had brought in was by now pretty well

drained, and a sizable body of those in attendance were thinking

about adjourning to the Old Ebbitt Grill over on F Street. Tim’s

momentary celebrity earned him an invitation to join the group, but

he decided he’d be better off boning up for this opportunity he’d just

been given, however late in the game it had come. And so within ten

minutes he was on his way home with someone’s copy of the

Congressional Directory, the deluxe edition with photographs. He

could study the pictures tonight and increase the percentage of

guests he’d recognize.

Passing the Old Post Office on the other side of Pennsylvania

Avenue, he was reminded that he’d yet to mail home the letter he’d

been carrying around for the past two days. In it he made his job

prospects sound a lot rosier than they actually were—but then again,

who knew? Maybe this assignment was a portent of better things

that might be coming once he left the paper and got back to passing

out his résumé, this time in earnest, on Capitol Hill.

Should he go up to Hecht’s and get a new white shirt? The collar

was frayed on the only laundered one he had left. No, too expensive,

he decided; he would settle for getting his shoes shined at Union

Station tonight. Walking along Fifth Street, above Indiana and D, he

continued on his career-conscious train of thought, contemplating

the signs for lawyers and bondsmen, knowing that the former

profession was still too much to aspire to, even if the latter one, like

process-serving, now resided in a realm his father had lifted the

Laughlins permanently above.

He bought a pint of milk and a sandwich before reaching his room

on the Hill, in the two-hundred block of Pennsylvania, one flight

above a hardware store. His occupancy was illegal, the lower floors

of the building being zoned only for offices, but a landlady with no

vacancies a couple of blocks away had tipped him off to the nice

Italian owner here, who told him he could have the room cheap and

not to worry. It came with a hot plate and tiny icebox, and a hall

shower one flight up, where apartments were legal.

Tim always made sure to keep the radio low; he clicked it on now

and waited for the tubes to warm up while he poured his glass of

milk. A promo for One Man’s Family became audible as he sat down

and began to drink.

The job ads from Sunday’s paper were on the table, and for a few

minutes he gave them a second, mostly hopeless, look. The

“Situations Wanted” had a hierarchy as discernible as the legal

pecking order on Fifth Street.

YOUNG MAN, COLORED, desires evening or night work of any

kind. Phone LI 8-5198.

After three months down here, the “colored” had ceased to shock; it

was the “work of any kind” that now arrested his attention and made

him wonder how many weeks might be left before he’d have to

consider putting that phrase into an ad of his own.

YOUNG MAN, college education, desires a responsible position.

Call WO 6-8202.

Pretty vague, to say the least, but except for the telephone, which he

didn’t have, it pretty much matched his own circumstances. He

certainly couldn’t compete with the ad just above it:

YOUNG MAN, 27, B.A., Yale, 3 years experience legislative

research. 3 yrs. formal legal training, desires position with trade

assoc. or law office. Box 61-V. Star.

He wondered if Helen had taken any of these down over the

phone.

Setting the paper aside in favor of the Congressional Directory, he

decided to put a ruler over the names beneath the pictures. He

would see if he could correctly distinguish, say, Prescott Bush (RConnecticut) from Bourke Hickenlooper (R-Iowa). At least he was

familiar with his assignment’s location, having gone to St. Matthew’s

last month on the Feast of the Assumption.

He wished he’d done more sightseeing this summer, or just spent

a little less time in this room. He had gone to wait outside St. John’s

Church one Sunday morning in June, hoping to catch a glimpse of

Eisenhower, but a disappointed tourist had told him that Ike was out

of town. Everyone waiting by the church had had to settle for

watching a small group demonstrate against the Rosenbergs’

execution. There had also been an evening, back in July, when the

second-string theater critic had comped him to a production of Major

Barbara. They’d gone to see it together, and afterward the man had

bought him a drink at the Hotel Washington’s rooftop bar, then

walked him all the way home and given him a funny little hug, which

he somehow hadn’t minded, even though the man was old enough

to be his father and didn’t really live, as he’d claimed, on Capitol Hill.

Excited about tomorrow, but a little restless after half an hour with

the Directory, Tim thought he’d like to go out to a movie, but he’d

been to see The Robe just last night, a quasi-religious act he’d used,

pretty Jesuitically, as an excuse not to go to church this morning. He

realized now that Miss Beale hadn’t told him whether Senator

McCarthy’s wedding would be just a short ceremony or a whole

Mass. If it was the latter, he’d have a legitimate excuse to sleep a

little later tomorrow instead of starting his day at the seven o’clock

inside St. Peter’s on Second Street. Actually, he’d better go to St.

Pete’s either way. Even if it did turn out to be a Mass at St.

Matthew’s, he’d be too busy taking notes to line up for the

Communion rail.

CHAPTER TWO

September 28, 1953

“Ready?” asked Hawkins Fuller, as soon as Mary Johnson entered

his office.

“Ready,” she replied, noting the gray-striped pants as he swung

his feet off his desk. “But aren’t you overdoing things?” Sporting a

version of the foreign service’s traditional trousers seemed ridiculous

here in the State Department’s boxy modern building in Foggy

Bottom.

Fuller was unpersuaded. “It’s true that we’re civil servants, Miss

Johnson, but our FSOs are supposed to wear gray-striped trousers

for daylight calls. The reception to which we’re heading constitutes a

diplomatic assignment. It is now six-twenty; the reception begins at

six-thirty; and sunset is not until six-fifty-five.” He flashed his smile,

put on his hat, and offered her his arm. “Just paying tribute to

custom.”

Out on Twenty-first Street, while they waited for a taxi, Mary

reflected that on an actual foreign service officer the overcorrect

pants would appear a clumsy attempt to get ahead. On Fuller they

provided an opportunity to slow his own advance, to stay where he

was through the prankish means of going by somebody else’s book.

A man in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs who’d known him when

they were boys at St. Paul’s had told Mary the other day: “Hawk

could have been a real track star, but for the small matter that he

could never see the point in outrunning anybody. Pretty odd for a

sixteen-year-old.”

Fuller held the cab door while she scooped up the edge of the skirt

she’d shortened on her Singer last night.

“That new?” he asked.

“It’s so old it was once New Look, which in case you didn’t know is

as dead as the New Deal. I miss both.”

“Really?” was all Fuller replied.

Mary knew that she wouldn’t have to elaborate on her feelings

about FDR. She had never met a man, here at the job or elsewhere,

more indifferent to politics than Hawkins Fuller. As for the New Look,

she wasn’t going to tell him she missed its long skirts because her

legs were too skinny.

The driver, looking toward the orange glow over the Potomac, had

begun to thrum his fingers on the steering wheel. “Where exactly are

we going?” asked Fuller.

“Twenty-six twenty-two Sixteenth Street,” said Mary, giving the

address of the Lithuanian legation.

“I don’t suppose it has a sign,” said Fuller.

“I’m not even sure it has a telephone.”

The driver pulled away.

“Well,” said Fuller, “you’re a sport to be my girl for the night. I’ll

take you to dinner after we sample whatever funny food they’re

serving.”

Poor plump Miss Lightfoot, who had the desk next to Mary’s, had

been mad with envy when she’d heard about the invitation. Women

in the building, including the married ones, generally went straight to

the department’s Biographic Register after their first sight of Hawkins

Fuller. She’d done it herself, finding out that he’d been born in ’25 to

a businessman father (also St. Paul’s); had performed some minor

naval heroics at the end of the war; then finished Harvard in ’50, just

after his twenty-fifth birthday. Before coming to the department he’d

spent one year working for a branch of his father’s firm in Asunción

and another on a Fulbright in Oslo.

Now he served with Mary in the department’s Bureau of

Congressional Relations. Their boss, Thruston Morton, an

internationally minded Republican who’d once been in Congress

himself, wanted Fuller at tonight’s reception to help convince a

particular congressman on HUAC that State really was serious about

the captive Baltic republics and that a more aggressive approach

could be expected from the still-new administration.

Mary liked Fuller, but experience and instinct left her immune to

the swoonings of Miss Lightfoot and the rest of the distaff staff.

Growing up in New Orleans, she’d seen any number of men, a few

almost as handsome as he, making their solitary excursions into

special precincts of the Quarter. She couldn’t say she’d been

surprised to learn from the Biographic Register that Fuller had

arrived in Washington without a Norwegian wife.

She felt pretty sure he had done some checking on her, too. Fuller

probably knew that she had, more or less, a boyfriend, and that this

romance of hers with a doctor at Columbia Women’s was, for Fuller’s

own purposes, at just the right state of intensity: not so hot that Mary

couldn’t accept someone else’s invitation; not so cold that she’d be

expecting a second date with Hawkins Fuller.

“Nice-enough house,” he said, as the taxi reached the legation.

“But not exactly the Pan-American Union building.” Tomorrow night

Secretary Dulles would be giving a dinner there for the Panamanian

president—a tougher ticket than one to this party being held by the

Estonian government-in-exile, an institution so small it had had to

borrow the Lithuanian exiles’ premises.

Mr. Johannes Kaiv, consul general at the outpost the Estonians

were able to maintain in Rockefeller Center, greeted Mary and Fuller

at the door. An assistant named Miss Horm ushered them into a

parlor, pointing, as she led the Americans through a hallway, to the

portrait of “our President Rei,” presumably hung this afternoon and

on its way back to Rockefeller Center tomorrow morning. “He was

first elected to that office in 1928,” Miss Horm told the guests, with a

bittersweet smile. Fuller interrupted her recitation of all the posts Rei

had held before and since to ask, “Is he here?”

“Oh, no,” answered Miss Horm. “He is in Sweden.”

“A disappointment,” said Fuller.

“Do not believe the reports of his death,” said Miss Horm, in a

lower voice. “These rumors are spread all the time.”

“I’m confused,” Fuller whispered to Mary, once Miss Horm took

leave of them. “Didn’t the Swedes once conquer the Estonians? Are

they now buddies?”

“Sorry, I never took the foreign service exam, either. In three years

I’ve gone from being a secretary in the Passport Office to being more

or less a secretary to the assistant to the Assistant Secretary for

Congressional Relations.” She had been in this new post, a few feet

from Fuller’s own office, for three weeks. “It hasn’t been a meteoric

rise.”

Fuller looked to see if the complaint was serious, and her smile

told him that it wasn’t. Mary had come to Washington once she

graduated from Sophie Newcomb and her daddy, an honest lawyer

on Poydras Street who’d kept his head down during all of Huey

Long, got a congressman friend to get her the job. With her striking

thinness and very black hair she still looked more like the sort of

coed who went to Paris than the kind who became a government

girl.

The little cocktail crowd surrounding her and Fuller consisted, she

soon understood, of a few exiles and a good many more highachieving Estonian-Americans. The department, for all she knew,

had an acronym for the latter, HAEAs. A series of quick introductions

revealed the ones here to include a Maryland state legislator and a

national officer of the VFW.

Fuller had found a seat on a couch and was now tugging at her

navy-blue skirt, urging her to join him.

“We’re supposed to circulate,” she replied.

“Take a load off, Miss Johnson.” He tugged a little harder, until she

sat down. He was already bored, she could see, but confident—as

he had no doubt been his whole life—that people would be coming

to him, wherever he sat. Yes, the reluctant track star: Why run the

race when you’ve already won it?

And come people did, like the wife of a Standard Oil man, who told

Fuller and Mary that the plundered oil shale of Estonia was now

helping to run the Soviet army occupying that little country. The

woman was glad to be here, “showing the flag” with her husband,

who believed in “keeping his hand in.” However unlikely the Baltics’

liberation might be, “you have to have faith,” she told Fuller.

“There’s an optimist,” he said to Mary, once the woman was gone.

“I’m guessing there’s more Esso than Estonian in the husband’s

veins.”

“Well, it is faith of a kind,” Mary countered, less inspired by the

woman’s display of it than she was wearied by Fuller’s insouciance.

“Would you be as mocking if the faith at issue were the religious

kind? The kind Dulles worries we’re losing?”

“I would never mock John Foster Dulles,” said Fuller. “My father’s

colleague on the board of the American Bank Note Company?”

Mary sighed. He hadn’t, of course, answered the question, which

had been about the secretary’s sense that faith was losing its power

to motivate America in the world. Declining to press the point, she

settled for saying: “I miss Acheson.”

“Are you always so awash in nostalgia, Miss Johnson? The New

Deal? Long skirts? Retired cabinet secretaries?”

“I’ve got nothing much against the current one. But I do sometimes

feel like part of the typing pool inside a big Presbyterian parsonage.

With Acheson you knew you were working for a diplomat.” On his

last day, eight months ago, she had joined the long line of

employees walking through the chief’s office to shake his courtly

hand: Thank you for your good wishes, my dear young lady.

“Never met the man,” said Fuller. “At least this time only the boss’

brother has a mustache.” Acheson’s had been a bit reddish. Allen

Dulles—who ran the CIA while his sibling, Foster, ran State—had a

more or less white one. “I can’t imagine growing one myself,” Fuller

continued. “Or would you like me to, Miss Johnson? Do you desire

my advancement?”

“No,” Mary answered. “All I want is that you save me from this.” A

burly man of about forty, carrying two fish-topped crackers, was

moving toward her at considerable speed. An honest-to-God

Estonian, she surmised. Before Fuller could act, however, the

gentleman introduced himself as Fred Bell, born on the Lower East

Side to immigrant parents, but completely American himself, down to

his changed name. A veteran of D-Day who now owned three shoe

factories in Massachusetts. Even so, he was part of an exiles’

committee, and nothing in the world could have made him miss the

opportunity to come down here and say something about the

situation.

“Miss Horm back there told me you were with the State

Department, ma’am. Fifty thousand deportations since the takeover.

Including my cousin, just a peasant, who these days has to work on

a Russian collective. My other cousin over there’s a musician. The

oboe. He gets to stay in Tallinn and play bad music.”

“Why did they deport the peasant?” Mary asked, feeling foolish

using the word.

“Because the peasants resist collectivization. Estonians are

natural businessmen, ma’am. Very independent. You know, my

relatives used to vote. Now they’re impoverished and relocated, or

just gone.” In his anxiety to make the most of the few moments he

imagined he was having in the presence of officialdom, Mr. Bell ate

both of the hors d’oeuvres he had carried across the room. His eyes,

Mary noticed, were watering. “We’re a colony. Stripped of our

machinery, forced to feed them with our crops. Did you know you

used to be able to get eggs from Estonia in New York City? So good

they were exported all that way! What we need is a general strike,

something that with a little encouragement from abroad might spread

to the railway workers in Russia. If they went out, there’s no telling

how soon the whole system might collapse!”

Mary looked at him, apologetically. Despite the supposedly tough

new policy that had dispatched her and Fuller to this party, they were

still required, she knew, to speak the department’s soothing

Esperanto of noncommittal clucks and nods. She found herself

urging Mr. Bell to contact the Office of Eastern European Affairs with

his views—but then she couldn’t remember the name of the

Assistant Secretary for that particular bureau.

She turned to her companion, who’d been busy talking to a retired

languages professor. Fuller saw, and misinterpreted, her desire for

assistance.

“You’re right,” he said, rising. “We’ve got to go. Don’t know how I

lost track of the time. Tere!” he said to Mr. Bell, giving him his card

and propelling Mary toward the door.

“See what I learned?” he asked. “It means ‘Pleased to meet you.’”

“Actually, what I wanted—”

“I suppose ‘Next year in Tallinn’ would have been better, but for

just a few minutes’ work with the languages prof, ‘tere’ isn’t so bad.”

Mary turned around and saw Mr. Bell, half ancient mariner and half

modern PR man, already importuning someone else.

“Let’s get out of here,” said Fuller. “There’s no sign of

Congressman HUAC, in any case.”

“We can’t decently leave yet.”

But Mary saw that they couldn’t accomplish anything, either. A few

minutes later—so soon after sunset that Fuller’s trousers remained

almost appropriate—the two of them were back out on Sixteenth

Street. He put his arm around her waist as they began walking

south. “What are you in the mood for?”

“Scrambled eggs, by my lonesome, at home.” Mary could only

imagine what Miss Lightfoot would say to her turning down dinner

with Hawkins Fuller.

“Well, there’s something to be said for an early night,” he

observed.

“Do you have them?” she asked. “Early nights?”

“Tonight I will,” he answered. “I’m having lunch tomorrow at the

Harvard Club with my mother’s childless brother. Have to look sharp.

I need to stay in his good graces.”

Mary looked at him, but for a moment said nothing further.

“The pants are one thing,” he declared. “But you don’t think I

bought these shoes on my salary, do you? Or that I want his winter

place in New Mexico to go to one of my sisters?”

“How about other nights? Early or late?”

Fuller just smiled, and clasped her waist a little tighter. “What do

you put on your eggs, Miss Johnson? Ketchup?”

He was not, she knew, doubling back to attempt a forward pass;

he had no intention of pursuing an invitation to her place, though she

now recalled the almost pro forma advance he’d made in the

cafeteria two weeks ago, on her third day in Congressional

Relations. He’d been pleased, she thought, when it was blocked.

Had she said yes, he would probably have followed through, happily

enough—all the way from third base to home if she’d let him—but

she had allowed him, she felt sure, to return to more ardent matters

elsewhere.

“Cayenne pepper” was all she replied.

Fuller pretended to wince. “Ah, of course. New Orleans. All right,

spitfire. Let me find you a taxi.” Cabs would be thin on the ground

until they reached New Hampshire Avenue. “Too bad we can’t

share,” said Fuller. “But not all of us can live on the Georgetown

reaches of P Street. What are you, maybe two blocks from your old

friend Acheson?”

Mary, who still probably received more money from her father than

Fuller got from his uncle, said, “So I’m not the only one who reads

the Biographic Register.”

“Knowledge is power,” said Fuller. “Then you know I have a

modest one-bedroom on I Street. Just blocks from the office, really.

Makes the boss think I can’t bear being too far away from my work.”

And makes it easier, thought Mary, for you to arrive, after a late

night, in a rumpled rush—as you often do, putting Miss Lightfoot into

an even deeper swoon. She felt her attitude toward Fuller becoming,

for a moment, almost sisterly. “Do you know,” she asked, as they

kept searching for a cab, “that McLeod is supposed to start doing

interviews in our own little precinct before New Year’s?” Scott

McLeod, the new administration’s security man, with his

“Miscellaneous M Unit,” was hunting through the ranks for moral

turpitude of any kind, but one kind in particular, the kind that still got

the men of the foreign service mocked as “cookie-pushers” whose

striped pants might as well be aprons.

She had tried to ask the question as if it were merely a piece of

office gossip, some water-cooler topic on the order of McCarthy’s

wedding.

“I came in as a certified paragon, Miss Johnson. Letters of

recommendation from Cordell Hull and both Dulleses. Never let it be

said that the Fuller family doesn’t touch all bases.”

She should respond, of course, that she hadn’t been talking about

him, only the morale of the division; but before she could get that

falsehood out, he had flagged down a cab. “You take it,” he said with

a grin. “I’ll get the next one.” He opened the door and made sure her

skirt didn’t get caught. “There. Much easier, I’m sure, than when you

were taking the New Look to such lengths. I’ll see you tomorrow,

Miss Johnson.”

She waved, and watched him pass up another available cab. He

continued along Sixteenth Street, toward downtown, instead of

turning onto New Hampshire, which would have taken him to his

apartment.

CHAPTER THREE

September 29, 1953

“Our Holy Father cordially imparts to Joseph R. McCarthy and Jean

Kerr on the occasion of their marriage his paternal apostolic

blessing.”

When the priest finished reading the pope’s official good wishes to

Senator McCarthy and his bride—a pièce de résistance with which to

end the ceremony—the crowd’s appreciative murmur turned into

applause. A second later, the organist struck the first note of the

recessional and the congregation snapped to its feet for the newly

married couple’s walk back up the aisle.

Joe and Jean—as even Timothy Laughlin couldn’t help but think of

them at this moment—turned from facing the huge mosaics behind

the altar and began their march to the cathedral’s doors. Standing

near the back of the church, Tim would have to settle for imagining

the McCarthys’ smiles until they were much farther along in their exit.

In the meantime he gazed at the huge red-and-white marble pillars

that seemed to be running with blood, and put a quarter into the

poorbox: he’d taken the extra coin from his dresser when he left this

morning, forgetting that, even if there was a full Mass with the

wedding, there wouldn’t be a collection.

He had just counted the twenty-four windows in the cathedral’s

dome, recording the figure in his Palmer-method hand on a page of

his steno pad that included the following notes:

Mrs. Nixon next to Dulles (Allen, CIA not State)

Jack Dempsey! (TELL DAD)

Wilbur Johnson—family friend (Kerrs), brought bride to church

Roy Cohen—McC committee counsel, one of ushers

As soon as the bride and groom were out the door, Tim managed

to leave the cathedral by a side exit, ahead of most of the crowd. On

the church steps he was supposed to pass his notes to Miss Beale’s

assistant. The wedding itself would make it into this afternoon’s

paper, but coverage of the reception would have to wait until

tomorrow’s. He wouldn’t need to deliver his notes on that part of

things until the end of work today.

Finding a place on the steps behind several reporters, Tim tried on

the feeling of being one of them. It was a bad fit, several sizes too

big. All the newsmen seemed full of knowingness, and none of them

was giving his dislike of McCarthy a day off. Eisenhower’s absence

—the president had claimed a conflict with the Panamanian leader’s

visit—was the subject of a few satisfied jokes before the reporters

quieted down to get a quote from Nixon, who was pausing briefly

during his descent of the church steps.

“A beautiful ceremony,” said the vice president, slowly enough for

any pencils still competing with microphones. “The bride was lovely,

but then I’ve never met a bride who wasn’t!” He snapped off a grin

and quickly escorted Mrs. Nixon to the car.

“Did he just insult Joe’s wife?” wondered a man from the Baltimore

Sun. There was, Tim thought, something a little off about Nixon’s

effortful remark, part of the awkwardness you could feel all over the

cathedral steps. “Kiss her, Joe!” the folks on the sidewalk kept

shouting. But the senator wouldn’t comply, and his expression

continued to undergo the oddest alternations. For ten seconds at a

time he’d look like one of Tim’s Irish uncles, the smile ready to issue

a song, but then some saturnine cloud would scud across the eyes

and mouth, turning McCarthy into a baleful, preoccupied spectator at

his own nuptials.

“He looks like he’s ready to push some cookies himself,” said one

of the reporters, pointing to the gray-striped pants beneath

McCarthy’s morning coat.

“Did you know that Torquemada got her to convert for this?” his

colleague asked. “The girl was a Presbyterian.”

Tim scanned the faces in the crowd filling up a whole block of

Rhode Island Avenue. Most of them were women, and the mood

was cheerful, but here and there he could spot someone glaring up

at the groom, displaying a resentment either abstract or deeply

particular. These angry exceptions only added to the off-kilter feel of

the whole event.

Once he’d handed off his notes, Tim hotfooted it two blocks to the

Washington Club in Dupont Circle, where guests waiting to be let

into the reception were sweltering alongside another crowd of

gawkers. Twenty minutes passed before he could get inside this

grand old building to make notes on the white chrysanthemums and

blocks of orange ice in the bowl of nonalcoholic punch. He got as

close as he could to the receiving line. If he were more aggressive,

let alone taller, he might have secured a better vantage point, but

even at some distance he could pick up most of what the politicians

were saying in their overloud voices. Senator Hickenlooper was

there—he recognized him from the Congressional Directory—along

with Teddy Roosevelt’s daughter, Mrs. Longworth, and a

Congressman Bentley from Michigan, identified with the help of a

Detroit News reporter. Between jottings Tim got further glimpses of

McCarthy himself, who he suspected (from long observation of his

male relatives) had just managed to get hold of something more

fortifying than the punch. But the drink had not resolved the

alternations in his facial expression; it was speeding them up.

“Had to settle for wearing this!” cried Joseph P. Kennedy, tugging

at the lapels of his dark business suit. “My own cutaway’s not back

from the cleaners.” This was understood, to general laughter, as a

reference to his son Jack’s wedding, less than three weeks ago, to

Miss Bouvier, the Times-Herald’s inquiring photographer. There

might be no sign of Senator Kennedy here this morning, but three of

his brothers and sisters were right behind the old ambassador.

Tim kept at it until 2:05, through the bride’s vigorous toss of her

bouquet—“That gal can play on my team anytime!” someone roared

—and the newlyweds’ departure in a black limousine, not the red

Cadillac rumored to be a wedding present from some of the

senator’s Texas supporters. Back out in Dupont Circle Tim soon felt

himself sweating through his blue suit. His steno pad was already

soaked from his own palm; thank God, at least, for ballpoint pens.

Looking at the top page of his notes, he realized he would soon be

mystified by his own abbreviations unless he made a fair copy, with

amplifications, right away. So once he’d bought a half-pint of milk at

the big Peoples drugstore, he sat down amidst the late lunchers and

sun-catchers on a bench near the Circle’s western rim. Across the

expanse of grass he could hear the last of the wedding guests

laughing through their departures.

He had just finished transcribing the first page on the pad when he

noticed a shadow approaching: someone also wanting to sit down.

As quickly as he could, he cleared off his milk carton, napkin, and

two loose steno pages from the rest of the bench. “Sorry,” he said,

before he’d even had a chance to look up.

“For what?”

For everything, thought Tim, once he raised his head and saw the

spectacular young man standing over him. Taking in the suit jacket

slung over the man’s broad shoulders and the faint glistening of

sweat in the hollow of his neck where he’d loosened his tie, Tim

wanted to say: For being nothing like you. For being all you’ll have

for company on this bench.

“May I?” said the man.

“Of course,” Tim finally answered.

“Don’t they give you an office?”

Tim laughed. “They’re not even giving me a job past Friday.” And

then it all came out in a nervous, mortifying rush: his graduation from

Fordham; his arrival here in June; his summer of rewrites on the

Star’s city desk; his hope for a job on Capitol Hill; the chance to

cover McCarthy’s wedding.

Realizing that the man’s suit was as fine as his physique, Tim

asked: “You weren’t a guest there, were you?”

It was the most foolish question he could have posed; if this man

had been inside the Washington Club, or even the cathedral, Tim

would certainly have noticed.

“No,” said the man, pointing in the direction of New Hampshire

Avenue. “I was having lunch with my uncle at the Harvard Club.”

Tim nodded.

“So who was there from the State Department?” the man asked.

“Come on: name names, as the groom might say.”

Tim flipped through the pages of his pad, as cooperatively as if

he’d actually been asked to do this in the witness chair. Searching

for a relevant name, he mocked his own parochial-school

penmanship, feeling certain his companion must have an altogether

more manly scrawl. “‘The neat handwriting of the illiterate,’” he said,

nervously quoting 1984. “Here we go. Mrs. Dulles. And Mrs. Walter

Bedell Smith, the undersecretary’s wife. The Spanish ambassador?

That doesn’t count. Harold Stassen? Foreign operations

administrator for the president? Not actually the State Department, I

guess. Is that where you work?”

“Yes. The job also brings me to the Hill every week or two. But I’m

not due there today until three-thirty. By the way,” he said, taking

Tim’s pad and flipping back to something he’d noticed on the first

page, “there’s no ‘e’ in Roy Cohn.”

“Live and learn,” said Tim, who obediently made a correction.

“Thanks.”

“Come on. We can walk a bit and pick up the streetcar on

Pennsylvania. It’ll get us both where we’re going.”

Tim started gathering his things so quickly that the young man had

to tell him, “Finish your milk. We’ve got time.”

Taking two last pulls on his paper straw, Tim looked at the paragon

beside him and hoped he wouldn’t now tighten his tie.

“Okay, we’re off,” said the man, once Tim had trotted the waxed

milk container to a trash basket. Only when he fell into step with the

handsome stranger did he notice that the bench to the right of the

one they’d shared had been empty all along.

Walking across the Circle to Connecticut Avenue, no more than

ten minutes into their acquaintance, the much taller man said: “And

to think you used to be so talkative.”

Thrilled at being teased, Tim replied, laughing: “I do talk too

much.”

“No, you don’t,” said the young man, giving Tim’s neck a

momentary, affectionate squeeze. The touch rendered him mute,

perhaps the only person in the United States who couldn’t find one

more thing to say about Joe McCarthy.

The man walking beside him broke the silence: “May I ask you a

personal question?”

“Sure.”

“Is this milk-drinking a habit of yours?”

“Sort of. I think they were always hoping it would make me taller. I

didn’t rise to the full five-feet-seven you see before you until I was

seventeen. I guess I developed a taste for it.”

The man nodded. “Glasses?”

“Two or three a day. Small ones.”

“No, idiot. How long ago did you get those?” He tapped the right

arm of the boy’s spectacles.

“Oh!” said Tim. “Had ’em since time immemorial. I must have been

eight. Farsighted. I can read a street sign a block away, but I’ve got a

problem with print or even faces close up.” With his eyeglasses in

place, he could see the man’s expression quite clearly, but couldn’t

be sure what it indicated. A trace of pity? A flicker of real interest in

what he’d been telling him? Anxious when his companion said

nothing more, he went nattering on. “They’re not so bad, really. I

used to have those old steel-wire frames. Got these tortoiseshells

going into my junior year of college. Pretty snazzy, no?” Looking up

into the man’s blue-gray eyes, Tim felt sure that they had never worn

corrective lenses. His own glasses suddenly felt like an artificial limb.

They reached the corner with the streetcar stop.

The man tenderly removed Tim’s eyeglasses. “How many

fingers?” he asked, holding up three just an inch from Tim’s eyes.

“Three,” said Tim, just able to make them out.

“There. You’re healed,” said the man, folding the eyeglasses and

slipping them into the handkerchief pocket of Tim’s jacket.

“You’re a riot,” said Tim, smiling as his heart pounded. He

retrieved the glasses and put them back on and saw that the man

was looking at him with a gaze that could only be called appraising.

He wanted to give this god a playful shove, and thought he could

probably get away with making it look like only that, rather than his

desperate desire to touch this person whose name he didn’t even

know.

The streetcar stopped in front of them.

“I’m Timothy Laughlin, by the way.”

“I’m pleased to meet you, Timothy Laughlin.”

Tim had time enough to see that the man was pleased, but then

the doors of the streetcar opened and the most terrible thing

imaginable happened. As the two of them boarded, three other

people, two women and a child, got between them. Standing in the

aisle of the crowded car as it went down Pennsylvania, struggling to

see past those three other souls, Tim only briefly recaptured his

acquaintance’s attention. The young man gave him a helpless shrug

and a relaxed smile that seemed to say: Oh well, sorry about this

little turn of fate.

Tim got off—there was nothing else to do—when the car stopped

in front of the Star. He waved goodbye from the sidewalk, unsure

whether the man could even see him. Standing in the doorway of the

newspaper’s office, he watched the streetcar continue on its

eastward way, and he knew that if he lived to be a hundred, he

would never be more in love than he was now.

CHAPTER FOUR

October 6, 1953

The handful of observers at the back of Room 357 could see the

shoulders of the witness stiffen. Mr. Edward J. Lyons, Jr.,

representing the Judge Advocate General, gamely proceeded to

describe the frequency with which United Nations prisoners had

been “discovered with their hands tied behind their backs and their

eyes gouged out. They’d been used for bayonet practice and the

like.”

While still in charge in Korea, General MacArthur had been

determined to do things differently from the way they’d been done

during World War II. Rather than waiting for victory—or, as it

appeared to be turning out this time, negotiated stalemate—he’d

begun investigating North Korean atrocities as soon as anyone got

wind of them. The evidence of torture and brainwashing was plentiful

and compelling, and Senator Charles Potter (R-Michigan) appeared

to relish running this hearing that had been convened to discuss it.

McCarthy had not finished honeymooning down in Nassau, but the

atrocities task force of the Permanent Subcommittee on

Investigations was Potter’s responsibility, and he seemed

determined to make the most of it. There were no cameras or

reporters here at this closed executive session in the Senate Office

Building, and public hearings on the subject wouldn’t come until

December, but even so, Potter remained energetic—no matter that

the Democrats, who’d months ago quit the committee in protest of

McCarthy’s tactics, refused to come back even for this; no matter, in

fact, that Potter was the only senator, amidst several staff members,

to have shown up this morning. He still looked bent on getting to the

bottom of something awful.

For most of the grim testimony it was hard to remember that this

was the McCarthy committee. But there came a point, in the midst of

eliciting information from Lieutenant Colonel J. W. Whitehorne III,

when Potter made the mistake of thinking out loud: “I am curious

about the twenty-three Americans who are still over there, whom

apparently Communist propaganda got the best of. Or maybe they

went into the service as pro-Communists. Is there any check being

made as to the background of the men still there?”

Once Colonel Whitehorne declared that information on the

defectors was indeed available, Roy Cohn, as if hearing a whistle,

sprang from a midmorning slumber: “What was the answer on that?

Did any of those people have Communist backgrounds?”

“Some of them had leftist leanings,” said Colonel Whitehorne.

“Would we be able to get some documentation?” asked Cohn,

more in the imperative than the interrogative. All at once he was in

possession of the hearing, which now seemed, more familiarly, to be

concerning itself with domestic subversion.

Tim Laughlin had a much better view of Cohn than he had had at

McCarthy’s wedding last week. He wasn’t sure whether to take him

for a mobster or a boy wearing his first suit. The dark, hooded eyes;

the scar down the nose; the slicked-down hair—all these features

fought against the committee counsel’s improbable, extreme youth.

Twenty-six, Cecil Holland, back at the Star, had said.

Tim could see the concern that Cohn’s line of questioning had

provoked on the high, creased forehead of the army’s new counsel,

John Adams. But Tim was looking more closely at Potter, to whom

he might actually be talking once the hearing reached its conclusion.

Yesterday afternoon he’d called the senator’s office to confirm his

appointment and been told by the secretary that he might like to get

a glimpse of Potter in action before coming in for an interview.

With his horn-rim glasses and balding brow, he reminded Tim of

the lay teachers in math and science at St. Agnes’ Boys’ High. He

would have been surprised by Potter’s own youth if he hadn’t looked

him up in the Congressional Directory during his last afternoon at the

Star. Only thirty-six, and already in the upper body after three terms

in the House! In addition to his regular committee assignments, the

senator served on the Battle Monuments Commission, a fact that

somehow appealed to Tim, who last night had imagined getting the

job and making phone calls that would spruce up the cannon at Bull

Run or the statue of Father Duffy in Times Square.

But the crisp zeal Potter was again showing, now that Cohn had

subsided, had to do with far-more-distant battlefields that had barely

cooled. None of the POWs who’d been rescued or exchanged—in a

mental condition more frightening than their physical one—was

seated here this morning. Only the brass were at the witness table,

and it was painful enough hearing the descriptions of torture filtered

through them. Tim could only guess what the impact would be when

the victims themselves testified in a couple of months. Cecil Holland

had told him how McCarthy liked to perform a sleight of hand

between the committee’s executive and public sessions. When pink

witnesses who’d been subpoenaed to reveal their former Communist

ties showed any instinct to fight back during the closed session, they

most likely wouldn’t get called for the open hearing, where McCarthy

preferred to display the timid and guilty-looking. Things would

operate with a strange similarity in this case, Tim imagined. The

more shaky the repatriated prisoners, the more powerful Senator

Potter’s point would be.

All this activity felt reassuring to Tim. Whatever the committee’s

reported excesses, surely not even Miss McGrory, back at the Star,

could object to this particular inquiry. Only three days ago the pope

himself had called for new international laws against war crimes, and

two years before that, Tim had heard Father Beane, the visiting

priest from the Chinese missions, tell about what he and his brothers

had suffered at the hands of Mao’s advancing armies. Even now he

remembered the friar’s cadences and fervor, and how he himself had

sat in the Church of the Epiphany, between Frances and his mother,

thinking: Some “soldier of God” I am! That was, after all, what he

was supposed to have become on the spring Sunday in 1944 when

Bishop O’Neill confirmed him with a symbolic toughening slap to the

face.

But maybe here, in the smallest of ways, he could be helpful in the

fight against godlessness and cruelty. If he went to work for Potter,

he would not just be keeping Father Duffy laureled; he’d be affording

protection to Father Beane as well. It might be the only soldiering he

ever did. He’d never been able to think through what he’d do when

the draft board got around to calling him up. Do you have

homosexual tendencies? Check yes or no. When he’d registered,

almost four years ago in that little office up at Fordham, he’d realized

he was damned either way he answered: he could be an outcast or a

liar. He’d chosen to lie, rationalizing that “tendencies” could be

proved only by experience, and he’d certainly had none of that.

Homosexual tendencies: had Uncle Alan, his mother’s never-married

brother, kept them tucked away with his St. Christopher medal,

inside the backpack he’d carried onto Corregidor? Tim had often

wondered.

Potter was making ready to adjourn, telling the military men that

he’d be out on the West Coast later this month, doing some more

preliminary interviews. While he was away, he expected them to

keep getting ready for the open hearings in December. “We’re

working toward the same purpose,” he said, with midwestern nasality

and a smile. His gavel came down at 11:45 a.m.

Everywhere in the city one could feel that autumn—the season not

of death, Tim always thought, but of quickening—had finally arrived.

What Drew Pearson still called the “Washington Merry-Go-Round”

had, after a summer idling in the weeds, rattled to life, even without

McCarthy in town to flip the switch. Yesterday Governor Warren had

been sworn in as Chief Justice, while Nixon was embarking on a tenweek tour of Asia.

Potter stood up, with a wincing, unexpected slowness, and came

out from behind the committee dais. How large his head seemed in

proportion to the rest of his body, Tim thought, before noticing what

was seriously wrong. An aide had handed the senator two canes.

From the stiffness of his gait, Tim realized that the man was walking

on artificial legs—not the sort of fact that went into the tabular pages

of the Congressional Directory.

And yet, all at once this fact seemed more joking than somber.

Each cane had a little electric flashlight near its top, and Potter was

now playfully using one of them to signal a man three seats away

from Tim.

That man—small and gray and grudgingly groomed, with a thin

face somewhere between mottled and ravaged—returned Potter’s

smile. He then got up to leave the back row, nodding genially to Tim.

“Excuse me,” said Tim, before the man could depart, “do you know

where Room 80 is? I tried to locate it on my way here. I’ve got an

appointment there in—”

“That’s number 80 in the Capitol, son. Not here in the SOB. In fact,

Charlie’s the only s.o.b. not housed with the other ninety-five s.o.b.s

here in the SOB.”

“I have a job interview with him. With Senator Potter, I mean.”

“Well, come with me, young sir. I’m heading there now.”

They trotted down the stairs to the subway that ran between the

two buildings. The older man explained how the senator had his

office in the Capitol to make his handicap less of an inconvenience.

“Of course it’s not so damned convenient when the committee

meeting is here instead of there, but it helps more often than not.”

Tim could smell a peppermint on the man’s breath and wondered if

it was there to mask a morning shot of Four Roses. He could easily

imagine the two of them saying hello on Ninth Avenue, the older man

having emerged from McNaughton’s saloon to slap him on the back

with best wishes “for that fine woman, your Grandma Gaffney,” who

would decline the wishes with a lace-curtain shudder once Timmy

brought them to her kitchen.

The man ushered him to a wicker seat on the jammed little

subway. Tim could see Potter in the car ahead as the two-car train

started down the monorail. While it moved, the man continued

talking in a rat-a-tat-tat like Winchell’s. “It was a land mine that did it,”

he explained. “January 31, 1945, Battle of the Bulge, in the Colmar

Pocket. No choice but to amputate both his pins. Spent a year in

Walter Reed and had to learn to walk all over again. Fella who’d

once been a high jumper!”

Tim nodded gravely in the darkness.

“The VA calls him ‘permanently and totally disabled’!” cried the

man, cackling over the clatter. “Well, it doesn’t keep him from voting

on their budget.”

“What are the lights on the canes for?” asked Tim.

“Hailing cabs.” The man paused for a moment. “Well, we’ll soon

see how ‘abled’ Charlie turns out to be among this crowd he’s in with

now.” He pointed to one of the heads in the lead car. “See our boy

Roy up there?”

“Yes,” said Tim. They had reached the end of the Lilliputian tunnel,

and he could make out the back of Cohn’s freshly cropped skull.

“Don’t use the men’s toilet when he’s around, if you catch my drift.

Though he tends to be enchanted by fellows a little huskier than

yourself.” The man laughed as the train bucked to a stop.

“Are you on Senator Potter’s staff?” asked Tim.

“No,” the man answered, chuckling, as he and Tim made their way

to the Capitol’s first floor. “Let’s just say I’m authorized to help him

out a bit from time to time. Him and some of the other Michigan GOP

men. My name’s McIntyre, Thomas McIntyre. Call me Tommy. Was a

newspaperman for several eternities, down here and up in Detroit.”

Tim shook hands and introduced himself, trying to understand

what this slight, fast-moving man meant by helping the senator out,

and wondering who had authorized him to do it.

“Potter’s a good-enough egg,” said McIntyre, the heels of his

unshined shoes beating a fast rhythm across the marble corridor.

“He’s managed to vote for foreign aid but not forget it’s the

automakers who sent him here. You know,” he continued, almost

reflective, “he ought to be an interesting fellow. He was actually a

social worker before he went off to the war. But he’s got one

handicap worse than no legs.”

“Really?” asked Tim, as McIntyre knocked on the door of Room

80.

“Yeah. A permanent charley horse between his ears!”

McIntyre was still laughing when the door to the senator’s office

was opened—by a man with one arm.

“His driver,” whispered Tommy. “No foolin’!”

Miss Antoinette Cook, the woman Tim had spoken with on the

phone, introduced him to Robert L. Jones, a still-young man who

looked as if he might be Potter’s executive assistant, and whose

speech carried the salt of a Maine accent. “Oh, yes, Mr. Laughlin,”

he said, appearing less than pleased by Tim’s arrival, let alone

McIntyre’s. “The fellow that Hawkins Fuller recommended when he

was up here to defend State’s latest excessive appropriation.”

McIntyre looked at Tim with an encouraging smile, and then alarm.

“Jesus, kid, your face has gone white. It’s only a job interview. This

ain’t the Depression.”

Hawkins Fuller.

Tim managed to nod and shake Mr. Jones’s hand, while McIntyre

cheerfully took charge of the situation. “Put him to work, Jones. See

what he can do. Better yet, see if he can do the bit of work I was

going to do for you today. Here, son, this is a copy of what

Knowland’s planning to say on the floor a couple of hours from now. I

got it from his press man. It’s no different from what he said at his

press conference yesterday, but it’s a couple of decibels higher, and

it’s going to make a splash. So why don’t you sit down at one of the

Underwoods here and write a couple of paragraphs that Charlie can

say in support of it?”

Mr. Jones had already lost interest in Timothy Laughlin; he was on

a phone behind Miss Cook, cupping his hand over the receiver.

“Go on, read it, read it,” said Tommy McIntyre, as he wheeled a

typist’s chair into position behind Tim.

Senator Knowland, the majority leader, had come home from his

world tour the other day and learned of Adlai Stevenson’s call for a

nonaggression pact with the Russians—a proposal that had irritated

the California senator to an extreme degree. “Now watch the

Koreans drag out the Panmunjom talks,” he was warning. “This will

be one more sign that we need to put our house in order and our

rifles at the ready. Time is not on the side of the Free World, and we

don’t need Mr. Stevenson, after his massive repudiation at the polls,

recommending that we play at useless diplomacy.”

Tim had only a slight idea of how Potter spoke, but he was pretty

sure the point of this writing assignment was to make him sound as

implacable as Knowland. So he took up a yellow pad and made

several notes for a few paragraphs of oratory. To begin with,

Knowland must be extolled. To continue, Stevenson must be

excoriated, for his attempt “not only to bend over backwards, but to

roll out the red carpet for our adversaries of that same color.” The

prose began to flow almost automatically. The defeated Democrat

was proposing “a nonaggression pact with a flagrant aggressor.” To

conclude, one needed to take a shot at India, a sentimental favorite

of liberals, which Knowland had accused of backing the North

Korean position before the peace talks had even gotten underway.

“In my great automobile-making state,” wrote Tim as Potter, “we’re

wary of any car or country that stays in ‘neutral’ for too long. ‘Neutral’

is what you’re in when you roll downhill.”

After penciling in a few revisions, Tim rolled a sheet of paper into

the Underwood and typed up this stentorian boilerplate. Struck by his

own speed, he realized how the words—for all that he believed

them, and he more or less did—seemed to be coming from neither

Potter’s brain nor his own. He was speaking in another voice entirely

—the way, as an altar boy during Mass, he would be saying his Latin

part while still hearing the English words of whatever hymn had

soared through the church a few minutes before. He proofread the

little speech a second time, to make sure he hadn’t typed the words

“Hawkins Fuller” somewhere in the middle of one of its sentences.

Then he handed the page to Mr. McIntyre.

“Fast fella, aren’t you?” the lined little man said with a grin, before

carrying the speech to the suite’s innermost office. Before five

minutes passed, he reemerged, in the company of Senator Potter

and a third man. All of them, carrying their hats, headed toward Tim.

“Another Irish wordsmith!” enthused the senator, who put both his

canes in his left hand, so that his right could extend itself to Tim.

“Welcome to the staff, Mr. Laughlin.”

Tim shook Potter’s hand and realized with embarrassment that he

had been looking down at the senator’s feet.

Potter seemed pleased by the

awkwardness he encountered daily.

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“I was just telling Mr. Jeffreys, my Lansing constituent here, that

I’m looking forward to some duck hunting on the Upper Peninsula

this winter. These days I’m able to glide around in some paper-thin

galoshes my wife gave me, while my pals have to clomp and sweat

in boots that weigh a ton. ‘Aren’t your feet cold?’ one of them asked

me last year. ‘Not exactly!’ I told him. ‘Unless they’re feeling chilly

wherever I left ’em in France!’” He paused to laugh. “Everything’s got

its advantages.”

Tim smiled, more in awe than humor. Potter clapped him on the

shoulder and continued on out with McIntyre and Mr. Jeffreys. Miss

Cook then presented him with two forms to be filled out. “You can

bring these back with you when you start Monday morning, Mr.

Laughlin.”

Tim thanked her and everybody else still in the office. A minute or

so later, halfway down the Capitol’s east steps, he paused to sit

beside a huge stone pediment supporting an ornate lamppost. He

closed his eyes and shook off the image of Potter’s severed feet, lost

somewhere in the soil of France. It wasn’t hard to banish the picture;

his mind had no room for it, or even for the fact that he could now

pay the rent and write home with some good news. His mind was

filled with the afternoon of McCarthy’s wedding, exactly a week ago.

An hour after getting off the streetcar, he’d been summoned to a

telephone on the other side of the city room. “A call from Capitol Hill,”

he’d been told. Through the receiver had come the voice he’d heard

an hour before and never expected to hear again: “Send your

résumé and a letter of application to the attention of Miss Antoinette

Cook. The job is a junior assistant with writing duties.”

Dumbfounded, Tim had written down the address and phone

number for Potter’s office. “Thank you,” he’d managed to say.

“If you get the job, treat yourself to a glass of chocolate milk.”

And with that the still-nameless voice had left the line.

Hawkins Fuller.

Now, a week later, Tim sat for another moment on the steps,

before he opened his eyes to see a flag being run up one of the

distant poles on the Capitol’s roof. It was a familiar sight: he knew

that this flag would wave for only a moment before being lowered

and shipped to some elementary school in Cheyenne or Mill Valley,

where the teachers could tell the students it had flown over the U.S.

Capitol. But for the few seconds it was aloft, filled with what might be

two new separate futures, Tim looked at it with his hand over his

heart.

October 6, 1953

Dear Rep. Fish:

You may assure your Dutch-American constituent in

Wappingers Falls that the Department of State views all recent

violence in Indonesia with the greatest possible concern. As

Secretary Dulles remarked on…

Mary Johnson proofread her letter to the New York congressman

and sank into the feeling of futility that often overcame her by

midafternoon. What could any of these well-meant epistolary

stitchings and swabbings really do to treat the wounds of the tortured

world? There was news this week that Lockheed had begun work on

a nuclear-powered airplane; no doubt it would be carrying an atomic

bomb as well.

Behind Mary, Miss Lightfoot was speaking to Beverly Phillips

about the woman in the Office of Legal Advisors who’d just won a

four-thousand-dollar car in WMAL’s “Mystery Voice” contest.

“Well,” said Mrs. Phillips, “she won’t have any trouble making her

Community Chest contribution.”

Mary laughed. Underneath the correspondence piling up for the

bureau chief’s signature lay her copy of the memo from R. W. Scott

McLeod, security officer to 1,142 employees, informing all of them

that if they chose not to make a Community Chest contribution this

year, they must report to his office for an interview. Secretary Dulles

was chairman of the department’s drive, and McLeod’s zeal to show

the boss what a little extra aggression could accomplish had sparked

much grumbling about the “Conformity Chest.”

“There’s nothing wrong with what McLeod is doing,” said Miss

Lightfoot, in her near-chronic tone of irritation. “He’s just trying for

one-hundred-percent participation. He’ll lend you a dollar if you can’t

contribute one on your own.”

Mary turned her small swivel chair so that she and Beverly Phillips

could each raise an eyebrow to the other. Miss Lightfoot also found

nothing wrong with McLeod’s unceasing security-risk investigations.

Indeed, she seemed disappointed with the estimate that his review

of things wouldn’t reach Congressional Relations until December.

A young man carrying a book now came through the door,

confusing Mary, who took him for the summer office boy from

Eastern European Affairs. Hadn’t he returned to school?

“Is Mr. Fuller in?” the boy asked. He stammered over the “F” in

Fuller. “I couldn’t find him on the wall directory, but the man at the

front desk told me to come here.”

Mary smiled. She realized that this wasn’t the boy from EEA,

though he did look a little like the lovesick Donald O’Connor in Call

Me Madam, the only musical anyone would ever care to make about

this place. And then it occurred to her. This skinny fellow was

lovesick. She looked at him gently, filling up with annoyance toward

Fuller as she did so. What new recklessness of his had made this

boy venture here with a handful of pebbles to throw at Romeo’s

window?

“I’m afraid he left early. To go to the Georgetown library, I believe.”

“The library at George Washington U.,” Miss Lightfoot corrected.

“Thank you,” said Mary. Her colleague, already matronly though

no more than thirty-five, certainly kept track of Fuller.

“Will he be back?” the young man asked.

“I doubt it,” said Mary.

Managing not to stammer, the boy said, “I was bringing him this.”

He handed Mary a new biography of the elder Henry Cabot Lodge. A

receipt from Trover’s bookshop stuck out of it. An odd present to

bring here, thought Mary, Lodge not exactly having been an

internationalist. But it was a big and serious book—impressive, the

boy had probably reasoned—and he had spent six dollars on it.

“You could leave it here,” she said. “I’ll see that Mr. Fuller gets it.”

The boy still looked crestfallen.

“You can leave a note, too,” Mary added. “So he’ll be sure to know

who it’s from.”

“I’ll write one inside the book,” the young man declared, looking

more hopeful.

Mary pointed to the empty chair at the side of her desk and

watched him fumble for his ballpoint pen. His handwriting was so

neat she could read it upside down without the least effort.

With thanks to Hawkins Fuller

(I got the job. You’re wonderful.)

Timothy Laughlin

“Does he know where to reach you?” asked Mary, trying to sound

casual instead of confidential. “Is there a number you’d like to

leave?”

“I’m not on the phone,” said Timothy Laughlin. A cloud rushed over

the map of Ireland that was his face—mortification, Mary thought, at

having used such a tenement archaism. “But I’ll put my address with

it,” he added, recovering enough equilibrium to accept the index card

that Mary gave him to write it on. He also removed the bookshop

receipt, and asked if she could direct him back to the Twenty-first

Street entrance.

After he’d gone, she prepared the envelope for another soothing

letter, to Congressman Ikard of Texas. Adjusting her typewriter’s left

margin, she noticed Miss Lightfoot smoothing her strawberry-blond

permanent wave, and realized what close attention the woman had

paid to the boy’s visit.

CHAPTER FIVE

October 16, 1953

Senator Kennedy, the radio was saying, had today called for “the

development of a strategic air force with sufficient retaliatory powers

to threaten a potential aggressor with havoc and ruin.” However

strong his words, they could not compete with McCarthy’s

announcement, just made in New York—and deemed worthy of a

bulletin—that one of his Fort Monmouth witnesses had broken down

crying and admitted he’d been lying to the committee. According to

the announcer, the senator had rushed out of the hearing in the

Federal Building, spoken to reporters, and then rushed back in to get

what the witness promised would now be the truth.

After a full week in Senator Potter’s suite of offices, Tim had grown

used to the radio’s steady murmur. The Fort Monmouth hearings

were making so much news—lab secrets said to be going to East

Germany; the alleged spies’ links to the now-dead Julius Rosenberg

—that you would think they were open to the public, whereas in fact

all the news they made came straight from McCarthy himself,

whenever he decided to hit the microphones outside the committee

room’s closed door. The senator seemed determined to justify the

urgency with which he’d interrupted his honeymoon last Sunday,

even though he was right now the only senator up in New York at the

executive sessions. Several staffers—including Mr. Jones, for

Senator Potter—were up there, too.

Still not sure what Jones’s exact position was, Tim felt it probably

didn’t matter much. In practical terms, the office’s secretary, Miss

Cook, a single woman who lived at the Hotel Continental, was the

person who kept everyone, Potter included, hopping. She’d directed

Tim to answer constituent mail this morning, and right now had him

writing a speech on fishing-industry issues that the senator would

deliver the next time he was home. Tim had just looked up “sea

lamprey” in the encyclopedia.

The staff were encouraged to go into the galleries and listen to the

floor debates as often as they liked. The Potter legend—what

Tommy McIntyre called “the gimp log-cabin lore”—included the story

of how, while learning to walk all over again at Walter Reed, Potter

would ask to go to the House and Senate in order to observe the

doings of those two august institutions in which he would later serve.

There was little enough action on the floor this week; debate had

been replaced by high-pressure caucusing behind the scenes. Since

the Democratic mayor of Cleveland had been named to fill the late

Senator Taft’s seat, it wasn’t entirely clear which party controlled the

show. At this moment there were forty-eight Democrats and fortyseven Republicans, but between Senator Morse (an Independent

pledged to organize with the GOP) and Vice President Nixon, who

could break a tie, Ike’s party might be able to hang on, just barely, to

its committee chairmanships and agenda. “Our fellas better get

some exercise and lay off the spuds,” Tommy had declared while

breezing through the office a couple of days ago. “One bad heart

attack and we’ll all be ordering new stationery.”

Tim now took care not to let any crumbs from Mrs. Potter’s sugar

cookies fall onto the draft of the speech. Everyone agreed that the

senator’s wife, who often baked for the staff in the kitchen of the

Potters’ ninety-dollar-a-month Arlington apartment, was a

warmhearted, if flighty, woman. Lorraine Potter’s particular part in the

legend of limblessness involved her supposedly having sprung bolt

upright in bed, back in Cheboygan in ’45, at the exact moment Potter

stepped on the land mine in France. Her own legs, she swore, had

gone numb for several minutes.

So far nothing Tim had worked on came close in importance to the

paragraph of remarks he’d auditioned with, and which, so far as he

could tell, Potter had never actually delivered. The little speech now

sat in a file with Stevenson’s original call for a nonaggression pact,

along with Knowland’s subsequent attack and reactions from several

other figures. Winston Churchill himself had announced that he saw

nothing terribly wrong with the idea—perhaps, Tim thought, a

backhanded way of suggesting its irrelevance.

“The scourge of Adlai!” cried Tommy McIntyre, suddenly passing

through the room with a cackle and a snort. The interruption made

Tim happy. He hadn’t talked to anyone for an hour and a half.

“I bring you tidings from the New York Federal Building,” Tommy

said.

“You mean the witness who broke down crying?”

“No,” said Tommy, smiling even wider. “Somewhat older tidings,”

he said, slapping an inch-thick typescript onto Tim’s desk. “Last

Thursday’s transcript. Turn to where it’s dog-eared, Mr. Laughlin.”

MR. COHN: Have you been told about any of the charges against

Mr. Yamins?

MR. CORWIN (witness): No, sir, I haven’t.

MR. COHN: Was he pretty friendly with Mr. Coleman?

MR. CORWIN (witness): Well, I would say they were friendly. I

don’t think they had much social contact.

MR. JONES: Friendly in what respect, then?

MR. CORWIN (witness): Well, they worked together, and it was a

companionship.

MR. JONES: Scientific companionship more than a social

companionship?

MR. CORWIN (witness): I would say so, yes, sir.

MR. SCHINE: Mr. Corwin, you lived with Mr. Coleman, didn’t you?

Tim looked up, worried where this transcribed colloquy (“it was a

companionship”) might be headed. But Tommy, who seemed to have

something different on his mind, just roared with delight and derision:

“Jones and Cohn and Schine. Like three kids playing gumshoe up in

their tree house! Our boy Roy even calls Schine ‘Mr. Chairman’ from

time to time! Dontcha think a little adult supervision might be in

order? There ain’t a single solon in the room. And look at this,”

Tommy added, flipping to the title page of the binder, where he’d

circled “Robert Jones, administrative assistant to Senator Potter.”

For his look of perplexity, Tim earned a playful swat with the

transcript. “‘Administrative assistant’ my Aunt Fanny,” declared

Tommy. “He’s a goddamn researcher, almost as low on this totem

pole as you are, if you’ll forgive me, Mr. Timothy.”

“Is he in trouble?” Tim asked. “Mr. Jones, I mean.”

“All in good time, all in good time. Why don’t you take this

document and put it on his desk, sport? And keep it open to the dogeared page.”

McIntyre then quickly left, no doubt headed back to the cloakroom

machinations over the Republicans’ new minority majority.

Tim walked into the next room and put the transcript on Mr.

Jones’s desk. He could see from some notes on the blotter that

Jones, too, was trawling after statistics on the sea lamprey. But that

was hardly all. The desk, even with no one in the chair behind it,

appeared to be a very busy place. Even more prominent on the

blotter was a cutting from last Wednesday’s Star, a small, discreet

story about a twenty-five-year-old theological student’s conviction for

soliciting an undercover police officer in Lafayette Square. The item

wouldn’t have made the paper at all were the student not the son of

Senator Lester Hunt, a Democrat from Wyoming.

The clipping made Tim burn with a terrible feeling of foolishness.

He could see himself as the hapless theological student and

Hawkins Fuller as Officer John A. Constanzo of the District Police.

For days now he had been imagining the contempt Fuller must be

feeling for him, ever since the sentimental gesture of the book, with

its unguarded inscription, had revealed Timothy Laughlin to be

someone who’d gotten completely the wrong idea about a friendly

chat in Dupont Circle, and completely the wrong idea about Hawkins

Fuller, a normal man whose fraternal, collegial favor—a simple jobhunting tip—had been twisted by the recipient into a distasteful

opportunity to seek another sort of favor entirely.

For each of the last several nights, Tim had been unable to banish

his longing for Fuller, or the stupid, unextinguished hope that the

older man might yet send him a kind note, maybe when he had

finished the Lodge biography. Nor could he cease dwelling on the

ugly probability that the book had been thrown away, along with

whatever few seconds of infinitesimal regard Fuller had had for that

skinny little queer on the park bench.

It was 4:35 p.m. Tim fought the temptation to picture, for the

hundredth time, what Hawkins Fuller must look like sitting at his desk

in the clean aquamarine precincts of the State Department. Instead,

he took one last look at the desktop in front of him and could not

resist picking up the topmost letter on yet another stack of Jones’s

pending concerns. It was typed with a lack of accuracy that seemed

more heartfelt than sloppy:

the Chinese doctor threatened to take me to to the hospital, on

account of my frostbitten feet. My two big toe bones were

sticking out, and the area around them looked real decayed. I

knew that 90 or 95 percent of the men who went to the hospital

never came out of it, so when the doctor left the room for five

minutes, I took a fingernail (all our fingernails were real long and

dirty) and punched it around the bones and broke off both of my

big toes. I threw them across the floor so they’d be out of sight.

The Chinese doctor came back in and he said “you go to

hospital” and I said “nothing doing, my feet are okay,” and he

said “let me look.” And he took a look and I had the bones broke

off, and the feet now didn’t look so decayed and he said “okay”

and went outside the door and never bothered me again. I knew

if I’d gone to the hospital I’d have never got out of it.

This letter from Sergeant Wendell Treffery, recently repatriated from

Korea to the army hospital at Walton, Massachusetts, must be part

of the preparations for Potter’s atrocity hearings.

A second letter in the pile came from Sergeant First Class George

J. Matta, who described the shallow graves he’d seen dug for

American POWs in Korea:

we would come the next time and the rain would have washed

the dirt away and there would be nothing there but bones. We

went back and we got on to them about it, about the people

digging up the graves and taking the clothes. They tried to tell

us it was the dogs that did it, that did the digging. (They must

have had pretty smart dogs that could dig the graves and take

the clothes off the men.) I suppose you could call that

“brainwashing,” but you’ll excuse me if I tell you I think it was

just typical b.s. from these monsters.

This, Tim told himself, was why he was here. Communism—and

whatever could be done about it—was more important than Jones’s

grandstanding, or even McCarthy’s, more important than his own

being in love with some handsome phantom who must now despise

him.

He lingered at Jones’s desk, reading letter after letter from hospital

after hospital. He thought of Father Beane and the missionaries, and

he wondered, guiltily, why his own feet should not be freezing and

bleeding in the Asian snow.

“Can’t say much for the hat,” Beverly Phillips declared. “It looks like

an upside-down lightbulb, don’t you think? The suit’s pretty, though.”

Mary looked hard at the hemline. “That’s still shorter than what I’ve

got, I’m pretty sure. I raised the last of my old skirts a couple of

weeks ago, and I’m not about to drag out the machine again.”

“Ah,” said Beverly. “Your evening with Fuller, right?” She mocked

herself with a sigh: “Some of us are just barnacles on his

dreamboat.”

Mary laughed. “Oh, Jesus, Beverly.”

“I’m sorry. I sound like Miss Lightfoot, God forbid. It’s none of my

business, honey. I also apologize for dragging you here.” This

morning Beverly had asked Mary if she’d like the second of two

complimentary tickets she had for this late-afternoon fashion show at

the Mayflower Hotel. During the past hour the women had finished

off a plate of sandwiches and two cocktails apiece.

“Anything that’s gratis,” said Beverly. “I’m still ‘Helen Holden,

Government Girl.’” When Mary’s expression showed no recognition

of the old radio serial and its plucky, thrifty heroine, Beverly sighed.

“You’re too young to remember. And I’m too old for the part.” Nearing

forty and divorced for several years, Beverly Phillips was raising two

sons, who would soon be waiting for their dinner, up in Friendship

Heights.

The last pair of new outfits started down the makeshift runway.

“Did you see Perle Mesta’s article this morning?” asked Mary. The

city’s best-known hostess was over in Russia, filing pieces with the

Washington Post on the subject of Soviet women.

“About all those butch gals wearing construction helmets and

rebuilding Stalingrad?” Beverly asked.

“She says even the expensive dresses look like junk compared to

what you can get over here for five dollars at Woodie’s.”

“Well, the one that came past me a minute ago cost forty-five

bucks, and I’m not a big enough capitalist for that.”

“Are you sure you won’t join us?” asked Mary. After agreeing to go

to the fashion show, she had phoned her date and told him to meet

her here at the Mayflower.

“Don’t be silly,” said Beverly. “I never mind being a fifth wheel, but

if I don’t get going soon the boys are likely to burn down the house.

So where’s he taking you?”

“We’ll probably wind up having dinner here. Maybe the movies

afterward, though I think the poster for From Here to Eternity scares

him a little.”

“The shy type? I like that. In fact, I’d rather have that than Burt

Lancaster. Who is this non-beast?”

“His name’s Paul Hildebrand. His family owns one of the breweries

along the river.”

“What happened to young Dr. Malone?”

“He’s been operating a little slowly for my taste.”

“So how’d you meet the brewer?”

“It’s embarrassing. Millie Brisson, the secretary to the

congressman who got me my first job—that friend of my father’s—

fixed it up. The poor woman must feel I’ve got her on a lifetime

retainer.”

Beverly reached for her gloves. “Mary, you’re a catch. And I,

personally, would kill to be—what are you, twenty-eight? Anyway, are

things with this guy promising?”

“I’ve got no idea. It’s only a second date.”

“Okay,” said Beverly, a strong believer in realism in these matters,

“when and where was the first date?”

“About ten days ago. The last of those outdoor Watergate

concerts, on the river. He’s been traveling since then.”

“See?” said Mrs. Phillips. “You’re keeping track. You are

interested.”

“He hates politics,” Mary added.

“Grab him,” said Mrs. Phillips.

The temperature was supposed to drop into the forties tonight, so

Tim opened up the window to coax in whatever cool breeze might be

on its way. After work he had stopped into church, and back here

he’d fallen asleep on the couch. He had awakened only a few

minutes ago and changed into a T-shirt and dungarees. Keeping the

radio low, he now listened to Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons, as he

opened up a can of soup. With most of his old programs turning into

television shows or disappearing altogether, it was nice to know that

this one could still be found on the air at eight o’clock on Friday

nights.

He added water to the pot and decided that once he got past a

couple of paydays, he would call Bobby Garahan and agree to that

dinner at Duke Zeibert’s. His old Fordham friend was now working

for an insurance company down here and thought the two of them

ought to go out one night and act like big knife-and-fork men to

celebrate being grown-up wage earners who lived away from home.

Bobby was sort of dull, but it might be some time before Tim made

friends at work, given how the location of Senator Potter’s office put

him so far from all the other Hill rats over in the SOB. Maybe when

the subcommittee got back from New York, he’d get to spend more

time over there.

Mr. Keen’s voice was giving way to the announcer’s pitch for tooth

powder when Tim heard a knock on the door. He turned off the radio.

Could there really have been a complaint from someone? He was

wearing socks, after all, and had hardly stepped off the thick braided

rug. He moved quietly toward the door, which had no peephole—

another sign of the apartment’s illegality—and cautiously opened it

up.

“You’re not ‘on the phone,’” said Hawkins Fuller, who placed his

hands high on each side of the doorframe. A head taller than Tim, he

smiled down as if from a crucifix.

“I’m not even on the lease.” Tim could feel his face getting very

red. He imagined he was smiling, but wasn’t sure.

“Ah,” said Fuller, “a desperado.” He took his hands from the

doorframe and put them on Tim’s shoulders, moving the smaller man

aside so that he himself could enter the room. He sat down on the

desktop and motioned for Tim to take the chair next to the hot plate.

“Hey,” said Tim, laughing. “Whose place is this, anyway?”

“Not yours, apparently.”

“You’re right. But as long as I lie low, and don’t have any visitors…”

On the desk beside one of Fuller’s flanneled thighs, Tim noticed

the Star’s radio listings. Why couldn’t it be the serious novel that was

open but unnoticeable at the foot of the neatly made bed?

“What’s in there?” asked Fuller, pointing toward the hot plate.

“Chicken noodle soup.” Grateful for something to do besides stare,

Tim went over to stir the pot. “There’s probably enough for two.”

He saw Fuller look at the Campbell’s can and make a face. “Why

don’t you let me buy you supper someplace? You brought me a

book, remember?”

“But that was to thank you. Besides,” said Tim, swallowing the last

inch of a glass of milk he had on the counter, “it’s a sin to waste

food.”

“Mortal or venial?” asked Fuller.

Tim looked into the pot as he resumed stirring. “In this case, I’d

have to say venial.”

“What if you were to let me kiss you, Laughlin? Would that be

mortal or venial?”

It was as if Father O’Connell, made somehow young and beautiful,

had appeared in a dream to examine him for Confirmation.

“Mortal, I’m pretty sure.” He felt the beating of his heart. “How

come a Protestant like you knows stuff like that?”

Further resembling Father O’Connell, Fuller refused to

countenance any wriggling out of the matter at hand. “Would you like

me to kiss you?”

Tim stopped stirring and looked down into the bubbles that began

to hiss around the wooden spoon. “No, Mr. Fuller,” he made himself

say.

“Well, that one’s got to be mortal.”

Tim shut off the hot plate but didn’t turn around. “What do you

mean?”

“If the size of the lie figures in, that one can’t possibly be a venial

sin.”

Fuller got up from the desk. He took down two bowls from the

open shelf. “Spoons?”

“Who is that awful woman?” asked Paul Hildebrand.

“May Craig,” Mary told him.

“Some sort of news-hen?”

“Yes,” said Mary, who had to laugh. How could a native

Washingtonian not know of this character who wrote for a handful of

newspapers up in Maine but managed to attract the continual notice

of presidents? Miss Craig had swept into the Mayflower’s dining

room a few moments ago, around nine-thirty, having just come from

New York and, before that, Morocco, where she’d spent a couple of

weeks in the U.S. Air Force hospital with a touch—“a big touch,” she

now squawked—of food poisoning. She continued in a near-shout: “I

thought Senator You-Know-Who would still be cuddling his bride

down in Nassau when I docked. But there he was, right in Foley

Square!”

Somebody at the table next to Miss Craig’s asked if she’d been

outside the room for “Mr. Lied-and-Cried” this afternoon.

“No,” she admitted, “but that’d be a good headline for tomorrow’s

Daily News!”

Paul Hildebrand swallowed half a chicken croquette and a gulp of

Cutty Sark. “God,” he said softly. “I wish she’d shut up.”

Mary looked across the table and considered her date. It pained

him to make such a remark about a woman, she realized. Yes, he

was old-fashioned, as was the style of his pleasant looks: the threequarter part in the curly dark-blond hair, the slightly reddish

complexion. Was there, beneath, she wondered, more of a spark

than resided in her doctor?

“They were even talking about ‘Mr. Lied-and-Cried’ at the fashion

show,” she finally said.

“That’s only because we’re here,” he replied. “In Washington, I

mean. They wouldn’t have been talking about it in Omaha.” He

mentioned the city without a trace of condescension.

“I doubt the dresses would have been as pretty there.”

“Probably not. Another?” he asked, holding up her own empty

glass of Cutty Sark.

“Yes.”

As he signaled for the waiter, Mary said, “Well, I’m just praying that

he flames out soon.”

Even Paul Hildebrand didn’t need to be told who “he” was, but he

responded with a question: “Know what I’m praying for? Rain. The

drought in the Midwest is driving the price of hops sky-high. You

think the country’s really waiting around and wondering if Ike’s going

to start fighting McCarthy? Mary, most of it just wants him to fire Ezra

Taft Benson and get a new Agriculture secretary. You know, my

brother and I are going to have to dump the brewery into the

Potomac if things don’t get better soon.”

“Are you looking for a new line of work?” asked Mary.

“Not yet,” he replied. “First I’m looking for a girl to marry me.”

Fuller grabbed one of Tim’s wrists, lifted the boy’s arm, and pinned it

to the pillow. Tim surmised the shift in position to be for the greater

comfort of the older man in the narrow bed, until he felt Fuller kiss

his armpit. He froze for a moment, but with the increasing pressure

and sweep of the other man’s mouth, he felt Fuller’s avidity and

abandon transferring themselves to him. He realized he was no

longer caressing Fuller’s thick black hair; he was pulling it, forcefully.

The act seemed to agitate Fuller—to excite or anger him, Tim

couldn’t tell for sure. But the older man, fully aroused, began to press

his body more and more forcefully against him. Tim could see the

damp beginnings of sweat on Fuller’s face and in the hollow of his

neck, where he’d seen it two weeks ago and had thought about its

being every day since. He felt an ardor in his own helplessness,

recognized that what he right now most desired was to have no say

in this, no word about it but yes.

By the time he was in Fuller’s mouth, and digging his clean, bitten

nails into the other man’s shoulders, he could feel the tears on his

own face. He became afraid of losing all physical control, of

ejaculating before he was supposed to. But when, and where, was

he supposed to? Would Fuller tell him? The older man seemed to

sense the approaching climax and relented in his attentions; his face

rose back up and smiled wordlessly into Tim’s.

And then, at Fuller’s unspoken but insistent direction, each of

them was lying on his side, facing the same wall. Fuller grasped him

from behind and held him close, kissing his neck and asking, “Are

you my brave boy?” As Tim nodded yes, Fuller caressed one side of

his face; the other side brushed the sheet. Fuller’s aroma

overpowered the smell of Clorox on the linen, banishing the more

familiar fragrance, the one redolent of a thousand Monday nights

when Tim had fallen asleep on the results of his mother’s wash day.

He turned his head far enough to plunge his face into the muscular

flesh of Fuller’s chest and shoulder. In response, Fuller tousled and

petted his hair, but the next words he said were inflamed, not

soothing. “Who owns you?” Fuller whispered, sharply, into his ear.

It sounded like some early piece of the catechism, a cosmically

important question-and-answer he had somehow missed, on the

order of Who made us? God made us. But Tim’s confusion, and the

desire to respond with the right answer, were lost in his own arousal.

He whispered, “Hawkins Fuller,” not as an answer to the question,

but simply an amazed statement of the other man’s actuality.

“Hawkins Fuller,” he said, repeating this name for a discovery he felt

the need to radio from one world to another, this name for a new

Eden, whose recently glimpsed existence had now been fully

confirmed.

CHAPTER SIX

October 17, 1953

Mary Johnson was awakened in Georgetown by a phone call from

Beverly Phillips. At the first ring, she imagined she was back in her

old place, a block away, which she’d shared with three other girls.

There the phone had always rung early Saturday morning with

someone’s request for a postmortem of someone else’s Friday-night

date.

“You want details,” Mary said, once Beverly had identified herself.

“There aren’t any.” Which was true. It had been a pleasant but early

night whose conversation had turned only moderately flirtatious,

even though she and Paul had been drinking more as if he were heir

to a distillery than a beer business.

“Well,” said Beverly. “As long as there are no gruesome details,

that qualifies as a good second date. I’m afraid I’ve got some

gruesome details on this end.”

“Did the boys burn down the house?”

“No, but Scott McLeod’s set fire to Jerry Baumeister. Canned him.”

Rubbing her eyes, Mary tried to think. Jerry Baumeister. Office of

Educational Exchange? Yes: early thirties; bow tie; made courtly little

jokes. “I hardly know him,” she told Beverly.

“Neither do I. But he’s here, and he’s coming apart.”

“At your house? At seven-thirty in the morning?”

“He practically arrived with the milkman. I think he’d been

wandering around all night. Honest, I barely know him, either, Mary.

A couple of lunches in the cafeteria. We’ve got divorce in common;

he’s got two well-behaved daughters instead of what I’ve got. Hang

on a second. Boys, pipe down! I told you to go to the playground!

Sorry, Mary. Anyway, Jerry’s girls live with him. The ex-wife drinks

and long ago went home to mother. Now he’s wondering how he’ll

feed himself, let alone the daughters.”

“What’s he done to inflame McLeod? He’s a little young to have

been in the Party, isn’t he?”

“It’s more personal than that.”

Mary paused for a moment, no more able than Beverly to use the

real name for what she now realized they were talking about. “Even

with two children?” She knew it was a foolish question.

“Maybe that’s why the wife drank. I don’t know. I also don’t know

what to do. He’s in the next room. I’ve given him three cups of coffee

and two plates of eggs. The man is sobbing, Mary. He thinks he’s

going to be arrested, for God’s sake.”

“What can I do?”

“I’ve no idea. But you actually know a couple of these

congressmen I’ve been typing memos to for six years. Isn’t there one

of them who might apply a little humane pressure?”

“You imagine McLeod will respond to pressure? Let alone the

humane kind?”

“I know, I know. There’s another half dozen they’ve just let go

besides Jerry, and God knows he’s not the prepossessing type

anybody’s going to make a federal case over. Mary, I’m sorry, I don’t

know why I called. His panic’s getting to me. God, maybe I should

marry him. He’d probably still be a better husband than what I was

used to.”

“What exactly do they have on him?”

“Just some odds and ends. Rumors. A sighting of him in a bar he

shouldn’t have been in. Plus things they won’t say. He’s never been

convicted of anything. But he failed their lie-detector test.”

Mary looked at the thermometer outside her window and said

nothing for a minute. “Beverly, give me your number and let me call

you back in a little while.”

She dressed for work, agitated by Beverly’s news and almost

wistful for the cacophony of those Saturday mornings with the

roommates on Q Street, when she’d be hacking through the nylon

kudzu dangling from the shower-curtain rod and discovering that one

of the girls had walked off with her umbrella.

Once out of the house, she moved on foot through Georgetown,

passing the antiques shops and little restaurants. She supposed she

could understand why the neighborhood drew scorn for being home

to the city’s “rich, red, and queer,” even though right now half its

dowagers and old New Dealers were still just heedlessly sleeping.

Soon they would awake to shop for groceries or take a stroll along

the canal with the same fitful anxiety about the Bomb, no more and

no less, as anyone else.

Her mind returned to Scott McLeod and the mystery of why, if the

State Department was so ineffectual, everyone worried about it so. If

the men only pushed cookies, what should be the harm of their doing

it with limp wrists? And why must half the organization have to put in

overtime to help them do it? The government’s Saturday-morning

workday had been disappearing before the war; been reinstated for

the duration; and then dispensed with once again. And now it was

back, at least here and there, thanks to zealousness about the

deficit. Mr. Morton, that bright spot of internationalism, didn’t come in

himself, but the rest of the Congressional Relations staff were

expected to put in an appearance, however loosely policed by the

weekend time clock. With any luck, poor Beverly could keep

attending to Jerry Baumeister and not be missed.

Coming into Foggy Bottom, Mary walked past the chipped

Watergate bandshell and the Negroes’ gingerbread shanties, which

some of State’s employees had begun to buy up and make

charming. She continued past the warehouses and the gasworks,

down toward the old Observatory with its shuttered dome, and,

finally, on into State’s big box. The building had been put up a

decade ago for the War Department, which had outgrown it before

ever moving in. From its new Pentagon across the river, the

Department of Defense, euphemized and elephantine, was happy to

let State have the place.

Three cabinet secretaries had since made the best of it, but that

didn’t mean she, Mary Johnson, would stay indefinitely in these

waxed corridors, down which her low heels now clicked on their way

to CR. She removed her scarf as she crossed the threshhold into the

bureau’s outer office and heard, from farther in, a strong baritone at

work on “Surrey with the Fringe on Top.” Fuller, who sometimes

couldn’t make himself stay through a Thursday afternoon, was here

bright and early on a Saturday morning.

Mary put a piece of paper into the typewriter and then stared at it,

before hearing Miss Lightfoot join Fuller, coquettishly, in song. That

thick-skulled cow who so loved to proclaim herself “nobody’s fool.”

She must live at the Y, thought Mary, or in some ancient

boardinghouse. Surely no roommates would put up with the array of

resentments she so enjoyed displaying here at work, as if they were

a tray of jewelry. The woman seemed to imagine that she glowed

with wit and good sense whenever she decried the uselessness of

Mary’s college degree or the “terrible unfairness” of Beverly Phillips’

having put her husband through law school only to “wind up” as she

had.

But Mary was resentful, too, more than ever—of Fuller. Did he

know about Jerry Baumeister? He was perfectly capable of singing

even if he did.

“Would you like this to go to both Pennsylvania senators?” trilled

Miss Lightfoot, whose hat was visible in Fuller’s doorway. Mary

guessed that the two of them were working on another appeal for

votes against the Bricker Amendment, which would radically limit the

president’s ability to make treaties with foreign powers. Love must

trump politics, thought Mary; she could not imagine that Miss

Lightfoot wasn’t personally in favor of the amendment, a pet

conservative proposal.

“Oh, yes,” said Fuller. “The more the merrier, Miss Lightfoot. I’ll be

back in a flash.”

He emerged from his office, startled to see Mary, who continued to

peer at her typewriter carriage.

“Do you enjoy her company?” she whispered, almost in a hiss.

Fuller sat down on the edge of her desk. “What do you think?” his

expression seemed to say. Mary remained silent.

“We are likely to set an office productivity record for a Saturday

morning,” he cheerfully declared. “Except for you. What’s this blank

page supposed to be?” He tapped the typewriter.

“My letter of resignation.” Visibly upset, Mary rose from her chair.

Fuller followed her into the corridor. “You’re carrying this nostalgia for

Acheson a bit far,” he said.

“Stop playing the handsome idiot.” She paused long enough to

make him certain that he was being insulted, not flirted with. “It just

occurred to me,” she then added, “you’re pretty much my boss. Fire

me, and I’ll get whatever unemployed GS-4’s get.”

Fuller said nothing.

“Do you know they’ve fired Jerry Baumeister?”

“I don’t even know who he is.”

“He is, or was,” Mary explained, “in the office of Educational

Exchange.”

“What’s his problem? Pink or lavender?”

For a moment she would gladly have thrown Fuller himself to

McLeod’s wolves.

“Lavender,” she forced herself to reply.

Again, he said nothing. He seemed to be searching his memory,

trying perhaps to recall whether Jerry Baumeister had been one of

the department’s “summer bachelors,” the type known to make a

pass at another man while his own wife was up in Maine.

“Fuller,” she said, as evenly as she could, “this is not right.”

“Would your resigning be?”

“It would give me the pleasure of making a gesture.”

She saw that he would not be drawn in, and she knew that she

should walk away. But she was too angry for that. “I don’t see any

bags under your eyes,” she told him. “I guess you didn’t have one of

your late nights last night.”

Fuller shrugged. “A moderately late one.”

“Oh? When did you fall asleep?”

“When Irish eyes were smiling,” he answered. And then he

disappeared down the hall.

Maybe he would fire her. Once he was out of sight, Mary

composed herself and returned to her desk. Miss Lightfoot was

singing “People Will Say We’re in Love.”

“We are all back here on Saturday because an urgent situation has

arisen,” Roy Cohn informed everyone in Room 29 of the Federal

Building in New York. “There is a direct conflict in testimony which

we have to resolve.”

The urgency of determining whether or not Mr. Joseph Levitsky

had actually said, upon the arrest of Julius Rosenberg in 1950, “But

for the grace of God there go I,” was, to Levitsky’s lawyer, Leonard

Boudin, debatable at best. Boudin announced that he was instructing

his client, who a decade before had been with the Army Signal

Corps at Fort Monmouth, to plead the Fifth Amendment to all

questions involving Rosenberg and Mr. Carl Greenblum, the man

who had lied and cried in front of the committee yesterday afternoon.

When Senator McCarthy, “in fairness to the witness,” now

informed Levitsky that he would be cited for contempt, Boudin asked

if any members of the committee other than the chairman were

present in the hearing room.

“No,” McCarthy explained. “There is the administrative assistant to

Senator Dirksen, Mr. Rainville, and the assistant to Senator Potter,

Robert Jones.”

For the rest of the morning, Jones himself remained pleased at the

thought of his name being read into the record by the chairman

himself. Otherwise he was principally aware of a new tenseness

between Cohn and John Adams, the army counsel who was here in

the service’s interest to observe the proceedings. Adams had so far

been stressing the absence of any problem between the Pentagon

and McCarthy, but now, as today’s hearing was recessed until

Monday, Jones noted the cool glances exchanged by the army’s

lawyer and McCarthy’s. The chairman tended to ignore Adams, but

McCarthy seemed inexplicably deferential toward Cohn, even

scared. Before questioning Levitsky himself, the senator had almost

sought the young counsel’s permission.

There was no time to puzzle out the incongruity, because to

Jones’s astonishment, McCarthy was now walking toward him. “Bill!”

called the chairman, clapping his shoulder. “Why don’t you come out

to lunch with all of us at Gasner’s? After all, we don’t know how

much longer Dave will be around.” The induction into the army of

committee consultant G. David Schine was said to be imminent.

Jones’s pleasure at being invited trumped any disappointment

over the chairman’s forgetting that he was Bob, not Bill. There might

be an opportunity to straighten that out over lunch, a prospect that

looked even brighter once he got a seat next to McCarthy, with

Adams across from him and Schine and Cohn at the other end of the

table.

“Senator,” Jones asked, while the waiter set down some glasses,

“did you hear what Eleanor said up in Connecticut last night? She

told the League of Women Voters that Roy and Dave are a bigger

threat to the country than Hiss ever was.”

McCarthy, chuckling, seemed pleased. Jones looked down the

table and saw that Cohn, busy regarding Schine, had not overheard.

“You know,” said McCarthy, grabbing a Manhattan off the waiter’s

tray, “the Pentagon could use some guys like you, Bill.” The senator

added, with a certain embarrassment, to avoid offending Adams: “I

don’t mean you’re not all right, John.”

Adams, efficiently ordering from the menu, gave a thin smile to

indicate that no offense had been taken. But then he looked away,

toward Cohn and Schine, and it was McCarthy who seemed a little

hurt.

“So,” Cohn called out, once he’d caught the army counsel’s eye,

“am I going to be allowed in on Tuesday?” The committee had told

Secretary of the Army Robert Stevens, Adams’ boss, that it was

planning a field trip to the radar operation at Fort Monmouth.

“It’s uncertain,” said Adams. “In Stevens’ view, it’s up to the

commanding officer.”

“Communists can get in!” cried Cohn, throwing his napkin onto his

plate. “Whole carpools of them can go to work there for years at a

time! But not me!”

“Roy,” McCarthy said, evenly, “hold on.”

“I will not hold on! We’re getting nothing but excuses and

obstruction. We were promised cooperation.”

Adams crumbled some crackers into his soup. “We have been

very accommodating and will continue to be—”

“Horseshit, John,” said Cohn, who then looked at Schine and

recalled that the hotel-chain heir’s family did not like swearing.

“Baloney! What I want to know most is, what’s going to happen when

Dave’s inducted in two weeks.”

Adams ate a spoonful of clam chowder. “Mr. Stevens will try to find

him something worthy of his talents.”

Schine, handsome and blond, seemed moderately intrigued by

how little it took to get Roy all excited.

“Dave is essential to the operation of this commitee,” insisted

Cohn. “His expertise—”

Knowing that Schine’s expertise had been demonstrated mostly by

his authorship of a pamphlet about communism’s historical perfidy—

an error-filled monograph that had gone into his family’s hotel rooms

like the Gideon Bible—Adams quietly repeated to Cohn that

Secretary Stevens would see what he could do.

“That’s your answer for everything—from clearances to

Communists to KP! Which Dave is not going to be wasted doing with

some bunch of goddamned hillbillies in a barracks!”

Schine put his hand on Cohn’s arm. “Roy, enough. It’s okay.”

“No, it’s not okay.” Sotto voce, he reminded Schine of all the favors

his family had done for Adams during the last couple of weeks up

here in New York—the free hotel rooms, the comped theater tickets.

Then, back to fortissimo, he barked out, for the whole table’s benefit,

statistics on security risks and Communist sympathizers at Fort

Monmouth.

McCarthy grinned nervously at Jones, as if trying to pretend to a

guest that there was nothing seriously wrong with the child at the

end of the table. “Tell me about yourself,” he said to the research

assistant. The chairman indicated to Adams, still methodically

finishing his soup, that it was okay for him to join this precinct of the

conversation instead of Roy’s.

In the course of giving an abbreviated life story—from his birth in

Biddeford, Maine, to his days at Bates College and in the army

during the war—Jones gently clarified the fact that he was a Bob, not

a Bill. Reaching the recent past, he told the chairman: “Before Potter,

I worked for Senator Brewster.”

McCarthy nodded, recalling his retired Republican colleague from

Maine. “Better than that old bag they’ve got in now.”

It was Jones’s turn to laugh, at McCarthy’s scornful reference to

Senator Margaret Chase Smith and her now-famous “declaration of

conscience” against the chairman. “Sir, she couldn’t find her

bloomers, let alone her conscience. Or a Communist.”

McCarthy slapped the tablecloth in appreciation, then signaled for

another Manhattan. He’d decided to skip any food. “So what’s it like

working for Charlie?” he asked Jones.

After a moment’s hesitation, the research assistant answered,

“Oh, he’s a fine guy.” But realizing he had nothing more to say, Jones

boldly changed the subject. “Sir, can you tell me how you plan to

handle Levitsky in open session?”

McCarthy, who proceeded by more or less constant improvisation,

had clearly not given the matter any thought. “Got any ideas?” he

asked Jones.

“Yes, I do,” said the research assistant, seizing his chance. “You

need to leak what he said about Rosenberg to the press. That piece

of testimony where he directly lies.”

“Actually,” said Adams, cutting into his fish, “Levitsky didn’t say

that himself.”

McCarthy invited Jones to respond, which the younger man did

almost immediately. “Does it matter? Greenblum says he said it. And

at this point his word is better than some Fifth-Amendment

Communist’s. If we want to sustain public interest in this, let people

think Rosenberg is still influencing things from beyond the grave.

That’ll scare them a lot more than one more fag at the State

Department. Or at the head of the Democratic ticket.”

McCarthy waved an empty fork to get the interest of the other end

of the table, as if here at last were a topic around which he could

unite the whole family. “Roy,” he called, “you think there are any

reporters still around the Fed building?”

Jones’s mind was moving fast. If he could make himself useful

here, he’d be able to get that drunken leprechaun McIntyre off his

back. Maybe even get himself out of Potter’s office and into the

chairman’s own.

Tim sat in a pew at the front of St. Peter’s fifteen minutes before

Saturday afternoon confessions were to begin. Nearby he could see

two women who had arrived early for the sacrament: an elderly lady,

perhaps eager to begin the only conversation she would have all

week, and a pretty girl his own age, probably hoping to finish here in

plenty of time to get ready for a date.

From the moment he’d reached the corner of Second and C

streets and stood before the church doors, Tim had known that he

would not be entering the confessional this afternoon. The church’s

yellow brick tower and parapets had seemed like a papier-mâché

stage set for one of Shakespeare’s sunniest Italian comedies, just as

here inside, the red-and-green pattern repeating itself from one

stained-glass window to the next resembled Christmas wrapping

paper, the kind whose expense always provoked disapproving clucks

from Grandma Gaffney before she slid her own annual gifts,

unwrapped cartons of cigarettes, across the dining room table to her

daughters and son. Even the plain Ionic columns here inside St.

Peter’s, so different from the blood-streaked marble at St. Matthew’s,

seemed ready to invite Kilroy’s signature or the crayon drawings of

children.

Tim would pray, but he would not confess. He was here to make a

separate peace, the way the Russians had—he’d seen it referenced

in the Lodge biography—during the First World War. Rising from the

pew, he headed to the little chapel, just off the altar, dedicated to the

Blessed Virgin Mary. He had been hiding behind her skirts his whole

life, and as he knelt before the chapel’s rack of tall blue candles, he

felt certain she would understand his predicament. She might not be

part of the Trinity, but her ex officio position, as the intercessor who

had God’s ear, had always made her something like Mrs. Roosevelt,

the person to go to first.

In the Baltimore Catechism, the source of all Tim’s knowledge of

the world above this one, the Trinity had been depicted as a

shamrock—the visual analogy closest to hand for the Irish clergyman

who’d written the text. But what if one added another leaf, the way

one used to, with an artful graft, after hunting in vain for four-leaf

clovers on the small patch of grass in the playground near Holy

Cross? Tim did not plan to worship Hawkins Fuller, but why couldn’t

his love for him be attached to the love he already felt for the actual

Trinity? Had he not, in fact, always been in love, physically and

particularly, with Christ, whose dark, haloed image on every calendar

and classroom wall glowed more handsomely than any man walking

His Earth? Had not Father McGuire, in the first pages of the

catechism, promised a kind of divine romance? God has been very,

very good to you. He thinks more of you than He does of anything

else in this world. To you alone He has given an invitation to live with

Him in heaven forever.

When Hawkins had removed Tim’s shirt and seen the scapular

beneath it, the older man had not seemed surprised, and he had

made no joke. He had hung it, without comment, over one of the

bedposts at the headboard, where, whenever Tim glimpsed it during

the night, it seemed no more out of place—and no less protective—

than it did when draped over his own narrow chest and back.

How many mortal sins had he committed last night? Did each

separate act he and Hawkins performed constitute an individual

transgression, or was their entire three hours together—until

Hawkins left, after some chatter and a tousle of his hair but no actual

goodbye kiss—a single offense? It didn’t matter, because either way,

he, Timothy Patrick Laughlin, was dead. Mortal sin, said the

catechism, kills the life of grace in our souls. That is why the

sacrament of penance is called a sacrament of the dead. And one

could not perform penance without making a confession, any more

than one could make a confession without perfect contrition—which

he did not feel. To his astonishment, he did not want to feel it,

however well he had once mastered Father McGuire’s illustration of

these matters. Elizabeth says: “Anyone who commits even one

mortal sin does more harm than hundreds and hundreds of

earthquakes ever could do.” She is right. As the words came back to

Tim now, he pictured the ground below the 38th Parallel opening up

and swallowing a thousand American soldiers.

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned…. Because he could not say

these words this afternoon, his heart would pound with fear tonight. If

I should die before I wake…Could he live, for even a little while,

without grace—drained of it, like the empty black milk bottle the

catechism drew for a soul with mortal or Original Sin? No. And he

could not take Saint Augustine’s approach, asking to be made pure

but not just now, because the truth—and God loves the truth—was

that Timothy Laughlin had never felt so pure as he had last night.

CHAPTER SEVEN

November 10, 1953

None of the twelve televisions on display at Hecht’s had its sound

up. Eleven of them, this Tuesday night, were tuned to Milton Berle,

cavorting in women’s clothes and silence, while the twelfth showed

Bishop Sheen returning from a commercial break to find that his

blackboard had been erased, as always, by Skippy, the unseen

angel he liked to claim was a member of the cherubim’s Local 20.

The clean slate waited, in the silence, for a word, the name of the

last theme Sheen would take up before the program ended at eightthirty. RECONCILIATION, it turned out to be, and as soon as he’d

written it, Sheen turned his elegant figure and blazing eyes to the

camera.

Tim was almost able to read the bishop’s lips, which he knew

would soon speak the broadcast’s weekly envoi, God love you, that

comforting wish caught somewhere between the subjunctive and

imperative.

Tim figured he could spend another half hour browsing the book

department until the store closed at nine. And then, knowing that

Hawkins didn’t like him showing up till past ten, he would kill another

ninety minutes out on the street. In the past few weeks he’d been to

the apartment on I Street four times, and before each visit, including

tonight’s, he had called hours ahead from a pay phone near his own

room to make sure he’d be welcome.

Exiting the store under a cloudy night sky, Tim wandered through

what was left of Lincoln’s Washington: east on F Street past the

Patent Office and old marble Tariff Building, then all the way down

into Chinatown toward Mrs. Surratt’s boardinghouse. Turning south,

he made his way to Pennsylvania Avenue, where he began to walk

in the opposite direction from the one he’d traveled on the streetcar

six weeks ago with the then anonymous Hawkins Fuller. Passing the

White House and looking at the lights in the residence, Tim

wondered if Eisenhower would be up late deciding whether to

support or criticize HUAC’s subpoena of Harry Truman. All these

years later, Attorney General Brownell was now insisting that the expresident had knowingly promoted a Communist at Treasury named

Harry Dexter White.

The snow from Friday’s freak blizzard was already gone. Tim now

recalled setting out for Hawkins’ apartment that night, after it had

started coming down. Although he’d been greeted with the gentle

ministrations of a terry-cloth towel, he had even then not been asked

to stay the night. Around two a.m. Hawkins had drawn attention to a

lull in the storm and matter-of-factly discovered an extra pair of

galoshes that would just about fit Tim.

Who, he’d wondered, had been their previous owner? But he had

not asked. After all, nearly a month since their first hours in his own

bed on Capitol Hill, he and Fuller had yet to take a walk together or

share a meal. Hawkins had once shown up, unannounced, at the

room above the hardware store, bearing a quart of milk (a joke) and

a candy bar. They had eaten the candy bar in bed, but that hardly

ranked with going out to a restaurant or making supper together.

Were he and Hawkins having an “affair”? Actually, Tim couldn’t

see that the word, with its implications of brevity and furtiveness, did

the situation justice. Devoid of any previous romantic experience, he

had lived these three weeks as an eternity of happiness. This wasn’t,

he told himself, even technically like Back Street, since Hawkins,

thank God, had not turned out to be married. That possibility, the ne

plus ultra of Tim’s imaginings about the worldly and perverse, had

been lifted from his mind the first night he had walked into Fuller’s

almost comically authentic bachelor apartment on the fifth floor of

2124 I.

Reentering the pale brick building tonight, Tim decided to take the

stairs instead of the elevator to number 5B, partly to experience a

pleasant envy of the career girls and med students who got to live in

such proximity to Hawkins—but mostly to kill a last minute of time,

enough to put him past ten-thirty on his graduation wristwatch.

“It’s open,” said Hawkins, above the clatter of kitchen cleanup.

In Tim went, but only past the threshhold. From that spot he stared

into Hawkins’ bedroom through its half-open door. He could see the

Norwegian flag, half curled up like the tin of a sardine can, a

souvenir of the Fulbright year. On the floor were sneakers and a Tshirt—used, Tim supposed, late this afternoon in the twice-a-week

handball game Hawkins played at the GWU gym. Tim felt an even

stronger desire to take hold of the shirt, to put his face against it,

than he did to rush into the kitchen and touch Hawkins himself—as if

the saint’s relics would provide an equally keen, but less risky, jolt

than the saint. He forced his eyes away from the shirt and sneakers,

and away from the framed photograph of Hawkins’ parents, who

surely couldn’t, any more than his own, imagine or tolerate what

would happen tonight in this bedroom.

And then, there, all at once, wearing dark suit trousers and a white

shirt, the sleeves rolled up and his arms still wet—stood Hawkins

himself.

“Hi, buddy.” Hawkins’ arm fell across his shoulder, helping to lead

him to the living-room couch, where, until he was encircled by both

arms, there would be several minutes of conversation, during which

he would probably learn another few facts of Hawkins’ life story: the

name of a sister or childhood pet, the location of his boat on the day

Japan surrendered. While scavenging these bits of knowledge, Tim

would feign casualness, like an undercover agent in East Berlin.

Desperate to avoid expulsion, he would never try the patience of his

quarry by asking one question too many.

Hawkins poured them both an inch of rye whiskey from the bottle

on the coffee table—a real drink, not the dulce de leche (another

milk joke, out of Guys and Dolls) that he’d been offered his first time

here. Tim hardly needed the alcohol to be unlocked like Sister

Sarah, but he knew a shot of it would complete his abandonment,

would make him crave and even ask for whatever piece of action or

technique Hawkins had last time had to coax him toward with a

soothing interrogative or sharp, warning whisper.

Tim looked past the coffee table at See It Now. The television was

barely louder than the ones in Hecht’s, and Hawkins now made it

clear he hadn’t actually been waiting for Edward R. Murrow to come

on with the latest about Trieste and Harry Dexter White. “The thing’s

been running since Pantomime Quiz,” Hawkins informed him, as if

the television were just some curiously animate table on which he’d

rested two Lena Horne records and his hat. Tim nodded, his eyes

leaving Murrow in order to proceed with his usual inventory: the extra

alarm clock; the Harvard diploma; the necktie from Saltz Brothers

draped over the diploma’s frame.

“I’m sure you can read more of it than I can,” said Hawkins,

pointing to the diploma’s Latin text.

Tim smiled. “Do you really think there’s not a single Communist on

their faculty?” Harvard’s new president had declared exactly that,

yesterday, in response to McCarthy.

“Harvard doesn’t need Communists,” said Fuller. “The Ivy League

undergraduate mentality is already more collective than anything

you’d find on a Soviet wheat farm.” He made some robotic rowing

movements that had Tim laughing just before the telephone rang.

The caller was somewhere so noisy that Fuller tried covering his

free ear to hear him better. “You sound like you’re down at the Jewel

Box,” he shouted over the apparent din on the other end. “You are?”

he asked, laughing, his voice higher than usual. “Well, let me get

back to you tomorrow.” A second call, almost immediately after the

first, was from Fuller’s mother; he told her, too, that he would ring

back the next day.

“Mother is bored with Father,” said Hawkins, returning to the couch

and once more putting his arm around Tim. “She needs a new

cause. Getting Eisenhower nominated wasn’t much of one, and it’s

been made obsolete by its own success.”

“I did my own small bit for that,” said Tim, knowing he was setting

himself up to be teased. He told Hawkins of how, while at Fordham,

he had worked part-time, mostly running errands, for Tex McCrary’s

public relations firm. “You weren’t aware of my proximity to the

famous, were you?” he asked, hoping to provoke some laughter and

roughhousing. “I had to pass out leaflets at the big Draft Ike rally in

Madison Square Garden. My father wanted Taft, and he was not

pleased.”

“Neither was mine,” said Hawkins. “I was at the rally, too.”

“You’re kidding,” said Tim, almost wheeling out of his embrace.

“Accompanying my mother. And thereby annoying my father, who

reminded me that a State Department employee shouldn’t be at such

a gathering.”

Tim’s mind was far away from politics and the Hatch Act. He had

soared into the realm of romance and fate, and before he could stop

himself, he asked: “I wonder what would have happened if we’d met

there, that day, instead of in Dupont Circle.” He winced as soon as

the words—too presumptuous—were out of his mouth.

Hawkins grinned from his well-defended battlement. “You’d have

been sorely disappointed.”

“How so?” said Tim, the whiskey putting him in for a penny, in for a

pound.

“Because I had an assignation that night with a musician. Who,”

Hawkins said, pulling Tim close enough for whispering, “does things

you haven’t even dreamed of.” He pulled back in time to catch the

blush he knew this would raise. “A clarinet player in Hell’s Kitchen.”

“I’d have walked you to his apartment,” said Tim, after only a few

seconds’ hesitation. “On the way I’d have shown you where I used to

go to school and church.”

The scenario was ridiculous, and yet so likely that both men

laughed. Even so, Tim was soon feeling bad about himself: pride

might be a sin, but self-mortification, detached from penance, could

be one, too. He reached for the tumbler of rye, his arm knocking into

Fuller’s, which he realized had raised itself, tenderly, in order to

caress his face. There was a softness, a sense of pathos and

protection in Hawkins’ expression, that he had never seen. But the

collision of their two arms caused Hawkins to withdraw the gesture

and replace the look on his face with one of relief—the look of a man

who was, upon further reflection, pleased not to have given away

something he didn’t need to.

Swallowing more whiskey, Tim asked: “Does your mother ever fix

you up with girls?” His own parents, curiously tactful, never seemed

to try. Hawkins said nothing. Tim bit down on an ice cube and tried to

blunt the query with playfulness: “She’s probably too busy beating

them away from the door.”

Hawkins unbuttoned his own shirt. “She does do a little

matchmaking for yours truly. And of course she’ll succeed at it one of

these days.”

Tim tried to hide the revulsion and fear coming over him by

pressing his face against Hawkins’ now bare chest.

“But that doesn’t amount to a terribly compelling crusade,” said

Hawkins, as he removed Tim’s eyeglasses. “What she should really

carry the banner for is religion. You know, she’s more than a little

attracted to your people. I think she imagines herself as Loretta

Young or Mrs. Luce, converting herself at the feet of Fulton J.

Sheen.”

“I was watching him tonight, on a TV at Hecht’s.” Tim was relieved

to think they might be finding their way back to the more usual

precincts of raillery.

“Well, Mother was no doubt watching it up on Seventy-fourth and

Park. I’ve seen it with her several times myself. I’m sure what she

really wishes is that we still had an Irish maid she could LadyBountifully invite to join her on the sofa.”

“You’re talking about your mother,” said Tim, poking Hawkins’

thigh.

“No, we’re talking about you,” said Fuller, drawing Tim up so that

their two faces were only inches apart. “Tell me, Skippy, how’d you

escape Local 20 of the cherubim? Why didn’t they make you into a

priest?”

For the same reason you should never be a husband, he wanted

to say.

“Maybe because I like doing this too much instead,” he settled for

answering. He kissed Hawkins’ neck, receiving in return only a

familiar, opaque smile, as if “this,” and all it signified, did not even

register. Was Hawkins ever really conscious, Tim wondered, of their

doing anything at all? Or had he somehow made “this” into an

automatic, harmlessly recurring condition, like sleepwalking?

Hawkins lifted him from the couch, and turned off the television.

Once they were in the bedroom and he was removing the last of his

clothes, the older man finally said, “Of course, there’s my father’s

great dilemma to consider, too.”

Tim propped himself up on the pillow, surprised at what seemed to

be a waiver of the rules. He prepared for the imparting of real,

personal information, unprompted by any risky question of his own.

Hawkins flopped onto the bed, holding a shiny brochure. “The old

man is deciding whether he can permit himself to drive an automatic

transmission—or whether that’s something that was never meant to

be, like filter tips.” He climbed on top of Tim and, between kisses,

began a comic recitation of the advertisement. “‘Now your hand, foot,

and mind are completely free from all gear-shifting work,’” he

whispered. Tim remembered to laugh, but this transposition of the

brochure’s promises, accompanied by Hawkins’ insistent touch, was

ludicrously thrilling, a smoothly narrated trip into the helplessness he

sought. “‘Masters the steepest grades without asking a thing of you,’”

said Hawkins, who shut the light and placed one hand under the

small of his back. “‘Instant response to throttle.’”

When they were through, Tim held on to Hawkins in the dark for as

long as he could, knowing he would soon hear the serious joke

about this being a school night, and how he ought to get home so

that come morning he would be fresh for “Citizen Canes,” as

Hawkins liked to call Potter. But for the moment he could feel the

beating of their hearts, at different rates, and recognize in Hawkins’

touch a fondness, an attachment, that was sanctioned only by the

dark.

At that same hour, a mile or so away, Mary Johnson was sitting

down to a late supper with Jerry Baumeister at the Occidental. She’d

already had an early one with Paul Hildebrand, whom she was now

seeing happily enough almost every other night, but Jerry’s invitation

had been urgent. His thin, ordinarily pleasant face seemed pallid. He

had picked, she noted, the most brightly lit corner of the most

respectable place imaginable, close by the Willard Hotel and White

House.

His girls were with his mother, who lived over in Arlington, not far

from his own place. “She thinks I’ve been ‘laid off,’” he explained. “By

the way, she also thinks I have a date. And she highly approved of

your vital statistics, which I provided to satisfy her curiosity.”

“Well,” said Mary, “as far as dates go, I could do worse.”

“No, you couldn’t,” said Jerry. He paused for a moment, as if taken

aback by his new self-loathing. “And I suppose the dear old thing has

a point about my being ‘laid off.’” He joked that the federal

government’s dismissal of fourteen hundred security risks was

assisting the attrition through which it was supposed to shed itself of

fifty thousand civilian employees by next June. “Our—your, I should

say—department is certainly doing its bit. State’s getting rid of two

people a week.” He had almost, Mary noted, said “perverts” instead

of “people,” seeming to decide before the word’s first syllable was

fully out that this was more than he could bear.

“I honestly don’t think all this would have happened under Adlai,”

said Mary, sipping a Dubonnet and knowing that, in fact, she

wouldn’t be the least surprised if Stevenson had felt compelled to

expand the government’s security program in just the way

Eisenhower had done, putting everyone’s personal quirks on the

same level of importance as their loyalty.

“I voted for him, you know,” said Jerry. “Eisenhower.” He slugged

back the last of a double. “Not that that matters. What matters is that

I’m supposed to be ‘blackmailable.’ And ergo, I must go. You know,

from my standpoint, blackmail would be better than what the past

month’s been like. It would certainly be cheaper. Presumably I’d get

to keep part of my paycheck.”

“Jerry, I can pay—”

Realizing the false signal he’d given, he raced to restore malefemale economics. “Oh, Jesus, Mary, I didn’t mean that. I asked you

—as soon as Beverly called me up to say that you’d done something

‘really extraordinary.’ Those were her words, though she thought the

details should be left for you to explain.”

“I didn’t really do—”

He waved a hand in protest, cutting her off, as if to prolong the

anticipation of good news, to keep the wonder of its existence from

being disproved. “You know, I still don’t know what the ‘M’ in

‘Miscellaneous M Unit’ stands for,” he said. “Maybe just McLeod

himself, though he wasn’t there for my questioning. I guess there are

so many cases that he has to save himself for the big ones—Yale

men, I suppose, instead of guys like me from Western Reserve. I

wonder, though, if he knew he was getting a Lutheran with me. I

suspect he thought from my name that I was just one more Jew to

bother. Maybe he would have shown up if he’d realized.”

Mary wished Jerry would stop. He reminded her of a Tulane boy

who’d once cried on her sorority-house porch halfway through a

confession of some hazing humiliation. She feared that Jerry,

already moving fast through a second double, was about to shed

tears himself.

“Almost nobody actually ‘confesses,’” he continued, sounding

more composed, taking on the manner of someone explaining a

little-known principle of chess or bookbinding. “Though I’ve heard of

one guy who, after he spilled everything, actually sent them a thankyou note.” There was a pause, which Mary took as Jerry’s invitation

either to laugh or cry, before he resumed in a straightforward,

insistent tone. “That I did not do.”

He said it with actual pride, as if by not expressing gratitude to

McLeod he had managed to salvage something from the situation.

“I don’t know who that guy was,” Jerry continued, now a bit

sarcastically. “You know, ‘we’ don’t all know one another.”

“I understand, Jerry.”

“I’m sorry. I don’t mean to sound however I sounded. The sad truth

is, Mary, if I’d known the name of one homosexual in the department

—I mean knew it for sure—I’d have given it to them.”

She would have preferred the earlier look of pathetic pride to the

expression of shame now sweeping his face.

“I’ve seen Senator Fulbright,” she at last interrupted. “He and my

daddy were Rhodes scholars together. I talked to him about my

troubled feelings. I didn’t mention you specifically.” Sitting across

from Jerry was worse than it had been sitting across from Fulbright,

who’d seemed appalled that a well-brought-up Southern girl should

be aware of such things, let alone bothering him with them.

Jerry said nothing. He appeared to be waiting for the story’s

climax, the miraculous news whose pleasure he had deferred. And

she had nothing like that to give him.

“He really just pursed his senatorial lips, Jerry. He said he might

call Mr. Morton, my boss in CR, to ask one or two ‘concerned

questions’ of a general nature.”

She feared that Jerry would be crushed to realize the paltriness of

her “extraordinary” action, but he now looked at her with an

enormous smile—at which she felt obligated to throw cold water.

“Jerry, he’s never going to make that call.”

“Oh, I know that,” he replied, his smile undiminished. “But you

were swell to do what you did. When Beverly said you’d done

something great, I never figured it was this great. It’s the first fine

thing I’ve heard since I started looking for work. Which, by the way,

I’ve found. At a hardware store in Falls Church. The job pays two

dollars an hour. Think I’ll get to use that master’s degree in French?”

The smile was coming, Mary realized, not only from sincere

gratitude, but also from his now being drunk. He put his glass down

a little harder than was necessary and, with a glazed look that could

almost have been construed as romantic, asked her: “Do you know

what they do with guys like me in Russia?”

CHAPTER EIGHT

November 26, 1953

At seventy-seven, Grandma Gaffney remained drier and tougher

than her Thanksgiving turkey. The bird’s insides were just as bad:

none of the widow’s offspring could ever detect a single ingredient to

her stuffing besides water, flour, and thyme. And yet no one was

willing to suggest that she cede control of the dinner’s preparation

and location. Even in these spacious Stuyvesant Town days, the

family continued to gather in Grandma Gaffney’s Ninth Avenue

railroad apartment, only a block from where the old woman had lived

through the Blizzard of ’88 as a twelve-year-old girl. Her oft-told tale

of sliding down the drifts that had reached the second-floor window

carried no wistfulness; she’d needed to get out of the tenement any

way she could, she’d explained to Timmy the first time she told him

the story. She was already working, dressing the hair of those snotty

boarding-school girls, Protestants every one, over on the East Side.

Eight other people had squeezed around her dining room table

this afternoon: two daughters and two sons-in-law; her unmarried

son, Alan; her grandchildren Tim and Frances; and Frances’s

husband, Tom Hanrahan. Nine people if you counted the baby

Frances was carrying. The child’s annunciation had been the chief

news and only source of real merriment around the table, whose

centerpiece consisted, as always, of a dozen celery stalks, leafy

ends up, in a cut-glass vase. The windows remained covered not

with lace curtains but paper shades that appeared, like so many of

Grandma Gaffney’s possessions, oddly defiant.

Uncle Frank, whose three grown sons were off with their wives’

families, had made a joke about Timmy’s “falling behind” in the

grandchild-producing department, which occasioned laughter from

everyone but Uncle Alan, who, Tim had to concede, didn’t laugh

much over anything. Frances had led the saying of grace, including

in it an expression of thanksgiving for the cease-fire in Korea. Since

this political development had made a call-up of Tom’s reserve unit

less likely, Grandma Gaffney had allowed the prayer to proceed

without any overt disapproval, though she was known to regard

grace as “something the Protestants say,” and during the canned

fruit–cocktail course had tried to imagine what Father Coughlin—if

the Jews hadn’t forced him off the radio—would think about allowing

the Communists to keep half the Korean peninsula.

Tim now busied himself washing the dishes. He normally did them

with Frances but had today insisted she stay off her feet, even if she

was less than two months along. His gesture allowed her to join the

crush in front of the television in the small parlor. Paul and Rosemary

Laughlin had a year or so ago purchased the TV for Grandma

Gaffney, who had pronounced a favorite cryptic anathema on the

givers—“Buy another and then stop”—before becoming intensely

devoted to this latest modern wonder. Frances, arriving midmorning

to face certain rejection of her offer to help with the cooking, had

later sworn to Tim that Grandma’d kept the television on for the halfhour broadcast of the Gimbel’s parade from Philadelphia, and then

promptly switched it off when coverage shifted to Macy’s own parade

right here in New York—a demonstration of lingering resentment

over a tablecloth the store had refused to take back in 1934.

Tim had grown up in an apartment almost identical to this one, but

the Gorgon-like presence of his grandmother (who adored him and

disliked Frances, for reasons unclear to both grandchildren) had

rendered this place a sort of enchanted cave. Its heat still came from

a coal furnace in the basement tended by an Italian super who had

always let Tim play down there. Once he reappeared inside the

apartment’s little vestibule, Grandma Gaffney would brush the dust

from his hair and face and tell him he looked like Little Black Sambo.

As he scrubbed the cutlery, Tim went from remembering the coal

dust to recalling the condensation on his eyeglasses that Hawk had

wiped off with his handkerchief yesterday at lunchtime. There’d been

a call for Tim at the office, asking that he be at the Capitol Hill

apartment at twelve-fifteen. He’d raced over and found Hawk already

there, inside the foyer near the radiator, standing in his Harris tweed

topcoat and flipping through Newsweek; his car was parked out

front. He would be driving to New York, he said, as soon as the two

of them finished “visiting.” They had laughed at the word while racing

up the stairs.

Hawk had never asked about his own Thanksgiving plans, but Tim

had made haste to say that he needed to work through the afternoon

and couldn’t depart D.C. until six o’clock, when he’d be getting a bus.

Failure to acknowledge this impediment would have made him

available to ride to New York with Hawk—an invitation he feared

might not be forthcoming.

As it happened, he did have to work, making long-distance calls to

two of the POWs set to testify next week. Neither turned out to be

much older than himself, and each had called him “sir.” Now, a day

later, plunging his hands back into the hot dishwater, he recalled the

tales of horrific cold that he’d heard from one of them, whose

frostbitten feet, like Senator Potter’s, had been left behind a world

away.

By the time Tim joined everyone in the parlor, the television was

flickering with images of the Salvation Army dinner for bums on the

Bowery. Political discussion overrode the TV’s picture and sound.

Ethel Rosenberg’s brother had just yesterday given the committee a

written statement about how spying might still be going on at Fort

Monmouth, a speculation to which Uncle Frank now gave loud

assent. Tim worried that this mention of the Rosenbergs would soon

have Grandma Gaffney unleashing a fusillade of complaints against

the “sheenies,” the most arcane of her many terms for the Jews.

When he had been a little boy, and the TV-star bishop just another

voice on the radio, Tim had surmised the word to be a name for the

followers of Fulton J. Sheen. If Grandma Gaffney came out with it

now, Uncle Frank would be sure to laugh, while Paul and Rosemary

Laughlin would remain silently disapproving—not from any real

moral opprobrium they attached to the word, but only a sense of its

being a crude immigrant relic, like the coal pile in the basement or

Grandma Gaffney’s bad teeth, something with which their newly

middle-class children shouldn’t be saddled.

“So, Timmy,” Uncle Frank fairly shouted, “did you have a hand in

that speech the other night?” He meant McCarthy’s eleven-p.m.

radio-and-TV address. It had been billed as an equal-time rebuttal to

Truman’s broadcast on the Harry Dexter White case, though in the

event, McCarthy had spent more time attacking the current president

than the former one, with a claim that Ike was “batting zero” against

Communists in government.

Tim politely shook his head. “Uncle Frank, except for his wedding,

I’ve never even seen McCarthy. He’s mostly been up here in New

York.” The committee, Tim explained, had the other week done a

little investigation of General Electric, before returning its attention to

Fort Monmouth. But such details didn’t matter to Uncle Frank: Tim’s

work for Charles Potter gave him in the eyes of everyone here, even

Frances, an admirable proximity to the senator from Wisconsin.

However much Tim tried to correct them, his family regarded him as

a lucky oblate to an all-powerful monsignor.

The White case—with the once-more-front-page Truman calling

the attorney general a liar, and J. Edgar Hoover branding Truman a

liar in return—had all the elements to sustain long discussion, save

one. “Where’s McCarthy in all of this?” Uncle Alan asked Tim, at a

decibel level low enough to indicate actual curiosity. “I mean aside

from that speech.”

“It’s really HUAC’s show,” explained Tim, who realized with a touch

of shame that he was tossing off such lingo to convey the very

insiderliness he’d been trying to disclaim at dinner. But he had heard

Tommy McIntyre remark that the White story was “making old Joe

emerald with envy” each day it gobbled up the lion’s share of column

inches in the papers.

Political news soon gave way to neighborhood reminiscence. Talk

of the Donahues, who’d recently moved from Fiftieth Street to

Mineola, ushered the family toward a collective sleepiness. The

television was at last turned off, and Tim began to hear the tick of the

clock near the old radio cabinet, a kind of telegraph tapping out the

unvaried existence of Uncle Alan and Grandma Gaffney, who

sometimes seemed more married than his own parents. He noticed

the thickness of the paint—another layer added by the landlord every

five years—on the square strip of molding that ornamented the

room’s plaster walls. And he also regarded the telephone, which had

come into the apartment only a few years before the TV. I’m not on

the phone.

With the same finger he’d yesterday used to trace circles on

Hawkins’ bare chest, he could right now, if he chose, dial the Charles

Fuller family, who were in the Manhattan book. What might be going

on in those rooms at Seventy-fourth and Park, high above the

doorman and flower-filled lobby that Tim could picture? Behavior

there could scarcely be more specified or formal than here. Even

now, Tim and his father and uncles had yet to loosen their ties, pride

in their white collars supplementing a deference both to the day and

to the family matriarch.

As conversation grew more intermittent, Tim’s discomfort

increased, as if, without much else on their minds and tongues, his

parents and uncles and aunts would somehow be able to see

images, like stigmata beginning to bleed, of his naked hour with

Hawkins Fuller.

“Grandma,” he said, too nervous to sit still any longer, “I’m going to

wrap up some of the leftovers and take them to the church. The

icebox won’t hold everything.”

“All right, Timmy,” she replied, all but adding “if you must.” She

tended to view charity not as a corporal work of mercy but a species

of busybodiedness, and yet, as a “nice boy”—her designation,

seeming to signify a handicap that made certain actions unavoidable

—Timmy “did such things.”

Out on the street, carrying a bag of waxed-papered turkey and

asparagus spears, Tim drew a great cleansing breath of the city’s

dirty air. He passed the corner of Forty-third Street and looked down

to the old building where he knew Hawkins’ clarinet player—the one

from the day of the Draft Ike rally—must still have his apartment.

Closing his eyes, he thought of yesterday, when Hawk had been

inside him, and he wondered if he weren’t now really more closely

connected to this musician—at just one physical remove—than to

everyone still sitting back in the parlor.

He found himself saying aloud a couple of lines from Dylan

Thomas, the ones Tommy McIntyre had come into the office reciting

the other day:

Time held me green and dying

Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

The Welsh poet had died in mid-bender here in New York only a

couple of weeks ago. “Ah,” Tommy had said with Irish reverence and

envy, “he should have been one of ours, Mr. Tim. He should have

been one of ours.”

The lines of verse vanished onto the breeze racing down Ninth

Avenue ahead of Tim, just as yesterday, in the apartment on Capitol

Hill, his own whispering of the words “I love you,” barely but

deliberately audible, had disappeared into the pillow and walls,

unanswered except for two gentle pats on the back of his head.

CHAPTER NINE

December 2, 1953

“Our orders was to hold at all costs,” said Sergeant Weinel, “and that

is what we was doing. We was holding at all costs.”

Even so, the sergeant’s unit had at last been overrun, on August

30, 1950, by the village of Chinju near the Naktong River, and that’s

why he was here today, three years later, in the Caucus Room of the

Senate Office Building. After the unit’s forced march from Chinju to

Taejon, Sergeant Weinel testified, he and his sixty buddies had been

beaten, indoctrinated, denied medical care, and put on display in

North Korean villages; and then—with the exception of the sergeant

himself—they had been massacred by their captors.

He explained his own survival to Senator Potter and the

Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations: “Yes, sir; they covered

me over with dirt, too. It was just loose dirt, with enough to cover my

head up. I laid there and after they got through I could breathe

through that loose dirt.”

As if fearing that heroism might be ascribed to him, Sergeant

Weinel quickly shifted the committee’s attention from his success at

playing possum to the last efforts of those actually dead. “Out of the

whole bunch that was shot there, I never heard one man ask for

mercy; none of them did. In fact, there was one of the boys that

wasn’t hit good, and he even asked them to give him another. Out of

that many men, nobody cracked.”

With this recollection Sergeant Weinel choked up, and appeared

to be on the verge of sobs, which he managed to restrain when

Senator Potter, rising to his artificial feet, leaned across the

committee table to pass him a cigarette.

Watching from a seat behind his boss’s chair, Tim felt his own

hand trembling from some internal tumult of anger and fear, all of it

overlaid and trumped by shame. Had he been in Sergeant Weinel’s

company, he would have cracked, and long before they reached

Taejon. He would have begged for mercy and been killed by the

enemy in full view of his own contemptuous comrades.

Sergeant Weinel quickly regained his composure, nodding while

Potter explained how the evidence they were gathering suggested

that the North Koreans had begun a coordinated effort to kill POWs,

in numerous locations, on the day the sergeant’s group was

slaughtered. “It had to be a command order rather than a prison

order,” the senator reasoned. He was especially interested in the

timing of a visit to the prison by a North Korean higher-up, a

propaganda speaker, shortly before the massacre.

One could argue that a cover-up of the atrocities extended all the

way to the Soviet Union—and beyond. Just yesterday, Vishinsky, the

Russians’ UN ambassador, had declared with a theatrical yawn, and

considerable support, that the United States’ heavily documented

report on war crimes was just fantasy. But, Potter insisted, the

particulars with which Sergeant Weinel and the other men were now

harrowing the Senate proved otherwise. “When a Red Chinese

nurse cuts off the toes of a GI with a pair of garden shears, without

benefit of anesthesia, and wraps the wounds in a newspaper, this

makes a liar out of Vishinsky.”

In the row of chairs behind the committee, Tommy McIntyre leaned

over to Tim and whispered, “Charlie sounds half like a senator today.

Too bad his luck’s not a little dumber.” He pointed to the dearth of

press at the back of the room. No television cameras, and only half

as many reporters as would be there ordinarily: a strike by photo

engravers had shut down the New York papers. McCarthy, Tommy

had explained, was relieved that a break in the Fort Monmouth

hearings should be occurring while there were no headlines to be

had in Manhattan. The chairman, present here today and all

modesty, had told newsmen, “It’s Charlie’s hearing,” when he

entered the Caucus Room this morning. “He’s been a one-man task

force on this important issue.”

Seeing him now in half profile, Tim could sense McCarthy’s

boredom with the whole undertaking, this bit of pro bono work where

the witnesses were praised instead of pilloried. As a display of his

supposed confidence in the Michigan senator, McCarthy had told the

reporters that Potter was free to disagree with his own approach to

the POW issue, which involved getting tough on any country still

trading with Red China, including Britain. “I myself believe it’s time to

stop sending perfumed notes to our supposed allies,” he’d said,

repeating a choice image from his pre-Thanksgiving speech.

Tim had hoped to see Cecil Holland from the Star here this

morning, but the day’s real action was over at the White House,

where at a news conference Ike would—or would not—back up

Dulles’s own rebuttal of McCarthy’s speech. There was also, here in

the Caucus Room, no sign of Roy Cohn, who doubtless thought the

hearings a digression beneath his notice. Even Robert Jones,

Potter’s own staffer, had gone to get a haircut in the Senate

barbershop. Well, Tim would at least be able to tell Uncle Frank that

he’d once more seen McCarthy, albeit the back of his head.

After a Pfc’s testimony about a chaplain who’d been shot in the

back while giving the last rites, the hearing was recessed for lunch.

Tim had to do without eating, since he’d been assigned to prepare

the witnesses’ travel vouchers in the committee’s office space down

the hall. He’d hand them out once the men had had their meal and

turned in their receipts. But before he left the Caucus Room he

walked up to Sergeant Weinel to shake his hand and say thank you

—not just for his testimony, he hoped the man would understand, but

for what he’d endured in Korea. As Weinel mumbled, “You’re

welcome,” Tim noted a smirk on the face of a reporter witnessing the

exchange, and he wondered if he’d violated some protocol. When

the newsman began to shake his head in what looked like knowing

disgust, Tim felt something angry flare up inside himself. “What did I

do wrong?” he asked the reporter, trying to make it sound like a

genuine request for information. But his emotions were running high,

and he found it hard to keep the edge out of his voice. “I’m Timothy

Laughlin,” he added, extending his hand without a smile.

“Kenneth Woodforde, The Nation,” responded the reporter, whose

facial expression, beneath a lot of curly auburn hair, had turned

almost pitying. “Tell me, fella, don’t you think these guys are just as

much on display here as they were in those Korean villages?”

Tim looked at him blankly. “No, of course I don’t.”

“Well, guess again, buddy boy. They’re trotting out these freshfaced farm kids—victims of big bad communism—to inflame support

for the committee’s real work.”

“Which is?”

“A gigantic domestic purge.”

“You don’t think these soldiers suffered?” asked Tim. At the start of

the hearing, General Ridgway himself had testified that there was no

precedent for the kind of atrocities being described.

“War is hell,” said Woodforde, with even more sarcasm than

before. “Bad things happen. So do exaggerations and outright lies.”

“You sound like Vishinsky,” said Tim, who immediately wondered if

the insult wasn’t beyond the pale.

“Well, I’d rather have worked for his Joe than for your Joe.”

Tim was about to say “I work for Senator Potter,” but Woodforde

had already walked away. So he stood for a moment by himself, in

silence, outraged over the idea that he should be ashamed to serve

McCarthy, however indirectly.

He looked at Sergeant Weinel, now near the exit, and thought of

him trying to breathe through the dirt and the corpses while

pretending to be one of them.

Down the corridor, inside the committee’s workroom, Tim found

that Robert Jones, freshly shorn, had taken a seat next to Roy Cohn,

who was now delivering an agitated monologue into a telephone.

“Laughlin!” called out Jones. “Which one of those fellows who

testified is from Maine?”

Tim consulted his clipboard and found the name of the private

from Augusta whose pus-filled arm had been slammed with a North

Korean’s rifle butt on the march to Taejon.

“Do not,” said Jones, “repeat—do not—allow Margaret Chase

Smith to get her picture taken with him. This afternoon, if the kid gets

called to her office, I don’t care what you do—take him to look at the

Declaration of Independence or the White House Christmas tree—

but do not let her pose near him.”

Tim nodded, but this whole tough-guy marching order sounded so

much like an imitation of Cohn imitating McCarthy that he had

trouble believing Jones could be fully serious.

Cohn himself continued shouting into the phone: “Listen, Adams.

You’re double-crossing me for the last time! You told me that Dave

would be assigned back to Manhattan after he’d finished his eight

weeks of basic. Yes, you did, goddammit! And now you go back on

your word and try to make him eat shit!” Pointlessly cupping the

receiver’s mouthpiece against his ever-rising volume, the

committee’s chief counsel declared: “If you don’t get Stevens to

straighten this out, Joe and I are going to wreck the goddamn army!

Yes, that’s exactly what I said, and it’s a promise!”

Further upset, Tim went over to the table with the travel vouchers,

amazed at the way Cohn and Jones seemed to think they could treat

the army, as if it were some crooked dry cleaner down the street.

After all, it was the army, with its million Private Garritys from

Augusta, that was actually killing Communists and being killed by

them. Still, Tim’s anger toward the two staffers couldn’t approach

what he was even now feeling for smirking Kenneth Woodforde, who

didn’t seem to think the reds ever killed anyone at all.

Tommy McIntyre approached Tim’s table in a grand mood. “It

seems that for all the ordure Private Schine’s been ingesting, he’s so

far had four weekend and five weeknight passes. Good thing he

wears a uniform. Otherwise he might not know he was in the army at

all.”

Tim was too agitated to remember who Private Schine even was.

Half the time he didn’t grasp what Tommy was saying, let alone who

really employed him and to what end. He didn’t know why

Woodforde should be one of the anti-anticommunists, as they were

now called, and he couldn’t be sure McCarthy, Cohn, and Jones

wouldn’t end up creating more of them. And he still could not

understand why, even with the New York strike, there hadn’t been

more press in the Caucus Room this morning. There was a war on,

for God’s sake, between good and evil, regardless of whether

Woodforde thought so, or even if he believed that each of those

values had been ascribed to the wrong side.

“Oh, god-fucking-dammit!” Tim heard his own voice flying out of

him when the heavy-duty stapler caught the tip of his thumb.

McIntyre and Mrs. Watt, the committee’s chief clerk, began to

laugh, mistaking his uncharcteristic profanity for exasperation over

some clerical error. Cohn, ranting through another phone call, didn’t

even turn his head. Dizzy with pain, Tim held his tongue against

further outburst; he wanted only for Hawkins to be here and to take

hold of him, the way he had when Tim had stubbed his toe one night

in the apartment on I Street.

“Jaysus,” said Tommy, realizing the actual situation. “You’re

bleeding, kid.”

“I’m okay.” But he wasn’t. He was a fool. Cowardly, and clumsy to

boot. I never heard one man ask for mercy. Out of that many men,

nobody cracked.

Mrs. Watt, also apologetic, now hovered over him.

“I’ll get him patched up,” said Tommy.

On their way to the nurse, his thumb wrapped in Tommy’s

handkerchief, Tim recognized Senator Hunt, the Wyoming Democrat

whose son had been convicted of sexual solicitation. Tommy

remained unusually quiet until the man passed and the two of them

reached the elevators. “Timothy,” he then asked, “have you got a

girlfriend?”

Annoyed by the pain in his hand, and now by this question, Tim

answered without suppressing the edge in his voice: “No, Mr.

McIntyre, I don’t.”

Tommy threw an arm over his shoulder. “Before the coming

shitstorm’s over, you may want to get yourself one.”

CHAPTER TEN

December 19, 1953

Thruston Morton wished Jerry Baumeister a Merry Christmas. He

shook his hand while propelling his own six-foot-two frame and pretty

wife, Belle, a few inches farther into Mary Johnson’s apartment. He

also patted the heads of Jerry’s two girls, who stood politely in red

velvet holiday skirts that their mother had made for them.

Watching from her kitchen, Mary took his skillful progress as

confirmation of the rumors that Mr. Morton did indeed want to get

back into elective politics with a Senate run from Kentucky in 1956.

The bureau chief did not look like a man who had lately received any

troubling phone calls, from Senator Fulbright or anybody else. He

certainly didn’t appear to know that the man he was greeting had

recently been discharged from his own department.

About thirty of the people Mary had invited were already here, and

it was warm enough for her to open the window. The place was

beginning to smell a little like the Maine Avenue wharf where she’d

gotten the crabs and cherrystone clams that Paul had helped her to

steam all afternoon—work he’d enjoyed much more than sitting with

her through the Mannes Trio at the Coolidge Auditorium Thursday

night.

What was it she’d come in here for? Napkins, that’s right. Okay,

now she had them and could rejoin both Paul and Beverly Phillips,

who’d arrived with some nice widower from the Social Security

Administration.

“He said he wanted to take me to the Shubert!” crowed Beverly,

who was in a fine mood. “I told him, ‘Hey, what do you take me for!’”

“I had to tell her they haven’t done burlesque in five years,” the

nice widower explained to Paul Hildebrand.

“See how far behind you get living out in the suburbs!” exclaimed

Beverly. “Gosh, Mary, this place is cute. And jammed!”

“Everyone who’s ever filled out a Form 57,” observed Paul.

“How does this poor man know about that!” cried Beverly. “Oh,

God, Mary, he’s not going to make you leave, is he?” Paul

Hildebrand’s dislike of politics and government had become a matter

of teasing and speculation among those who knew the progress of

Mary’s romance, and two bourbons had made Beverly even more

direct than usual.

“No,” said Mary. “I think Form 57 was mentioned in the monologue

Paul got a little while ago from that girl in International Materials.”

She pointed out a young lady across the room. “She was telling him

how well she hears women are doing at the FBI. Getting to be

everything but agents.”

Beverly’s widower seemed interested in pursuing the subject, but it

would have to be without Mary, who had just decided that she and

Paul, as if they really were married, should be circulating separately

through the party. Departing the conversation, she introduced one of

her old Q Street roommates to the little circle Paul would now be in

charge of. Betty Bowron, conspicuously tanned, had just been to

Miami with her boss for a Commerce Department conference, and

she seemed eager to talk about it.

Mary edged into another conversation. Her old friend Millie

Brisson, the congressman’s secretary, was talking about the suicide

of a young guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

“Mysterious, no?” said Millie.

“Redundant, I’d say,” offered the young man Millie was talking to, a

Lousiana acquaintance of Mary’s who was up here trying to write a

kind of national version of All the King’s Men.

Mary checked the phonograph: the Christmasy Corelli concerto

had another two inches to go before she’d need to change the

record. But one of Jerry’s daughters, she now noticed, was

struggling with a hem that had fallen. Maybe the hard-drinking

mother had dropped a few stitches. “Honey,” called Mary, coming to

the rescue, “let me get you a little old safety pin.”

Inside her bedroom, while she rummaged the sewing box, Mary’s

glance was drawn through the window, to a scene made visible by

the streetlamp two houses down P Street. Hawkins Fuller, dressed

for her party and holding a small brown bag, stood talking to a

smaller man in a woollen cap and zippered jacket. She now

recognized him—the tortoiseshell glasses—as the boy who’d come

to the office with the book a couple of months back. He and Fuller

appeared to be saying goodbye. After giving Fuller a sweet, casual

punch on the arm, the boy smiled and walked away. At which point

her colleague turned around and started toward her apartment.

Mary wondered: Had that lovelorn little dogsbody leapt at the mere

chance to walk Fuller to a party the older man wouldn’t even let him

enter?

What exactly should she be feeling? Disgust? Sympathy? She

blocked the questions from her mind, and decided to use a needle

and thread, instead of a pin, on the Baumeister girl’s skirt. Picking

out a spool of bright red, she heard Corelli give way, abruptly, to

Eartha Kitt: Santa baby, hurry down the chimney to me…

Looking out into the living room, she saw Fuller at the turntable

and realized that he’d had a phonograph record inside the little

brown bag. People were beginning to cluster around him, just as

they would have had he only blown some dust off the needle and

dropped it back onto Corelli. An older man from European Affairs

was asking in a loud voice if he didn’t “think it terrible what had

happened to poor George Marshall over in Oslo. You were over

there once, weren’t you, young fellow? The poor general, heckled by

those Communists while picking up his Peace Prize!” Fuller agreed

that it was a shame, and moreover an embarrassment to old Haakon

VII, “a fine chap and top-drawer king.” Even as his always-adaptable

speech found him communicating in the EA man’s idiom, Fuller

began letting his own shoulders sway in a manner both slinky and

manly, one that belonged to nobody else at the party. Santa baby,

forgot to mention one little thing, a ring…

Mary watched him and nodded but didn’t smile. She proceeded to

Jerry’s daughter with her needle and thread.

Ten minutes passed before she again needed to be in the kitchen,

where she found Miss Lightfoot, middling drunk on Harvey’s Bristol

Cream and wearing a hideous hat. Mary had had to invite her, and

poor Mr. Church, an old friend from the Passport Office, was having

to listen to her.

“What do you mean by ‘this’?” asked Miss Lightfoot, who knew

perfectly well that Mr. Church had meant the sway of Senator

McCarthy when he told her that “this could all end if Senator Morse

just voted with the Democrats.” Should Oregon’s independent—

formerly a Republican—throw in with the other side when it came

time to organize the congressional session, then the chairmanship of

McCarthy’s committee, and much of his power, would pass to the

opposition.

“Well, Morse won’t vote with the Democrats. He’s already said so,”

Miss Lightfoot informed Mr. Church, whose more serious error had

been to assume, from the general tenor of those at Mary’s party, that

Miss Lightfoot, too, wanted all “this” to end. She did not. Nor,

actually, did the Democrats, she now argued. “They don’t want to

take over. They’d rather carp. Which is why they left the committee in

the first place.”

Mr. Church was shaking his head with forbearance, allowing Miss

Lightfoot to overprove her point, when Hawkins Fuller brushed past

them both. Leaning against the sink, Fuller took note of Mary’s

sleeveless black dress and declared: “That appears to be a very cold

shoulder.”

Miss Lightfoot, already keenly stimulated, and wishing for a sprig

of mistletoe under which to capture Fuller, tried to annex him to her

own conversation. “Mr. Fuller, tell Mr. Church here how you’ve got to

deal with the Democrats on Capitol Hill. Tell him how—”

Fuller ignored her ardent grasp of his forearm. He was interested

only in the lady of the house, who he realized had already had

enough to drink herself.

“You came alone?” Mary finally asked him.

“More or less,” he replied.

“How is a person ‘more or less’?” asked Mary. “Did you make that

poor creature I saw from the window walk all the way back home by

themselves?” Lit as she was, she took care to keep the pronouns

neutral, even at the expense of grammar, since she and Fuller now

had Miss Lightfoot’s complete attention, Mr. Church having beaten a

gentlemanly retreat once the handsome guest began having words

with the hostess. Fresh from political triumph, but still smarting from

Fuller’s rebuff, Miss Lightfoot now appeared determined at least to

savor victory over whatever hapless female Fuller had apparently

declined to bring up to the party.

Mary attempted to move out of the kitchen, but Fuller blocked her,

trying to smooth things over with a laugh. “If I’d brought him up, he

would only have asked you for a glass of milk. And you don’t seem

to be serving any.”

By now furious at being ignored, Miss Lightfoot could feel her

overpowdered jaw suddenly slacken. Him? He? A small cascade of

pennies started dropping in her head. After all her flirtation! She’d

even sung with this man! Without hesitation, she began a loud,

seething recitation of the words she’d seen that boy, that milkdrinking nancy, write in the Lodge biography: “‘With thanks to

Hawkins Fuller. I got the job. You’re wonderful.’” She made the

inscription sound as if it were a cable from Moscow that had been

discovered in Fuller’s shoe.

Mary, still unable to get away, could picture the book lying on

Fuller’s filing cabinet. He’d never even taken the gift home—a bit of

callousness that still appalled her, even as she wanted to defend

Fuller from this harridan to whom he’d so foolishly exposed himself.

Pushing Miss Lightfoot aside, she at last returned to the living room.

Fuller lifted the bottle of Harvey’s Bristol Cream from the kitchen

counter. He topped up Miss Lightfoot’s drink and poured one for

himself. He clinked her glass and said, “Miss Lightfoot, I am

wonderful.” And then, before walking away, he leaned over and

whispered in her ear: “So why don’t you just suffer.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

December 23, 1953

At 6:05 a.m., the radio was saying that Cardinal Spellman, Catholic

vicar of the armed forces, had departed for Korea to say Christmas

Mass for the troops. On the Formica table near Tim’s bowl of cereal

lay the current issue of The Nation, which he’d been making himself

read last night. Kenneth Woodforde’s short sarcastic article on the

Potter hearings argued that the Hollywood Ten might now be making

a fine sentimental film about the forced march to Taejon if they hadn’t

been blacklisted from practicing their profession.

Since the atrocities testimony, Tim had more strongly than ever felt

himself part of a great moral battle, and more and more he wondered

how Hawkins, stationed at its international center, could exempt

himself from the fray with the handful of liberal nostrums and jokes

he uttered whenever Tim tried to draw him out on the subject. An

attempt to discuss his encounter with Woodforde, for example, had

resulted in Hawk’s telling him only to “stay away from reporters. They

dress worse than McCarthy.”

Tim opened a box containing the cheap necktie, monogrammed

with a huge, loud “F,” that he’d bought the other night on Fourteenth

Street. He would tell Hawk that the “F” stood for “Farouk,” not

“Fuller.” The deposed Egyptian king was back in the papers now that

his gaudy possessions were about to be auctioned off to help pay for

the Aswan Dam, and a sketch that Tim had gotten up early to finish

—of Hawk as a sultan surrounded by prostrate secretaries and

ambassadors, each peeling him a grape or fanning him with palms—

would go into the box with the tie. Tim drew well enough to have

once thought about going to art school, and he’d felt a wonderful

contentment while illustrating Hawk late last night, even if he’d had to

work from memory. (Would he ever possess a photograph?)

He planned to deliver the tie before Hawk left for work. He knew

he would be taking a risk by coming unannounced, and was certain

there would be no present for him in return. But he could not face the

trip home for Christmas without seeing Hawk once more.

There had been no question of buying a real gift. Any present that

seemed to express deep feelings instead of high spirits might invite

Hawk’s disapproval. As it was, once Tim boarded the bus to Foggy

Bottom, he worried about even this silly tie.

Traveling across the city, whose early commuter traffic was

moving mostly in the opposite direction, he calculated how much

time he had left to get to Hawkins’ apartment, give him the gift, and

then make it back to his own office on Capitol Hill. The time was

tighter than he would like, but even so, he got off the bus in Farragut

Square, in front of the Army and Navy Club, a few blocks from his

destination. He liked to approach the apartment on foot, to walk

down I Street savoring his own apprehension along with new details

of his beloved’s neighborhood. All too soon, he was there, at the

front door of the building, able to avoid the downstairs buzzer by

slipping in behind a meter man.

He had hoped to surprise Hawkins while he was still in bed, to find

him wearing striped pajama bottoms and no top. But instead he was

up, already in a shirt and tie. He’d been reading the paper at the

kitchen table and seemed neither angry nor startled to find company

at the door. Was there a chance he was pleased? He motioned Tim

in, pointing to a story in the paper. “Have you sent a Christmas card

home, Skippy? Even Guy Burgess has written his mother. From

where is unclear, but he’s let old Mum know he’s still alive.”

“I’ll be seeing mine when I get back to New York tomorrow.”

“I go up to Bar Harbor tonight. Not a safe harbor, either, with such

a large gathering of the paternal clan in the offing. Before New

Year’s everyone will be wishing they’d spent the week somewhere

warmer and with somebody else.” He pressed the trash container’s

little foot pedal and scraped the remains of his plate into the can. “I

should have arranged to go to Bermuda, with you.”

Tim was thrilled beyond measure. Anyone would have told him this

was only a pleasantry. But it’s the thought that counts, he heard

himself thinking.

Hawkins poured him some orange juice while glancing back at the

story on Burgess, the British spy.

Say you’ll miss me, thought Tim. All his thoughts were racing; all of

them were upping the ante. Finally, he leaned over and kissed him.

“Merry Christmas, Hawk. Here.” He handed him the gift.

Hawkins smiled at the box’s shape. “You may have noticed I

already have one of these on.” He sat down at the table. “Should I

open it now?”

“Later’s okay.” Tim suddenly didn’t care about the dangers of

rejection, about all the unspoken protocols and endless calculations

of risk. He climbed onto Hawk’s lap and began kissing his face and

neck with the desperate greed he always imagined the darkness hid.

“Hey, hey,” whispered Hawkins, making a token effort to push him

away. “My own juvenile delinquent. Careful you don’t wind up in that

Senate investigation.”

“That’s me,” said Tim, kissing him some more and loosening the

necktie that must have cost twenty times more than the one in the

box. “I’m your hoodlum, your little j.d.”

“Complete with switchblade,” said Hawkins, feeling Tim’s hard-on

through his Sanforized trousers.

In another minute they were on the bed, shirts off, pants open. Tim

forced himself to keep one eye on the clock, though his frantic ardor

ensured that things would be over quickly. His tongue was soon

moving along the thin line of hair that ran down Hawk’s stomach to

the waistband of his jockey shorts. As Tim sucked him, Hawkins

tousled his hair and softly moaned, not for the first time, “You’re the

best,” a phrase that always excited Tim, even if the competition it

implied was more disquieting than complimentary.

He wanted Hawk to climax in his mouth, but soon found himself

being lifted up, brought face-to-face with the man he loved, a man

who wanted to kiss him—as if aware that this was what he truly

needed to be soothed. With their tongues pressed together, he came

all over Hawkins’ stomach and chest.

The next kiss he received—for all the devastating tenderness of

the one before—could not have been more perfunctory. “Time and

tide,” said Hawkins, cheerfully, looking down at his own torso, from

which he’d gently displaced Tim. “And I do mean tide.” He got up to

get a towel.

Tim lay in the bed, scarcely daring to breathe. This last kiss had

put him back in his place, turned the ecstasy stale, and plunged him

into a welter of self-loathing. He watched Hawk towel off and

rebutton his shirt in front of the bathroom mirror. Knowing he’d soon

be crying, unless he held in the tears by force of will, he grabbed for

something on the night table. He wanted anything small that he

could squeeze in his hand to distract himself, the way one forgets a

pain in one place by introducing another somewhere else. He

realized what object he’d picked up—a pair of cuff links, hooked

together—only after he’d finished squeezing the metal as hard as he

could and opened his hand to have a look.

Hawkins returned to sit on the edge of the bed. “Put your shirt

back on,” he said.

Tim obeyed, while Hawkins went and got a pair of scissors that he

used to cut off the white buttons at Tim’s wrists. After making two

small slits to match the buttonholes, he proceeded to refasten the

sleeves with the cuff links he’d seen Tim squeezing.

The silence and the gestures seemed ritualistic. Were the cuff

links meant to be a return present, Hawk’s way of saying “I didn’t

have time to shop”? Should he be insulted? Either way, he wanted

them. They were proof, testimony to their union, a more elegant

exhibition of it than the bottle of milk Hawk had brought with him that

night to Capitol Hill, and which he’d never thrown away.

And yet—a horrible thought—what if the cuff links were someone

else’s? Left behind like that pair of galoshes? Tim could almost hear

the stranger and Hawk laughing, as the jewelry clinked onto the night

table just before some drunken dawn.

But then he saw the initials cut into the silver: HF.

Hawkins let go of his wrists and looked into his eyes. And then Tim

understood: these were his reward for not crying, for not making the

scene he’d been on the verge of making. He touched the cuff links,

trying to enjoy the feeling that he was branded, owned; trying to

appreciate the small bit of recklessness required of Hawk to give

them. Wearing them would entail a measure of daring, too: what

would he say if someone read the initials? His mind proceeded to

construct the sort of fast little lie that people like himself learned to

construct a dozen times a day. They’re not real silver. A Maryknoll

nun gave them to me when I made a donation. The “HF” stands for

“have faith.”

“I’m going to be late, Skippy.” Hawkins got up and walked to the

door, leaving him to show himself out.

Within fifteen minutes, Fuller was at the department. Inside

Congressional Relations, a bottle of Kentucky bourbon—a gift of the

bureau chief—sat atop each desk. On Mary Johnson’s blotter there

was also a tiny box, no bigger than two inches wide and high. A ring

from the brewer, Fuller supposed, as soon as he saw it.

“He snuck in here around eight-fifteen,” said Beverly Phillips. “An

odd way to propose, no? Maybe he wants us to be cheering her on,

telling her to accept.”

“And we’ll do just that,” said Fuller. “Won’t we, Miss Lightfoot?

Marriage being such a grand institution? Something everybody ought

to enjoy?”

Miss Lightfoot looked up from what she was typing to give him a

thin, defiant smile, as if signaling that she would have to bear his

presence here only a little while longer. Victory would be hers.

Fuller saw Mary enter the office, and he managed to halt her near

the front door. Walking her back out to the hall, he said: “You’ve got a

present on your desk from Mr. Right.”

“I’ve been expecting it,” she replied. She seemed calm, neither

displeased nor especially happy.

“You’re not going to let him take you away from all this, are you?”

She looked straight at Fuller. “Are we on speaking terms yet?”

They had exchanged hardly a word since the party on Saturday.

“You can decide that within the next hour,” said Fuller. “I’ll be out of

the office on a date with Mr. Right.”

Mary looked puzzled.

“McLeod. The real Mr. Right.”

“Oh, Fuller.”

He saw her sudden look of concern. Clearly they were speaking.

“The summons arrived yesterday,” he explained.

Revulsion crossed her face. “Miss Lightfoot?”

He nodded. “I’m due in Room M304. I’m sure your friend

Baumeister is familiar with it.”

“Does Mr. Morton know?” she asked.

“The boss is always the last to know. I don’t believe they tell him

until after they’ve told the wife. Their idea of fair play.”

An elevator ride and several hundred feet of waxed corridor

brought him to M304, the Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs,

whose name always sounded to Fuller like a CIA front: the little

publishing house in Vienna, the art dealer in Rome. The office he

entered had walls similar in color to those in his own, but there were

no partitions and, it appeared, no secretary. On a small table

between two chairs rested the department’s Investigative Manual

and several mimeographed copies of Scott McLeod’s August 8

speech to the American Legion in Topeka: “I have attempted very

frankly and honestly to face the issue of sexual perversion—the

practice of sodomy—in the State Department,” he had assured his

audience, promising the Legionnaires that in trying to replace those

discharged from federal service, he would be looking for men “wellgrounded in the moral principles which have made our democratic

republic a model form of government.”

“Mr. Fuller,” said a voice emerging from the wall intercom. “I’m

Fred Traband. Please step into Room M305. And please leave your

coat out there.”

Fuller entered the inner office and shook hands with Mr. Traband,

who immediately made it clear that there was nothing miscellaneous

about the Miscellaneous M Unit. “I’m the special agent in charge of

sexual-deviation investigations,” he said, as matter-of-factly as if he

were introducing himself as a budget analyst. “We believe we have

reason to ask you a series of questions,” he continued, without

actually giving the reason. Miss Lightfoot’s privacy, it seemed, must

be protected.

“Sit down, Mr. Fuller, and let me be frank. Eighty percent of these

sessions end with the admission of at least one proscribed behavior

by the interviewee.”

Fuller said nothing. He succeeded, without much effort, in looking

courteous, as if he were listening to a purser explain the exchange

rates for the next port of call.

“Security,” said Mr. Traband, “is endangered by more than covert

disloyalty, Mr. Fuller. The moral perversion and emotional immaturity

inherent in homosexual behavior make those who engage in it

targets of blackmail by anyone seeking to undermine the

government of the United States. Moreover, that same perversion

and immaturity are a danger to the homosexual’s fellow employees.

As I suspect you know, the Hoey Committee, whose investigation of

sodomy within the State Department led to the reconstitution of this

bureau, concluded that ‘one homosexual can pollute an entire

government office.’”

Fuller neither nodded nor shook his head, though Mr. Traband

looked as if he expected a flood of personal confession. When none

occurred, he made a request: “Mr. Fuller, please get up and walk

across the room.”

Fuller obliged and then returned to his seat.

“Again,” said Traband.

When Fuller had finished his second walk, Traband gave him a

newspaper and asked him to read a small story that he’d seemed to

pick at random.

Fuller recited: “‘President Eisenhower revealed in his State of the

Union message last January that he favors some form of home rule

for the District. The pres—’”

“Thank you, Mr. Fuller, that’s enough.” Traband passed an open

book across the desk. “This paragraph, please. The second-to-last

one on the page.”

Fuller picked up the book and looked at the spine—Of Human

Bondage—before he commenced reading aloud: “‘Philip opened a

large cupboard filled with dresses and, stepping in, took as many of

them as he could in his arms and buried his face in them. They smelt

of the scent his mother used. Then he pulled open the drawers, filled

with his mother’s things, and looked at them: there were lavender

bags among the linen, and their scent was fresh and pleasant. The

strangeness of—’”

“Enough,” said Traband, almost as if he could no longer bear the

voluptuous nonsense being inflicted on him.

Somerset Maugham? Fuller wondered. Was the interrogator

expected to detect a tribal affinity between author and reader? Was it

to be discerned in too much mimicry, a slightly excessive archness

or lyricism in the tone of the recitation? Just as, presumably, too light

a step in crossing the room might be added to his own too-expensive

clothes in the bill of fairy particulars being drawn up against him?

“Mr. Fuller, I’m going to ask you to take a lie-detector test.”

Fuller looked around but saw no machine. There was also no door

leading to any Room M306. There was, however, the kind of

curtained screen one found in a doctor’s office, and it turned out that

Traband’s assistant had been sitting behind it, beside an apparatus,

all along.

Fuller was instructed to open his shirt and roll up his right sleeve.

Once he did, the sensors were applied.

“Mr. Fuller,” asked Traband, “have you ever given or received

presents of a romantic nature to or from another man?”

With thanks to Hawkins Fuller. (I got the job. You’re wonderful.)

“No.”

“Have you ever frequented a Washington, D.C., establishment

called the Jewel Box, at the corner of Sixteenth and L streets?”

The tufted purple walls. The bartender who looks a little like Alan

Ladd. “No.”

“Have you ever been present at a Washington,

establishment called the Sand Bar, in Thomas Circle?”

D.C.,

The old redheaded queen leaning on the big plastic anchor at two

a.m., shouting to no one in particular. The piano player hammering

out “Some Enchanted Evening” for the third time in two hours. “No.”

Fuller looked at the blank far wall. Silently, he sang to himself:

You’re calmer than the seals in the Arctic Ocean. At least they flap

their fins to express emotion.

“Mr. Fuller, who was the president of the United States when you

were born?”

A “baseline” question. “Calvin Coolidge,” Fuller answered.

“Have you ever had inappropriate physical contact with a male

foreign national either in the United States or while abroad?”

Behind the bicycle shop in Oslo. Lars? Who had no undershirt

beneath his heavy fisherman’s sweater. “No.”

“Have you ever engaged in sodomy or oral-genital contact with

another male?”

He sometimes counted them like sheep. What was the name of

that Italian boy in San Diego? The night before we both shipped out.

The one who rubbed his feet together, fast, like a puppy having a

dream, when he came. And that same week, the one who claimed to

have gone to Annapolis, and tried—

“Mr. Fuller, answer the question.”

“No.”

“Have you ever considered yourself to be in love with another

male?”

Here, Fuller thought, was the first interesting query of the morning.

He pondered it, sincerely, dropping his gaze from the wall to his lap

and then his forearm, where, beneath the cuff of the machine’s main

sensor he noticed a golden-colored fleck of something dried onto his

skin: the tiniest bit of exuberant Tim, he realized, missed by the

towel. That’s me. I’m your hoodlum, your little j.d. He filled up with a

tender feeling, which he expelled, immediately, like a breath. “No,”

he answered.

Traband nodded to the machine operator, who tore off and labeled

a long piece of paper. “Mr. Fuller,” said the interrogator, “as soon as

the technician removes the sensors, you may return to your office

until you hear from us.”

Outside in Room M304, Fuller was confronted with the sight of

Scott McLeod himself, talking to whatever subordinate he’d brought

along. Picking up his suit jacket, Fuller wondered if he himself might

not be a bigger fish than he’d imagined. He nodded to the security

chief, whose plump pink complexion and translucent eyeglass

frames nodded back, before McLeod hastened himself and his

underling into the room Fuller had just exited.

McLeod’s chief patron, Senator Styles Bridges of New Hampshire,

had once, around 1940, during Fuller’s time at St. Paul’s, given a

speech to the students. Buttoning his jacket, Fuller could now recall

its title, printed on the program passed out in the chapel: “How to Be

a Man.”

Alone in Room M304, he took his time, combing his hair and

shooting his cuffs. He thought of Tim clutching the pair of links an

hour or so ago—and then he heard conversation begin to filter

through the cheap wartime-construction door separating Room M304

from Room M305. He walked back and put his ear to it.

“Clean?” asked an agitated voice he realized must be McLeod’s.

“As a whistle,” answered Traband.

PART TWO

FEBRUARY–NOVEMBER 1954

I am a strong believer in Purgatory.

—FLANNERY O’CONNOR

CHAPTER TWELVE

February 22, 1954

On George Washington’s Birthday the upper body’s only piece of

business—now being performed by Senator Hunt before a handful of

colleagues and a full gallery of holiday tourists—was a recitation of

the first president’s Farewell Address. Representative Metcalf of

Montana was doing the honors in the House. According to Tommy

McIntyre, the old-timers there could still remember the February

tributes to Lincoln being conducted by Henry Rathbone, Republican

of Illinois, son of the unfortunate fellow who’d been beside the

president and knifed by Booth in the box at Ford’s.

Tim couldn’t imagine ever being an old-timer on the Hill, but after

four months he no longer needed the Congressional Directory to

recognize who came and went on the floor. He’d been able to pick

out Hubert Humphrey, plump and happy and fast, as well as Senator

Green of Rhode Island, frail and dusted with dandruff and said to be,

like Speaker Rayburn and Senator Russell, “a lifelong bachelor.”

Senator Hunt was doing his best, but very laboriously, with

Washington’s 150-year-old oratory. It was hard for Tim to believe,

even as he tried peeling away the decades with his imagination, that

this rumpled and tired-looking man, stolidly fixed to the carpet, had

once played semipro baseball. Kenneth Woodforde could probably

make some clever irony out of the way Hunt had spent much of his

adult life, after baseball and before politics, as a dentist. It was, after

all, another dentist bringing the Capitol to a boil right now. The

building was ready to blow over the way General Ralph Zwicker had

been questioned by the McCarthy committee in New York last

Thursday about the promotion of Major Irving Peress, D.D.S. and

onetime Communist.

It seemed obvious to everybody including Tim that Peress had

gotten an extra stripe merely through the routine, unstoppable flow of

army paper, with whoever had been in charge no more likely to

notice the major’s politics than to spot a pebble inside a glacier. And

yet, for being in command at Camp Kilmer when the promotion

occurred, General Zwicker had received an absolutely livid thrashing

from McCarthy. The record of the hearing had been leaked in several

places on the Hill and would no doubt be in the papers tomorrow.

It was hard concentrating on George Washington’s rhetorical ghost

while holding this incendiary onionskin transcript that Tommy had

asked him to read. It had been typed over the weekend by Miss

Cook, who’d called everybody in to the office this morning. (Tim

could now get telephone messages through the hardware store

below his apartment.) He’d intended to spend lunchtime on the

banks of the Potomac, where, to mark the holiday, contestants in a

model-plane competition would be flying tiny craft weighted with

silver dollars across the river; but by 8:45 Tommy had been greeting

him at the door to Room 80, informing him that they’d have to spend

the day “telling Charlie what to think of all this business with the

brass.”

SEN. McCARTHY: Don’t be coy with me, General.

GENERAL ZWICKER: I am not being coy, sir.

Each translucent page was more startling than the one before. Lest

Tim miss anything, Tommy had circled the worst bits with a laundry

marker:

GENERAL ZWICKER: I don’t like to have anyone impugn my

honesty, which you just about did.

SEN. McCARTHY: Either your honesty or your intelligence; I can’t

help impugning one or the other…

SEN. McCARTHY: I mean exactly what I asked you, General,

nothing else. And anyone with the brains of a five-year-old

child can understand that question.

SEN. McCARTHY: Any man who has been given the honor of

being promoted to general and who says, “I will protect

another general who protected Communists,” is not fit to wear

that uniform, General. I think it is a tremendous disgrace to

the Army to have this sort of thing given to the public. I intend

to give it to them.

On Friday afternoon, Zwicker, who’d stormed Omaha Beach on DDay, had told reporters that McCarthy had treated him worse than

he’d treated the actual Communist who’d been in the witness chair a

few minutes earlier. Secretary of the Army Stevens, upon learning of

the chairman’s tirades, had told the general not to show up for the

public testimony he was supposed to give tomorrow in Washington.

Stevens would come to the Capitol and answer McCarthy himself.

The army and the subcommittee were now, indisputably, at war.

Roy Cohn had returned Stevens’ fire, pronouncing “the army’s

attempt to coddle and promote Communists” too important for good

manners from the subcommittee. His own part in the assault on

Zwicker could also be found in the transcript, where Tim spotted

Jones, too, charging in like a battle-crazed bugle boy. For the past

couple of months there had been amused talk in the office about

how the ambitious research assistant was beginning to acquire

McCarthy’s oral cadences and repetitions, those reiterated opening

phrases that turned the senator’s questions into little battering rams

of sound.

“‘The nation which indulges toward another an habitual hatred or

an habitual fondness is in some degree a slave,’” Senator Hunt

continued, to the gallery’s ever-decreasing attention. What might

Woodforde make of that? Tim wondered. The Zwicker transcript was

starting to upset him as much as Woodforde and Cohn had after the

atrocities hearing. But even so, the larger, implacable fact remained:

we ought to hate Russia, where people were slaves. China, too: the

House had just gotten intelligence estimates that Mao Tse-tung had

murdered more than fifteen million people. How differently, knowing

of such mass slaughters, might George Washington be speaking

today?

The conflict between sordid means and great ends had been

gnawing at Tim—it was a kind of religious mystery beyond his

powers of reckoning—and when it came to Hawkins Fuller, the last

two months had been grindingly devotional. Tim realized he was

practicing a kind of Trappist discipline that left him alternately exalted

and exhausted. At Grandma Gaffney’s on Christmas Day he’d felt

the same isolation he’d experienced at Thanksgiving—only it had

been twice as strong, a physical ache that stole his appetite and left

him unable to concentrate on anything but endless, repetitive

thoughts of his beloved. He had kept himself from sending a

postcard to the Fullers’ address in Maine, mailing one instead,

pointlessly, to the empty apartment on I Street, which he’d walked

past three times after returning to Washington early. He had tried to

content himself with the awareness that this small, falsely cheerful

expression of himself was sleeping in the mailbox of #5B, beside

some unopened bills awaiting the still-absent tenant. He had finally

gone to dinner at Duke Zeibert’s with Bobby Garahan, his Fordham

pal—God, Laughlin, it’s steak; how come you’re just picking at it?—

but he’d returned home early to read a library copy of the Lodge

biography. He still wondered where Fuller’s inscribed one resided. At

the office? In some jumbled corner of the apartment he’d never

caught sight of?

Once Hawk finally came back to town, all had gone as it had in the

fall, with a sort of unnerving joy, the possibility of banishment

hovering over everything, more like a rival than a fate, a presence

that seemed to listen in on the telephone and slip into bed between

the two of them. Now, three weeks into February, Hawk had

suddenly gotten busy at work. His preoccupation there was actually

proving a relief to Tim: if Hawk had less time for him, there had to be

less for any others as well.

A vote on the Bricker Amendment was fast approaching, with

Hawk actually due to call on Potter later this week to explain the

administration’s opposition. “I’ll make myself scarce when you get to

the office,” Tim had assured him. Hawk, seeing the embarrassment

Tim was anticipating, had only laughed. “Skippy,” he’d replied,

squeezing the back of Tim’s neck, “don’t ever play poker.” More

seriously, he’d added: “Make yourself stick around when I arrive. It’s

good training.”

“For what?” Tim had asked.

“For the life you’ll be leading.”

A life together? He had, for a moment, allowed himself to believe

that that was what Hawk meant, though he soon realized that he

meant the life Tim would be living once he’d been sent, schooled in

doubleness, on his way.

All at once, Tommy McIntyre was in the galley, standing over Tim.

The gleam in his eye would have made anyone guess he’d gone

back to drinking—“the affliction of our people,” he often told Tim in

alluding to the problems of his past. But, along with a clipboard,

Tommy’s right hand held only an unopened bottle of 7Up.

“You’re needed,” he said. “Badly.”

“I’m sorry,” Tim replied, quickly gathering up the loose sheets of

transcript.

Tommy flung his arm over Tim’s shoulder. “There’s nothing to be

sorry about today, Mr. Laughlin.” The gleam in the eye, Tim could

see, bespoke an almost martial excitement. Tommy whistled while

the two of them marched back to Room 80, which bustled with

enterprise. Even Mrs. Potter was on hand, oblivious to the real

drama and driving Miss Cook crazy with a display of the floral hat

she’d bought to wear at Thursday’s congressional wives’ luncheon

for Mamie Eisenhower and Mrs. Nixon. Everyone else in the office

had already been made to inspect the hat; Senator Potter looked

relieved to see McIntyre and Laughlin reappear.

“Here’s the drill,” said Tommy to the senator and Tim, as if both

occupied the same rung on the staff. “The hearing with Stevens has

been postponed until Thursday. And our Democratic friends have

decided to come back to the committee.” Potter seemed as much

taken aback by this as Tim, who was now told why he’d been

fetched. “All right, my boy,” said Tommy. “Sit yourself down and

compose a nice noble statement for our friends in the press about

why we’ve just fired your colleague Mr. Jones.”

Tim turned quickly to Senator Potter, who looked down, abashed,

at his own artificially filled shoes. “I’m afraid,” the lawmaker said,

“that on Friday, without any authorization, Bob put out a statement in

my name. It was just like Cohn’s, all about how the treatment of

General Zwicker was justified by the gravity of the matter under

investigation. Apparently a couple of papers up in Maine, Bob’s

home state, went and ran it. I just can’t have that.”

“Nor,” said Tommy, “can the senator have Mr. Jones engaging in

impersonation at the hearings themselves. I’ve just shown him a

couple of transcripts from last fall.”

“I wish I’d known before,” said Potter, who still seemed more

perplexed than outraged.

“Well, Senator, better late than never. Don’t you agree, Timothy?”

Earlier, thought Tim, would surely have been better still. Why, he

wondered, had Tommy months ago shown him, but not Potter, the

transcripts that had Jones playing senator along with Cohn and

Schine?

“Bring the statement ’round to me at the Press Club an hour from

now,” instructed Tommy.

And why, Tim wondered, wasn’t Tommy himself handling this

crucial and clearly relished piece of business? Only, it seemed,

because he had too much to do. From the way he proceeded to

direct the senator back to his own desk, it appeared evident that

Thomas McIntyre—this Johnny-on-the-spot, this come-and-go fixer

—was now everybody’s boss, Potter’s included.

Fuller, too, had been called into the office this morning, no matter the

holiday. Dulles, just back from Berlin, had scheduled a conference

for congressional leaders. It was going on right now, and its

participants included South Dakota’s Senator Mundt, second to

McCarthy on the subcommittee, who in the course of a lobbying

session against the Bricker bill just the other day had demonstrated

no real interest in talking to Fuller about the legislation.

“He preferred to squawk about all the commotion Marilyn Monroe’s

been allowed to cause in front of our boys in Korea,” Fuller now

explained to Mary. “It seems the army is in hot water it doesn’t even

know about.”

“Diamonds should be this girl’s best friend,” said Mary, still cross

about having had to come in today.

“You’ve got a diamond.” Fuller pointed to the modest ring from

Paul Hildebrand, whose stone Mary now twisted around to the

hidden side of her finger.

“Is that or is it not an engagement ring?” asked Fuller.

Both realized that he had just fallen into mimicry of the Christmasweek interrogration they’d never talked about once it was over.

“The rumor is you passed their lie-detector test,” said Mary.

“Yes, and I haven’t yet had my raise.”

“How’s your French, Fuller?”

“Not as good as it would be if I’d had nuns teaching it to me in

New Orleans.”

“Do you know

recklessness?”

the

difference

between

sang-froid

and

“Yeah, that I grasp.”

“No, you don’t. Sang-froid is what you must have shown in front of

the machine. In here you’ve just been reckless.”

Fuller leaned back in his chair, daring her to elaborate.

“The ever-more-frequent personal phone calls. The louder

laughter whenever you take them. The ever-shorter hours. It all adds

up to a certain triumphalism. Dangerous, I’d say.”

“Is she not gone from our midst?” asked Fuller, palms upward.

“Yes, she is.” Another rumor had it that, before her disappearance

into the Operations office, Miss Lightfoot had tried and failed to get

herself transferred to McLeod’s domain. But the handing over of

Fuller had proved a poor audition for any job in the Miscellaneous M

Unit.

“Well, there you go,” said Fuller.

“Our real triumph is supposed to be over Senator Bricker,” said

Mary, as politely as she could. “I’m not sure that Mr. Morton’s

patience will last forever.”

“I guarantee you that I’ll fail upward. Even if every now and then I

have to hide behind your old New Look skirts.”

“So it’s mothering you want from me?” She was embarrassed

once she asked the question—it sounded as if she were fishing for

some surprise romantic answer—and she did her best to withdraw it.

“You still have a mother. Which is more than I can say for myself.”

“I have a father, too.”

“Are they happy together? Mother and father.”

“You’ve got to be kidding,” said Fuller.

“Why shouldn’t they be? Mine were.”

“The corridors at Park and Seventy-fourth are just as quiet, and

nearly as long, as the ones we have here. Mother was more or less

within shouting distance of my room, to the north. Father was around

the corner and far to the south.”

“A sister,” said Mary, trying for lightness. “That’s what you need.”

“I have two of them. A surfeit, Miss Johnson.”

“I’m making you angry. I should go.”

“You’re making me angry. I should go.”

“I shouldn’t pry.”

“As if that were the reason you anger me!” said Fuller, with a

laugh.

She suspected the real cause of his anger was his not wanting her

to be a mother or a sister. A part of him—the part that hated what he

was; even he couldn’t be without that—must also hate her, for the

way she got under his skin, ever so slightly, while remaining, finally,

irrelevant. He wasn’t angry because she knew his secrets; he was

angry because she couldn’t be the way out of them. Hadn’t he

looked at her, now and then, with a moment’s real interest? An

interest that quickly curdled into something like contempt—for

himself, for her, for his inability to follow through? She doubted she

would ever tell him her own secrets, not when some part of him

might take an oblique pleasure in betraying them.

He got up from his chair, a folder in hand, and began to exit the

office.

“Are you mad at me now?” she asked.

“Now and forever,” he replied, with a tenderness that made the

answer no less true.

Not a good day for the mimeograph machine to be on the fritz! But it

was, and so once Tim cut the stencil announcing Jones’s

termination, he had to trot it over to the office of Senator Goldwater,

another GOP freshman and World War II veteran, whose secretary

would be happy to run it off. Eager for some air, he took the outdoor

route, and on the sidewalk in front of the SOB came upon a cluster

of photographers. They were shouting like the crowd he

remembered outside McCarthy’s wedding.

“How about giving her a kiss, Joe?” “How about signing the cast?”

“I’ve already signed it,” said McCarthy, who grinned as he pointed

to the plaster enclosing one of Jean McCarthy’s shapely legs. She’d

broken it in a taxi accident in New York, the night before the Zwicker

hearing. Joe hadn’t been injured, but his wife had spent a couple of

nights by her lonesome in Flower Hill Hospital. McCarthy had just

gone to Union Station to meet the train bearing his injured bride from

New York. If ever there was a day when he could use a picture full of

pulchritude and warmth, this was it. Jean flashed her beauty-queen

smile and the cameras went in for tight shots that cut out the

plainclothes policemen whose sidearms bulged beneath their coats.

Amidst this Hollywood clamor, Tim suddenly locked eyes with

Robert Jones, who looked like a man just given his dream job, not

one who’d just been fired. Jones smiled broadly at the lensmen,

hoping to interest one of the cameras in himself. Tim made his way

into the building without their exchanging even a nod.

A half-hour later he was down on Fourteenth Street, entering the

Press Club with a hundred copies of the firing announcement under

his arm. The first one went to Tommy, eating peanuts at the bar, and

the second to May Craig, who sat beside him. Each already had

another press release—not as neatly typed as Tim’s—resting on the

bar beside their drinks. Tommy picked up that sheet, damp with

ginger ale, and gave it to Tim to read.

JONES DECLARES SENATE CANDIDACY

Robert L. Jones of Biddeford, Maine, former legislative assistant

to Sen. Charles Potter (R-Mich.), announced this afternoon that

he would challenge Maine senator Margaret Chase Smith in this

June’s Republican primary. Citing Sen. Smith’s “shameful

reluctance to face the Communist menace for what it is…”

“Running for office!” cried Tim. “Where will he get the money for

that?” He recalled the peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches that

Jones’s wife sent him to work with.

“Wait till you see what Joe McCarthy’s Texas supporters pony up!”

cawed Miss Craig. “Jones’ll be riding around Bangor in a red

Cadillac all his own! Even so, it’s only because the liar got canned.

So in the meantime,” she said, lifting her glass in a toast to McIntyre:

“To the man who chopped down that miserable little cherry tree!”

“I cannot tell a lie,” said Tommy. “’Twas I.” The gleam in his eye

thanked Miss Craig, but behind its excitement, much farther back,

Tim thought he could see the look of a man who knew he had

entered a dark and perilous grove.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

March 3, 1954

“Ah, seems Skippy fell into the coalpile in Grandma Gaffney’s

basement.”

Tim stood, puzzled, at the doorway to the Bureau of Congressional

Relations. His Ash Wednesday had begun so early, near the crack of

dawn at St. Peter’s on Second Street, that he’d forgotten the priest’s

black thumbprint on his forehead. Now he remembered.

“And to dust I shall return,” he told Fuller.

“Come inside,” said the older man, guiding him between the

desks. “Meet our ambassadresses to that foreign country where you

reside. I refer, of course, to Capitol Hill. Timothy Laughlin, this is Mrs.

Phillips, my right arm, and here is Miss Johnson, increasingly our left

wing.” Fuller completed the roster with a reference to their Kentucky

boss: “The colonel, I’m afraid, is nowhere to be found.”

“Well,” said Beverly Phillips, “I’ve got to go find him. Excuse me,

all.” On her way out, she smiled at Tim, whose October visit to the

office she did not recall.

He knew that even mild political joking was proscribed at State,

but Hawk had told him how the atmosphere in the office had become

much merrier since a woman named Miss Lightfoot had gotten

herself transferred to the Operations office. In fact, as he went to

take a phone call, Hawk told him to sit at the desk that was still

awaiting her replacement. Before disappearing, he took from Tim the

manila envelope that was the reason for this visit.

“It’s nice to see you again,” said Mary. “You’re the young man who

brought Mr. Fuller a book sometime back.”

Tim nodded, nervousness subsumed into pleasure over how this

memory of hers certified that he had a history with Hawkins, that he

was situated within his life. There was also something thrilling about

the term “Mr. Fuller.”

“Right,” said Tim. “Yesterday he left some papers at—on the Hill.”

Within the limits of the adjusted preposition, this was not a lie.

Fuller had forgotten the envelope in Tim’s apartment early last

evening, when he’d come around after some late appointments in

the House Office Building. Tim had meant to return the papers

tonight, but Fuller had called Senator Potter’s office an hour ago to

say he needed them now.

“Did you at least manage a Mardi Gras celebration last night?”

Mary pointed to the ashes on his forehead. “I should explain I’m from

New Orleans.”

“Oh, I know,” said Tim, who feared, as soon as he said it, that he’d

said too much. But Miss Johnson was smiling at him, and he felt

suffused with a sense of safety. He forgot about his desire to see

around the doorway and into Hawkins’ office, where he’d worried

about finding the Lodge biography, uncherished, lying atop a filing

cabinet or beside a dying plant.

“We’re usually a bit more busy here,” said Mary. The defeat of the

Bricker Amendment the other day—owed in part to the theatrics of

Lyndon Johnson, who’d brought Senator Kilgore in on a stretcher to

cast the deciding vote—had been a rare piece of good news. And it

had been followed by another, when Secretary Dulles unexpectedly

relieved Scott McLeod of his personnel duties, confining him

henceforth to security matters—an amazing, tacit declaration that the

two operations were not locked together in eternal emergency.

McCarthy had complained about McLeod’s diminution, but he had

too many other fish frying—everyone could see something big

coming—to say very much.

“It’s nice,” said Tim. “The calm, I mean. It’s anything but calm

where I am.”

“He’s right,” said Fuller, emerging from his office. “These days poor

Mr. Laughlin is even dodging bullets.”

“You weren’t near the shootings, were you?” asked Mary.

“No,” said Tim. “I’m on the Senate side. But I was at the hospital

this morning. My boss, Senator Potter, went to see Congressman

Bentley. They’re both from Michigan, and I came along for the ride.”

It had been an odd delegation that went to Walter Reed to see

Bentley, who’d been wounded by the Puerto Rican nationalists firing

from the House gallery. Tim had shared the car with Potter and his

one-armed driver and Tommy McIntyre, whose eyes had remained,

for the past ten days, continually ablaze. As near as Tim could tell,

he’d been asked along because Tommy liked having an audience for

all sorts of indiscreet chatter about the committee’s impending

showdown with the army. The confrontation would either break

McCarthy—as Tommy tended to believe one day—or render him

omnipotent, as he generally feared the next. Either way, for as long

as it went on, Tommy insisted, Potter would have to be manipulated

into doing the right, maybe even pivotal, thing. Robert Jones’s

campaign against Margaret Chase Smith—a small, distant theater of

a much bigger war—was already another arena for Tommy’s

attempts at subversion. Cash was being mailed, phone calls getting

made.

These were the sorts of things Tim told Hawkins on nights they

were together, eliciting laughter at naïve points in the telling.

“Has McCarthy still got his guards?” Mary asked Tim.

“Plainclothes, I think. You wouldn’t believe some of the mail

Senator Potter gets, just from sitting at the same table with

McCarthy. Which isn’t really fair,” he said, lowering his eyes toward

Miss Lightfoot’s old blotter, not truly confident of what he was saying.

“The Communists are the real issue, and—”

Fuller cut him off: “I wouldn’t open any packages that arrive, even

after all this is over.”

Tim, not sure if he was being teased or protected, said nothing,

while Mary Johnson pictured this boy opening a parcel with his small

scrubbed fingers and getting blown to bits. His destruction was, she

thought, going to occur in any case. She watched him watching

Fuller, his face like a paper target on a firing range.

“The rumor,” said Tim, “is that John Adams, the army’s lawyer, has

a diary that lists all the pressures McCarthy and Cohn applied to get

special treatment for David Schine. People also say McCarthy’s own

staff has been coming back to the office late at night to cook up

documents that will refute the diary.”

He spoke the last sentence as if refusing to believe it.

“My boss,” Tim continued, meaning McIntyre, “had me go over

there the other night and look around.” He blushed at the admission.

“I didn’t really see much through the frosted glass of the door.”

“All right, Mr. Laughlin.” Fuller rose from the edge of the desktop.

“We can’t waste the taxpayers’ money by keeping you here any

longer.” The dismissal was performed as a burlesque of impatience,

but Tim knew he was indeed meant to go, as if the two of them really

were Mr. Fuller and Mr. Laughlin, strangers. The touch of Hawkins’

hand to his shoulder, for the briefest moment as they reached the

door, did little to erase the impression.

“He’s a nice boy,” said Mary Johnson, once he was gone.

“Skippy?” asked Fuller. “Practically an angel.”

She resumed typing thank-you letters to opponents of the Bricker

Amendment.

“You don’t approve,” said Fuller, not quite ready to reenter his own

office.

“Of what?” asked Mary.

The ensuing silence convinced her he didn’t really mean to

discuss it. “Fuller,” she finally said—a last effort—“I’m not Miss

Lightfoot.”

“I’ll tell the brewer. He’ll be relieved.”

“But no,” said Mary. “I suppose I don’t approve. I doubt any woman

really does. And you can’t expect me to: I was still getting ashes on

my own head three years ago. But there are things I approve of

less.”

“Of our boy Skippy railing against the reds?”

“No. Of your breaking his heart.”

Fuller paused before saying, grandly, “I lack all such intention.”

“But not all such power.”

They were both still afraid of this conversation, and knowing that

Fuller could outlast her in any duel of silences, Mary got up to file a

handful of Bricker clippings from the European press.

“I suppose,” she said at last, “Tim was imagining how he’d like to

sit at that desk every day, be at your beck and call.” She nodded to

Miss Lightfoot’s empty station.

“He’d be excellent,” replied Fuller. “Works very hard, and has his

race’s gift of gab when he’s working on paper. The stammer

disappears then, just as it does when he’s drunk or—I’m sure—

angry, though that I’ve never seen. His handwriting is even neater

than Miss Lightfoot’s.”

“Oh, you’d see him angry if he worked at that desk.” Mary kept

filing as she spoke. “How do you think he’d feel taking your calls, and

hearing your conversations?”

Fuller said nothing, but still would not go back inside his office.

Mary knew that he wanted to make her work even harder at this,

force her to stick the knife farther in, get her—where McLeod had

failed—to make the needle jump.

“Wouldn’t sooner rather than later hurt him less?” she asked.

“Couldn’t you let him down easily? Give him up for Lent?”

Fuller pushed his hair above his forehead, making his ashless,

marble brow fully visible. He returned to his office, declaring curtly,

“I’m not Catholic, Miss Johnson.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

March 10, 1954

“You’re not coming in?” Senator Potter asked Tommy McIntyre at the

threshold to McCarthy’s inner office in the SOB.

“No,” said Tommy. “I’ll let Mr. Laughlin go in with you to make a

record.”

Surprised as he was by Tommy’s directive, Tim was soon even

more startled to feel the hard, friendly clap of Joe McCarthy’s hand

on his shoulder. The chairman didn’t seem to mind his presence,

taking him, perhaps, for an unpaid gopher, maybe even a page.

There was nothing to do but go in and, after taking charge of Potter’s

canes, sit down on a beat-up horsehair sofa, a few deferential feet

from the two senators.

“Now, Charlie,” said the chairman. “I hope you haven’t let Egghead

R. Murrow scare you off from all the work we’ve still got to do

together.” McCarthy ran his tongue over his top front teeth, and

smiled as he awaited a reply.

“I didn’t see the program,” said Potter.

Tim had watched it on Hawkins’ television. The half-hour episode

of See It Now had been unrelenting, even brutal, but Hawk had fallen

asleep before Murrow closed with an ominous quotation from Julius

Caesar.

“I gather the fellow doesn’t like me,” said the chairman, flashing

another smile and twirling his big horn-rimmed glasses above the

blotter. McCarthy was nervous, Tim realized, though only for

moments at a time. At the doorway, when he realized he’d hit Tim’s

shoulder far too hard, a look of tenderness had crossed his face and

then instantly vanished, been left for dead in the space of a second.

“Well,” said Potter, who sat in a chair beside the desk, “my old aide

Jones is throwing you plenty of bouquets up in Maine. ‘A great

American, a great patriot, doing a great job.’” He tried smiling, but

couldn’t manage it; there wasn’t enough mischief in him.

McCarthy, however, roared with laughter. “You never should have

let him go, Charlie! I’m not sure I could get even Roy to put it so

well.”

“Jones has also been saying some things, not so flattering, about

Margaret Smith,” added Potter, just above a mumble. “‘A nice lady

but for her left-wing ideas.’ Stuff like that.”

McCarthy shrugged, but Potter managed to warm to the topic of

Jones, even if it wasn’t the subject he’d come in with. “In his

speeches up there, Bob now talks about having been a ‘member of

the committee.’”

McCarthy again laughed things off. “There’s a go-getter! You

should have kept him and given him a raise!”

“He seems to be doing pretty well up there for a guy who’s no

longer pulling in the eighty-five hundred a year I used to pay him.”

“He hasn’t gotten a dime from me, Charlie.”

The smile was gone, and the “m” in “dime” came out as a

prolonged, electrical buzz, the way McCarthy would have sent it

through a radio microphone.

“Joe, I got a report last night from across the river.”

There was no need to explain further. Everyone had been hearing

rumors of the “Adams chronology,” a timeline prepared at the

Pentagon by the army counsel, detailing all the pressures exerted on

Schine’s behalf by McCarthy and Cohn.

“That prick Nixon wouldn’t be behind this, would he?” When it

came to exposing Communists, McCarthy liked to call the veep a

Johnny-leave-early, an ambitious young man who’d traded his onceraucous sound truck for the smooth sedan of Eisenhower

moderation, a vehicle he now thought he could ride to 1600

Pennsylvania Avenue.

“No, Joe,” continued Potter, as sternly as he could. “I got this

report from Wilson. He sent it to me himself.”

Surely, Tim thought, even Potter knew that the secretary of

defense had not dispatched this dynamite without a direct order from

the White House.

McCarthy tried to stare down his interlocutor, but Potter managed

to continue: “I’m disturbed by what I see in it.” He sounded like the

social worker he’d once been, regretfully forced to confront a relief

recipient with reports of misbehavior.

The senator from Wisconsin would have none of it: “Charlie, you

and I and the rest of the committee need to get back to finding

Communists. We should be getting Scott McLeod the rest of his job

back.” The “Ms” and the “Ns” were buzzing.

“Joe,” said Potter, delivering the line he must have rehearsed the

hardest, “Roy Cohn needs to be fired.”

Tim recalled the look on Cohn’s face when the committee counsel

had been on the phone screaming to John Adams about Dave

Schine’s having to “eat shit” in basic training. Had that remark gotten

typed into the “Adams chronology,” which Potter was nervously

rolling and unrolling in his hands? Tim had no more than a second to

ponder the question; the room’s sudden, inescapable drama was the

hurricane sweeping McCarthy’s face, stirring up the expression that

must have greeted General Zwicker a few minutes into his testimony.

“Senator Potter, believe it or not, I have some friends among the

press. Men like Winchell and George Sokolsky. Jews. Strong, rightthinking Jews who have a clear sense of what communism actually

is. They’re a minority among their own people, from whom they take

considerable abuse. They won’t be pleased to see you and your

friends go after Roy, who’s the youngest and the finest and the

strongest of this minority within a minority. Winchell has a

microphone, Senator. And Sokolsky has a thousand of Hearst’s

printing presses. Go after Roy Cohn and they’ll go after you,

Senator. In fact, I’ll make sure they do.”

Tim gripped both of Potter’s canes as if they might actually be

needed to beat McCarthy back. And yet he could hear that the

secretary sitting outside next to Tommy had not so much as

interrupted her typing in response to the boss’s bellow. She seemed

to realize that the fierce-sounding storm would actually be a quick

shower, not worth opening an umbrella for.

But McCarthy was not quite through. “Everybody’s money comes

from someplace, Senator. Even yours. Everybody’s people come

from someplace.” McCarthy indicated the outer office with a raise of

his chin. Was Tommy, Tim suddenly wondered, a former

Communist? He looked toward Potter for some confirmation of the

possibility. The senator did not respond. His courage, Tim realized,

was of a purely physical kind; when Potter looked into the boiling

face of his colleague, he appeared calmer than when he merely

glanced at the carpet.

Then the sun broke through. McCarthy relaxed his chin and

smiled. He shook his head. “Oh, hell, Charlie. I don’t give a damn

about Schine. He’s just a dumb, good-looking kid hoping to get laid

even more than he already does. I think he figures coming home

with a few scalps and a few headlines will accomplish whatever his

face and his old man’s money can’t.” Potter said nothing, not even

when one last cloud scudded across the chairman’s face. “But Roy

worries about him,” said McCarthy. “And I’m not going to get rid of

Roy.”

What, Tim wondered—trying to think like Tommy—did Cohn have

on McCarthy? It couldn’t just be, as McCarthy was now saying, that

“the Communists would take more comfort from Roy’s being fired

than they have from anything since Roosevelt recognized Russia

twenty years ago.” Nobody, thought Tim, not even Cohn, could be

that smart or indispensable. Everybody said Bob Kennedy would

have done just as well, been just as ferocious, if McCarthy had given

him the counsel’s job. Joe Kennedy had wanted it for his son, but

McCarthy, who’d even dated one of Kennedy’s daughters, had

feared being tainted with the old ambassador’s anti-Semitism,

something he couldn’t afford when the committee was investigating

so many Jews. And so the job had gone to Cohn.

“Have a drink, Charlie.”

The chairman, smiling again, now appeared to take Potter’s

silence for consent. It was settled; Roy would stay. And since the

bottles in the glass-doored bookcase were all the way across the

room, McCarthy reached a few easy inches for his briefcase,

unsnapping its metal tabs and taking out a fifth of Jim Beam. He

looked at Tim and laughed: “Are you old enough, son?” The “n”

didn’t buzz. McCarthy may already have had a liquid lunch, but he

was fully himself—playing to the room, not the radio. Tim smiled and

shook his head, declining as politely as he could, while wondering if

Tommy’s hatred of McCarthy might not spring from this alone, the

drinking, the loathing a reformed drunk has for an active one. No,

Tim decided, it wasn’t enough of an explanation, any more than

Cohn’s talent for fighting communism could explain McCarthy’s

determination to keep him around.

While the chairman, still smiling, took a drink by himself, the junior

senator from Michigan sat in silence for a last few seconds. But then

—perhaps only, Tim thought, because he feared Tommy’s

displeasure—Potter found his voice and seeded the clouds for

McCarthy’s next mood-storm: “We can get the army to fire John

Adams, too, Joe. We can make it look like a trade, with fault on both

sides. But unless Roy goes, this whole thing is going to have to be

investigated, maybe even in front of television cameras.”

McCarthy’s smile disappeared, but no thunder issued from behind

the new clouds on his visage. He seemed to be considering the

possibility those cameras would present him, how they might be a

risk worth taking if he could bend the hearings in his own direction,

change their subject once the lights came up and the lenses opened.

For the moment, however, it seemed he would err on the side of

caution. “You tell your new friend Wilson to keep that report to

himself from now on. We’ve got files of our own. We’ve got

typewriters, too. You tell him that, Charlie.”

The meeting was over, and by all appearances McCarthy, now on

his feet, was judging it a success. He reached into the office

refrigerator for three small wheels of Wisconsin cheese, one for Tim,

one for Potter, and one for Tommy McIntyre. All of them, the

chairman included, were soon exiting Room 428 and walking down

the corridor.

“Did you hear Flanders on the floor yesterday?” asked McCarthy.

“It was better than Murrow and all that Julius Caesar crap. Listen to

this,” he said, urging them to slow down while he pulled a newspaper

clipping from his pocket. McCarthy began quoting the Vermont

senator’s remarks: “‘In this battle of the agelong war’—I guess he

means against the Communists—‘what is the part played by the

junior senator from Wisconsin? He dons his war paint. He goes into

his war dance. He emits his war whoops. He goes forth to battle and

proudly returns with the scalp of a pink army dentist.’”

McCarthy’s laughter bounced off the walls of the SOB. At the

landing of the staircase, by the blue-and-white peppermint-stick

columns, he said goodbye to his visitors with a high, enthusiastic

wave that parted the halves of his unbuttoned jacket and revealed

the holstered pistol beneath.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

March 19, 1954

Whenever the radio played “Secret Love,” Tim believed for a few

moments that he had something in common with other Americans in

the throes of romance. The song had been riding the airwaves for

weeks, and it made him feel more normal than furtive, at least until

Doris Day reached the tune’s happy ending. Right now, late on a

Friday night when he was home alone working, the song seemed

more than he could stand, so he turned the dial and arrived, almost

immediately, at the sound of Joe McCarthy, speaking live from

Milwaukee about the Democratic party’s “twenty years of treason,

twenty years of betrayal.” Along with roars of approval from a hotel

banquet room, the microphones were picking up traces of a “Joe

Must Go!” chant from the opposing rally outside.

“Tonight,” McCarthy intoned, “I shall place before the greatest of all

juries, the American people, an indictment of twenty counts, picked

at random.”

The “m” buzzed through the mesh of the Philco.

McCarthy’s text and the protesting chant competed like the parallel

columns Tim was constructing on a legal pad. The crux of the

charges and countercharges already seemed pretty clear to the

public: the army, through its secretary Robert Stevens and counsel

John Adams, was claiming that all sorts of extravagant pressure had

been brought to bear by Senator McCarthy and Roy Cohn to make

Private David Schine’s life in the service a kind of holiday; on the

contrary, the senator and Cohn continued to assert that the army

was holding Schine “hostage”—preventing him from continuing to

assist the committee and threatening the young man with overseas

duty as a means of getting McCarthy to call off his probe into the

army’s tolerance of subversives at Fort Monmouth.

But if the crux was clear, a farrago of detail still swirled underneath

it. Tim looked at the columns he was composing for Tommy McIntyre

and Senator Potter, and wondered if he’d ever master their

contradictions:

ARMY

CLAIMSMcCARTHY MEMORANDA

(ADAMS

CHRONOLOGY)

Dec. 9: AdamsDec. 9: Confidential memo from Roy C to Sen. McC: “John

says

he Adams said today…that he had gotten specific

complained to information for us about an Air Force base where there

Sen. McC about were a large number of homosexuals. He said he would

Roy

C’s trade us that information if we would tell him what the

behavior

and next Army project was that we would investigate.”

threats

re

Schine.

an. 11: AdamsJan. 14: Memo from Roy C to Sen. McC: “John Adams has

visits

Cohn’s been in the office again…said this was the last chance for

office.

Claims me to arrange that law partnership in New York which he

Cohn

said wanted. One would think he was kidding, but his

Stevens

is persistence on this subject makes it clear he was serious.

“through”

as He said he had turned down a job in industry at $17,500

Army Sec’y if and needed a guarantee of $25,000 from a law firm.”

Schine

gets

sent overseas.

Sitting amidst piles of newspapers from the past two weeks, Tim

decided that the whole thing was impossible, like some assignment

from the nuns requiring you to cross-connect the Seven Deadly Sins

and the Four Cardinal Virtues. Was Cohn in love with Schine, or was

Adams in love with money? A week ago, Tommy McIntyre had had

Tim compose Senator Potter’s statement demanding that everybody

be put under oath to sort things out, and four days after that, meeting

in executive session, the committee had agreed—beginning in a few

weeks, in front of television cameras—to investigate itself.

Tim was growing accustomed to the circularity of all this, and to

the possibility that truth might be reachable only by riding on wheels

within wheels. Did McCarthy have something on Tommy McIntyre

(“Everybody’s people come from someplace”), and did Tommy also

have something on Potter? Something to account for his evergreater command of the senator’s office? Since the afternoon when

the three of them experienced McCarthy’s wrath and bonhomie,

Tommy had been so busy that Tim had had no chance to question

the older man about his political past. When McIntyre slowed down

enough for even a short snatch of conversation, he talked in riddles,

sententiae, and snippets of poetry.

Closing his eyes and breathing in the woody aroma of the

hardware store below, Tim tried to reestablish the concentration

required for his parallel columns, but was stopped by the sound of

footsteps on the stairs.

“You need a TV, Skippy.”

As soon as he came in, Fuller pointed to the radio, from which

McCarthy’s consonants continued to buzz. Slightly and thrillingly

drunk, he sat down on the edge of the desk and nodded toward an

especially ugly picture of Cohn in the Evening Star. “Without a TV,”

said Fuller, “you missed him on Meet the Press last Sunday. Trust

me: he’s not as sweet as he looks.”

He took off his suit jacket—all the warm, nearly spring night

required—and extracted from it a white card, which he handed to

Tim. “For your information,” he said. “Forwarded from Bar Harbor by

the paterfamilias.” The card invited the holder to the Maine state

Republican convention, set for the first and second of April.

“According to Father,” Fuller explained, “your Mr. Jones’s supporters

are urging that he be allowed to speak to the delegates along with

‘Magrit.’” He pronounced Mrs. Smith’s name with an old Mainer’s

accent.

Tim mentioned the latest that he’d heard in the office. “Jones is

now giving speeches that refer to himself as a ‘member of the

committee’! He used to just say he ‘sat in’ once in a while.”

Fuller flipped through the stack of newspapers on the desk until he

found Monday’s Washington Post. “Good boy,” he said. “Glad to see

you’re sometimes trading up from the Star, if only a small bit.” As

Hawkins looked for the correct page, Tim considered the praise he’d

just been given, which was really a piece of the tutelage that

sometimes confused him—as when Hawkins suggested he get

himself something better than the Van Heusen shirt he’d regarded as

a splurge to begin with.

“Here it is,” said Hawkins, pointing to a column by the Alsop

brothers, Joseph and Stewart. “‘The uncensored Adams chronology

is also understood to contain an indication that Cohn was receiving

substantial financial assistance from Schine, while he was

threatening to “wreck the army” in order to make his rich friend’s life

more comfortable.’”

“That’s not true,” said Tim. “It’s Adams who was interested in

money. I think.”

“Then what is the truth?” asked Fuller. “Where Cohn is

concerned.”

“Cohn is in love with Schine.” Tim was struck by the difficulty of

just saying it.

“Good,” said Hawkins. “Our little boy is growing up. But read on.”

He pointed to the column’s next sentence and handed the paper to

Tim, who read from it aloud:

“‘This financial dependence would help to explain Cohn’s feverish

desire to be of service to Schine. It does not explain the strength of

Cohn’s apparent hold on McCarthy.’”

Tim looked up, confused. “It’s true,” he said, “that McCarthy

doesn’t speak very well of Schine unless Cohn is around.”

“Think harder, Timothy.”

Tim put down the newspaper. “It gives me a headache. I’ve been

trying to figure out what McCarthy has on McIntyre and what

McIntyre has on Potter.” He walked over to Fuller and kissed him. “I

know what they could all have on me.”

Hawkins lightly kissed him back and let him sit on his lap. “I could

tell you what I’ve got on Joe Alsop,” he whispered, thinking of the

spring day last year when the elder, unmarried brother of the

columnist duo had first leered in his direction at the coat check of the

Metropolitan Club. The card that came around the following morning

had read more like a mash note than a luncheon invitation.

“You’re as bad as Tommy McIntyre,” said Tim, who believed Fuller

was kidding. “The only thing I want to have on you are these.” He

pointed to his lips, before kissing Hawk’s neck.

“Just remember, Skippy. The only thing that counts in all this is

what anybody has on McCarthy. Got that?” He gently deposited him

back in the desk chair, as if Tim, freshly instructed, could now return

to work.

For the past week and a half, Tim had wanted to tell Hawkins

about his ten minutes in McCarthy’s office. But after the night of the

Murrow program, when Hawkins seemed to keep him at arm’s

length, he had forced himself not to come around; he’d made himself

wait for Hawkins’ appearance here. He now wanted to say “I’m glad

you came over,” but it was too simple and direct, somehow even

more honest than the kisses he’d planted.

“I need to believe,” he explained instead, “that there’s still at least

a chance Adams and Stevens could be the worst ones in all this.

Maybe they’re not worthy of the soldiers they’re in charge of. Maybe

they were trying to stop the Fort Monmouth investigation—you know,

because they’re bureaucrats trying to protect themselves.”

He knew, as he spoke, that his dread of McCarthy must be

showing in his face, as it had started doing months ago in front of

Kenneth Woodforde. He further knew, as his eyes darted to the

parallel lists, that the “McCarthy Memoranda,” especially the

communications from Cohn, had the too-good-to-be-true

smoothness of forgery. We’ve got typewriters, too.

“Where have you been?” he asked Hawkins, willing to risk

humiliation if it would extract him from the conundrum of McCarthy.

“Out with the dullest crowd imaginable.”

“Was the brewer there?” He knew that Hawkins didn’t think much

of Mary Johnson’s fiancé; he also knew Hawk wasn’t about to

answer for the whole last ten days.

Fuller shook his head. “No brewer. Two former classmates. Plus

one wife, one girlfriend.”

“How about you?” asked Tim. “Did you go with a girl?”

“Of course,” said Fuller.

The girls never made Tim feel jealous; the ease with which they

were pressed into service—like handkerchiefs taken from a drawer—

only added to Hawkins’ allure.

“Did you know Schine?” The question had only now occurred to

Tim. “When you were at Harvard?”

“Ever so slightly. We overlapped—so not to speak—for a year or

two. He would have fit right in with tonight’s crowd.”

“He’s not your type, right?” said Tim, hoping his teasing would

provoke a measure of the same.

“Nor is Cohn his. Private Schine likes the ladies. Your buddy Roy

is going to wear out his lawyer’s larynx barking up that particular

tree.”

“Yeah,” said Tim, amorous once more. He got up from the desk in

search of a kiss. “You like them shorter, skinnier. With a few freckles.

A stammer.” He buried his head against Hawkins’ shoulder.

“Easy, Timmy, it’s a school night.”

He felt immediate despair: if Hawk really wanted to go to bed with

him, there would be, he knew, no consideration less important than

the clock.

“I hate working Saturdays,” he managed to complain. “It’s only

those ancient bachelors like Senator Russell who enjoy them. They

get so lonely in their hotel rooms they wish everyone would come in

on Sundays.” He paused, hoping that Hawk would reconsider, would

sigh forbearingly, then laugh, then throw him down on the blue

bedspread. But nothing. “Don’t you have to work tomorrow, too?”

Hawkins shook his head. “Middle rank has its privileges.” Since his

triumph over McLeod, he’d come in fewer Saturday mornings than

he’d missed. “In my case, the night is young.”

“Take me out into it.” Tim knew his smile must look as desperate

as any flashed by a politician behind in the polls. “Make me the

drunk version of your type. One spiked dulce de leche and the

spectacles come flying off. The stammer disappears.” Be here with

me at seven in the morning. Force me to stay in bed another hour.

Keep me from going to Mass and being the only Catechumen there,

the one who sits in the back no longer daring to take Communion.

Fuller smiled but didn’t move. After a long moment, he at last said:

“All those things—skinny boy, freckles, specs, stammer—they’re

certainly a part of my type.”

Tim warmed with encouragement. “I can supply the rest of it, too.”

Hawk tugged on his ear. “Let’s go find the rest of it.”

Tim looked around, comically, to his left and then right and then

behind, as if trying to spot the rest of himself.

“Let’s go out and find it together,” Hawkins said, his voice lower

than before. He put his arm over Tim’s shoulder. “Maybe the two of

us can become the three of us.”

Tim felt the back of his neck flush.

Hawkins tried for a lighter touch. “You know,” he joked. “Like Joe

and Roy and Dave. What do you say?”

Tim crossed the room and stood at the sink. “No, Mr. Fuller.” They

were the words he’d said at this same spot five months ago, but this

time there was no chance of their being a sin, mortal or venial; they

contained no lie.

What he said next might have been a line from a movie, except for

the excruciating effort it took to summon the words: “Get out and

don’t come back.”

Fuller straightened the papers he’d displaced in sitting down on

the desk. Ten seconds later, the door had closed and Tim could hear

the ex–track star’s light, heedless descent of the stairs.

Out on the street, Fuller walked west, wondering where he could

catch a cab on the deserted Hill. He passed a telephone booth and

thought of calling Mary Johnson, who probably was out with the

brewer, which was too bad, because he remained curious about

something. He wanted to ask her what credit one got for giving

something up when Lent was halfway through. Did you get more if

the renunciation was meant to be for good, to go beyond Easter? I

did what you told me to, he wanted to say. He’d devised the

stratagem himself, but had carried it out for the reason she’d

suggested. Wouldn’t sooner rather than later hurt him less?

Now that he’d done his good deed, he was—what, precisely?

Angry? Sad? He dismissed the questions and kept walking, not in

the direction of a bar, but toward home, where tonight, for once, he’d

intended going all along.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

April 7, 1954

“Well,” said Tommy McIntyre, “there’s Jeannie, but where’s Joe?”

McCarthy’s young wife sat across the dining room of the Carroll

Arms, lunching with George Sokolsky, the Hearst columnist who’d

helped script her husband’s televised rebuttal of Murrow last night.

The senator’s reply had come late and—even Joe’s friends thought

—fallen rather flat, consisting largely of references to Murrow’s leftwing friends from the 1930s, most of them respectable not only now

but then.

Tommy took scornful note of the wine bottle between Sokolsky and

Jean McCarthy. “They’ll probably keep at it straight until they pour

themselves into a cab for dinner at the Colony.”

Tim looked at Mrs. McCarthy, pretty as a Miss America, and

wondered why she hadn’t ended up with a man who looked like

Hawkins Fuller instead of someone fifteen years older who was

running to blotches and fat. The answer had to lie in the way she lit

up, as if for a camera, each time she caught a senator or reporter, or

even a staffer as junior as himself, turning an eye in her direction.

Joe McCarthy was the source from which all that derived.

Sokolsky’s speech had contained one peculiar patch, a piece of

hit-and-run rhetoric in which McCarthy offered up the possibility that

everyone hearing his voice might soon die, and the nation itself be

destroyed, because of unnamed traitors who had slowed down

production of the U.S. hydrogen bomb. And now, as Tim looked into

his water glass, he felt himself wishing for the prophecy’s fulfillment

—a manmade Second Coming, all doom and no redemption.

Weeks without Hawkins had left him with circles under the eyes

and even thinner. He now took a cigarette whenever Tommy offered

an open pack, and after work crawled into the bed he’d left unmade

that morning. Good Friday was nine days away and he would not be

heading home to New York: longing for Hawkins had made

Thanksgiving and Christmas hard enough; consciousness of

banishment would be unbearable in Grandma Gaffney’s parlor.

Once he failed to make his Easter duty at the Communion rail, his

estrangement from the Body of Christ would become official and

another mortal sin upon his soul. Several times during the last few

weeks he had come close to entering the confessional, in search not

of absolution but some temporary solace. Yet what could he possibly

say in the darkened booth? Bless me, Father, for I have been unable

to sin; he won’t see me.

Should he have gone looking for the third man, then gone to bed

with him and Hawk? Should he send Hawk a funny, forgivenessseeking note that made a joke about the Holy Trinity? Or just offer an

abject below-stairs apology, as even his implacable grandmother

must once or twice have done to the snotty boarding-school girls,

lest she lose the situation on which her life depended?

Would sleeping with two men have been doubly sinful, or just

“immature”—as men like himself were judged to be by even

sympathetic observers? Would it have been, perhaps, no worse than

joining the jerkoff circles of other boys on the rooftop over Ninth

Avenue, or by the lake up near Ellenville during one of the family’s

rare summer weeks outside the city? Maybe. But if he’d not been

able to make himself enter those harmless groupings in the light of

day, how could he now expect to lie in the dark while, with one hand,

Hawk caressed him and, with the other, pleasured someone else?

Tommy hit his water glass with a knife. “Snap to it, Mr. Laughlin.

There’s work to be done.”

Three other Senate aides—assistants to Mundt and Dworshak and

McClellan—were at the table. All had extracted pads from

briefcases, ready to focus on the ground rules for what people were

already calling the Army–McCarthy hearings. Mr. O’Brien and Mr.

Matthews, Mundt’s man and McClellan’s, laughed when each saw

the other click open a PaperMate pen whose barrel bore the

signature of Minority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson. “He must give out

five hundred of those a day,” said O’Brien.

Tommy began making energetic notes. “All right, gentlemen,” he

said, “let’s remember the decision from the executive session:

nothing procedural about these hearings will create a precedent for

any other set.”

“That’s fine with my man,” said O’Brien, whose boss, the

unprepossessing Senator Mundt, would chair the sessions. “He sure

isn’t going to want to do this again.”

Sandor Klein, assistant to Senator Dworshak, nervously sketched

a little chart. His own boss’s position was the most delicate of any of

the panel’s senators, McCarthy having handpicked the Idaho

Republican to replace him as a voting member of the committee.

McCarthy would still be allowed to cross-examine witnesses—when

he wasn’t being questioned himself. “Christ,” said Klein, “how could

this create a precedent? Joe is going to be plaintiff, prosecutor, and

defendant—not to mention his own mouthpiece, when Cohn is

otherwise occupied.”

Matthews recalled the laughing plea that McCarthy had made to

Senator McClellan, the committee’s former chairman, when the

majority shifted to the Republicans in ’52: “‘But, Jack, you’ve got to

stay on as ranking Democrat. Who the hell else is going to keep an

eye on me?’”

Klein fretted: “I don’t know how we’re going to have enough people

to handle the mail this is going to generate.”

Tommy, beginning to relax a bit, smiled. “We’re short one staffer

ourselves. I refer of course to Mr. Jones.” Tommy had helped to

arrange a rude reception for Mrs. Smith’s challenger at the state

convention in Bangor; he’d also, he now informed the table,

managed to spread across Maine the story that Jones had run over

his own dog and taken its still-breathing carcass to the town dump.

This produced laughter all around, except from Tim, who felt ever

more gray and stateless in a world of black and white. McCarthyite

tactics were all right, it seemed, so long as they were applied against

McCarthy.

Maybe in his despair (another mortal sin), he was taking too

seriously what was just the ordinary stuff of politics. After all, Mr.

O’Brien, aide to the McCarthy-supporting Mundt, was laughing

louder than anyone.

A small commotion across the room caught everybody’s attention.

Two tables away from Jean McCarthy, Mrs. Watt, the committee’s

chief clerk and supposedly a fan of Joe’s, was sharply dismissing

someone who’d set down a piece of paper and a pen beside her

buttered roll.

“Ruthie looks miffed,” said Matthews.

“Timothy, go see what that’s all about. Discreetly.”

Obeying McIntyre, Tim rose from the table and got himself as

close as he could to Mrs. Watt by pretending to straighten his tie in

front of a mirror.

“I won’t sign it!” she repeated, loud enough for half the dining room

to hear. Unnoticed in the hubbub, Tim moved even nearer to her

table, then returned to his own.

“It’s a loyalty pledge,” he listlessly reported, just as his sandwich

arrived. “A messenger gave it to her waiter. The committee staff are

being asked to guarantee their support for Senator McCarthy and Mr.

Cohn.”

“By whom?” asked Matthews.

“I couldn’t tell,” answered Tim.

“Well, what’s it supposed to accomplish?” Matthews inquired.

“It’s not what it will accomplish,” said Tommy McIntyre, delighted.

“It’s what it signifies. A touch of desperation, I’d say. The two of them

are soldering themselves a little closer together. Nice work, Timothy.

We ought to reward you with another pair of those.” He pointed to

Tim’s cuff links.

“FH,” said Klein, noticing the initials but reading from the right wrist

to the left. “What does that stand for?”

“Fordham History,” said Tim, after taking a sip of water. “It’s the

department I majored in at school.”

He could see that Tommy didn’t believe the explanation. Fine, he

thought. Now you’ve got something on me.

“With any luck,” said O’Brien, “you can win a pair of links off Joe.”

He pointed with awe to Oklahoma’s Senator Kerr, who’d just entered

the dining room. The richest man in the upper body was also its best

card player, never going anywhere with less than five thousand in his

pocket. Once or twice at the poker table he’d taken almost that much

off his colleague from Wisconsin.

Tim could see Jean McCarthy coming back from the powder room,

waving to the waiter who’d done his duty with the loyalty letter,

whatever its ultimate lack of success. He could also now see

Senator Hunt waving a swollen right hand—there were rumors of

kidney problems—to greet an elderly lady near the maître d’s stand;

she congratulated him on having the other day announced that he

would run for another term after all.

Mr. Matthews, getting back to business with the others, elaborated

upon the “musical chairs” rule that had been adopted to

accommodate the cameramen who’d be televising the hearings:

each day senators and lawyers around the giant table would move

one seat to their right, so that the same players wouldn’t fill the

screen day after day.

“Well,” said Senator Mundt’s aide, “this will give Joe a bigger

microphone than he’s ever had before.”

“And you think that’ll be good for him?” snapped Tommy.

“McIntyre,” asked Matthews, “where is your man in all of this?”

“I believe,” said Tommy, “that he’d actually like to get at the truth.

Poor bastard.”

Tim suspected this was true, that he and Senator Potter were in

the same forlorn position, hoping the army’s executives might be

lying a little more than McCarthy and Cohn. And if they weren’t?

Would that invalidate everything else the committee had tried to

accomplish? Would it leave Father Beane and his exemplary kind

any safer from the Communists’ universal advance?

He closed his eyes and again, almost peacefully, imagined a

Russian H-bomb flying toward Washington.

None of it mattered. He now knew that he himself would tell any

lie, deny even Christ, for one more touch of Hawkins’ hand. These

past few weeks, in his own bed several blocks from here, he had

found himself unable even to masturbate. He would try, thinking of all

the two of them had done, of the smell of Hawk’s hair and neck and

armpit, where his own tongue had long since gotten used to going.

He would manage to arouse himself, until some tender memory—

There. You’re healed—would invade his loins and he would climax, if

at all, with a strange lack of sensation, like the absence of grace.

Are you my brave boy? No, I am not. I need you to rescue and

redeem me.

“So Charlie Potter wants the truth,” said Matthews. “Well, maybe

he’ll get it for us.”

“Oh,” replied Tommy to the rest of the table, “he’s going to get us

much more than that.”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

April 30, 1954

“So, yesterday,” asked Cecil Holland, “who was calling who queer?”

“Whom,” said Miss McGrory in her softest voice. The Evening Star

had freed her from the book page to write colorful sidebars for

Holland’s regular reports on the week-old Army–McCarthy hearings,

and the two of them were waiting for the Friday afternoon session to

start, recalling the previous day’s exchange between McCarthy and

Joseph Welch, the Boston lawyer for Secretary Stevens and John

Adams. The winsome attorney had sarcastically wondered if

McCarthy thought a “pixie” was responsible for cropping a

photograph whose alteration McCarthy claimed to know nothing

about. Pressed to define “pixie,” a creature McCarthy suggested

Welch “might be an expert on,” the lawyer explained that a pixie “is a

close relative to a ‘fairy.’ Shall I proceed, sir? Have I enlightened

you?”

The press had given the round to Welch. Even though propriety

kept them from noting his apparent, if oblique, reference to rumors of

McCarthy’s homosexuality, they regarded the attorney’s innuendo as

a fine achievement, whereas McCarthy’s suggestion of the same

about Welch was considered a smear. All of it, thought Tim—who

was trying to take pleasure in the greetings he’d just gotten from

Miss McGrory and Mr. Holland—felt much the same as Robert

Jones’s dead dog. Any rules of engagement, let alone any standards

of personal conduct, were now laughably antique. Even the ferocious

Roy Cohn, the lights in his glass house turned up high, had looked

nervous during yesterday’s duel between McCarthy and Welch.

Cohn looked a bit nervous now, too, waiting as they all were for

the testimony of Private Schine. Secretary Stevens had been on the

stand almost the whole week, and he’d be back after the break he

was being granted today for exhaustion. In the meantime, soon, they

would be hearing from the young man who, in immediate terms, this

was all about: G. David Schine, either the object of Roy Cohn’s

obsession, or the “hostage” of an army fearing Cohn’s scrutiny.

The atmosphere in the Caucus Room was eerie, that of an

interminable midnight Mass. The bemedaled army brass that Welch

each day brought to the front row of spectators’ seats sat, brave and

solid, like a mute choir in coats of different colors. To keep glare off

the TV cameras, the room’s thick curtains remained closed, a purple

backdrop for the cigarette smoke rising up the chamber’s great

Corinthian columns. Against the front wall a large wooden bench

with a high back panel made the committee table look even more

like an altar, albeit one whose feet were beset with snakes from

some netherworld: the television cables on the carpet.

Once the principals had reassembled, Senator Mundt gaveled the

proceedings to order. He complimented the audience on its good

behavior, the way he did at the beginning of every session, as if

fearing a turn to the riotous at any moment. Tim brought a stack of

papers to Senator Potter’s place at the enormous table, atop which

he could actually hear the slosh of McCarthy’s bourbon bottle when

somebody moved his briefcase. Although everyone continued to

remark on television’s influence over the proceedings, Tim had been

more reminded of his old radio programs like Mr. Keen. Listening to

the different speakers while his eyes concentrated on the notepads

and transcript in his lap, he found himself following the alternations

by changes in voice. He had learned to distinguish the loud

Tennessee drawl of Ray Jenkins, the temporary counsel hired to

question both sides, from the thick Arkansas locutions of Senator

McClellan, whose bad mood never seemed to lift. The nasal,

countrified tones of Mr. Welch, a sharpie masquerading as an

innocent, actually sounded a lot like Fred Allen.

Tim now exchanged a nod with Kenneth Woodforde in the press

section, though they’d never had another conversation since the

atrocities hearings (long since forgotten and still lacking a final

report) back in December.

Before Schine took the oath, the senators spent yet another

several minutes on the “doctored” version of a picture taken during

Secretary Stevens’ visit to Fort Dix last fall, when cooperation still

reigned between the army and the committee. This particular print

contained only Stevens and Schine, as opposed to the original,

which had included a third man. When first contested three days

ago, the photo had provoked the pounding of desks and McCarthy’s

barked order that handsome Senator Symington be quiet. This

afternoon, however, the committee’s disagreements seemed like a

weary seminar in art appreciation, full of ineffable and arcane

questions about the meaning of the picture and its provenance. As

Tim saw it, Stevens was looking, affably, at Schine—and no one else

—in both the larger and cropped versions, although the photograph

was so innocuous that either way it made no difference. On this

matter, surely, Roy Cohn was right. In fact, given that McCarthy and

Cohn’s “eleven memoranda” were looking more suspicious by the

day, shrinking the picture seemed about the least underhanded thing

the senator’s office had recently done in this case. But the press kept

awarding the army points over what Welch continued to call the

“shamefully cut-down” photograph, making it sound like a farm boy

whose arm had been sliced off by some shoddy piece of machinery.

At last Private G. David Schine raised his hand and swore to tell

the truth. Blond, Jewish, and beautiful in a lazy way, he appeared to

Tim like the corrupt young emperor from a biblical movie. When

asked about the manner in which he’d delivered the vexing

photograph, once it had been requested for the investigation, he said

he’d brought it to George Anastos, a committee staffer, at the Colony

restaurant:

MR. JENKINS: Do you remember what you ate there that night?

PVT. SCHINE: I had a butterscotch sundae.

The soldier was soon pouting and talking back to the committee:

“Since I have been in the army, sir, I have been subjected to many

pressures. I have been called upon to do many things.” And yet,

there were hints of enjoyment in his own performance. Tim had this

morning heard Mrs. Watt complain to another secretary about

Schine’s asking if he could expense the calls he’d made alerting

friends in California to the exact time of his appearance on television.

Would the hotel-chain heir, unpaid during his days on the committee

staff, take the $6-per-day witness fee? Tim wondered, as he watched

Cohn study the disputed picture and then Schine himself. Was this

the look of love? Or did the chief counsel’s intense expression

indicate only an attempt, telepathic and fervent, to will Schine into a

higher articulacy than the private could accomplish on his own?

“I have no questions,” said Senator Potter, once his turn came

around. A moment later, when it came again, he declared, “I have no

further questions.” Maybe he was hopeless, thought Tim, who’d

lately been hearing Tommy McIntyre refer to the senator as “our

pottered plant.” Even so, Tim could see no real look of displeasure

on Tommy’s face as their boss for a third time let the microphone

pass. Perhaps McIntyre didn’t want his plant, so carefully tended, to

bloom too soon?

An hour would expire before McCarthy exploded with a defense of

Schine that he’d kept bottled up during all the inquiries into the

private’s whereabouts, weekend passes, and butterscotch sundaes.

His colleagues’ questions were “ridiculous,” the senator claimed;

abusive even, if one considered how Stevens was being pampered

with a day off. The photographers, as always, sprang into action at

the first sign of Joe’s agitation, and this time one of them even

managed to knock over McClellan’s water glass, earning a rebuke

from Senator Jackson. Before long, Welch was suggesting it might

be time for them all to adjourn—and for Schine to get himself a

lawyer. With an excess of either nerve or stupidity—Schine often

looked so impassive it was difficult to tell—the private asked the

chairman: “Since I am in the army, sir, and since Mr. Welch is the

counselor for the army, sir, doesn’t that automatically make him one

of my counselors?”

“I believe not,” Senator Mundt replied.

Cohn, too, shook his head no, while allowing his gaze to linger on

the handsome soldier. In the two of them Tim saw a crude Herblock

cartoon of himself and Hawkins Fuller, though he felt sure nothing

had ever been consummated between the lawyer and the private.

And he wondered: Would he himself have been better off loving

Hawkins without any physical return? Without the illusions of

emotional requitement he sometimes allowed sex to impose? One

heard that Schine actually liked Cohn; could anyone say that

Hawkins Fuller liked Timothy Laughlin?

Tim would never learn whether he was ready to face this last

question, because at the moment he posed it to himself, he heard

Hawkins whisper: “I’ve decided to forgive you, Skippy.”

Dumbstruck, he turned around to look. Hawk’s hand was on his

shoulder—a mirage brought forth by his own weeks of thirst and

suffering?

“Go tell them you’re sick and have to leave right now. Don’t wait

for the gavel. Meet me in ten minutes on the southwest corner.”

He made it there in eight, after lying to Tommy McIntyre, racing

back to Potter’s office in the Capitol, shutting his desk lamp, and,

once he saw Hawkins’ big green Buick waiting for him outside the

SOB, wondering if he’d left any lights burning at home. He realized

now that they were going away. To Charlottesville, for the weekend,

Hawk explained.

He sat in silence all the way over the Memorial Bridge and through

the red-bricked garden apartments of Arlington, offering no argument

or banter, nothing that began “You’re forgiving me?” He said nothing

at all, as if, unlike the doubtful Private Schine, he really were a

hostage, one who at any moment might be thrown out upon the open

road. Hawkins, too, all the way to Manassas with the radio off, said

nothing.

But no, this could only be good, could only be another miracle on

the order of Hawkins’ telephone call to the Star last September.

“A hundred minutes ago,” Tim finally said, as they passed the

battlefield cemetery, “I’d have been wishing I were lying there.”

“Having to look at Karl Mundt will do that, I’m sure,” said Hawkins,

never taking his eyes from the road.

Tim struggled to keep from fishing, from begging for reassurance:

You know what I meant.

“A hundred years ago,” said Hawkins, “you would have been here,

freshly dead. While your Grandma Gaffney was out rioting against

the draft that stole you for a drummer boy.”

“Before I died I would have had a case on you, in your fancy

uniform at the head of a Zouave regiment.”

“No, you wouldn’t have. You’d never have met me. I’d have bought

my way out of conscription for three hundred dollars, so that I could

still be eating oysters at Delmonico’s while you were cracking your

poor Irish teeth on hardtack.”

Tim smiled and rested his head against the backseat. A minute

later he fell asleep, exhausted with relief as they continued riding

westward. He slept until the beginning of a bright orange sunset

made itself felt through his closed eyelids and woke him to the sight

of a hundred pink flowering trees, the smell of their blossoms rushing

through the car’s open windows like the surge of violins on one of his

sister’s Puccini records. He burst into sobs.

“I can’t—” said Hawkins.

“I know,” said Tim, recovering as quickly as he could. “I know. You

can’t have this.”

In fact Fuller was thinking: No, what I can’t do is even tell you why

I came across town—how it was the television picture I saw of you

emptying Potter’s ashtray, looking gaunt and desperate, the circles

under your eyes as dark as the ones under McCarthy’s. And

because of the glimpse I caught of that cold-eyed prick Bob

Kennedy, no different from the way he was at Harvard a half dozen

years ago, glancing at you while you fussed over the ashtray,

annoyed that this hardworking little fairy was cluttering up a piece of

history in the making.

That was what he wanted to say and couldn’t. But, yes, he did

want Tim to stop crying now, and he was wishing he’d resisted the

impulse to drive across town and get him. He was wishing he were

right now back with the uncomplicated cracker kid he’d had the other

night, a rawboned boy who no more considered it sick to mess

around with another man than it might be to eat a bowl of ice cream

between two helpings of cotton candy.

He wished he weren’t putting them both through this.

And yet, for all that, he wanted to hear Tim’s chatter, wanted the

intermittent pleasure of protecting him; and wanted to fuck him on

the floor of the car once it was dark enough to pull over into the

woods.

They stopped to buy him a toothbrush and underwear and a

second shirt, and then had dinner on King Street before browsing the

used bookstore a block away and walking along the colonnade of

rooms on the university lawn, where they looked out of place with

their un-crewcut hair and made jokes about the white-bucked college

boys, even jokes about taking one of them back to the hotel.

When they checked into their room, Tim’s tears came again, from

some borderless place between anguish and joy, where he was

struggling to believe that the two of them had actually been visible

together, out in public, in a restaurant and a store. “Do you know

what? It’s the same question!” he cried, laughing and shaking. “The

same question! The one I was asking myself when you wouldn’t

come back to me and the one I’ve been asking myself all night, when

you’ve made me happier than I’ve ever been! What did I do to

deserve this? The same question!”

During all the coltish kisses with which he always sought Hawkins’

attentions, he had never asked for a specific pleasure or gratification,

taking care always to follow Hawk’s direction, maximizing his

beloved’s satisfaction and thus, he thought, his own. But tonight,

physically spent before he had opened a single shirt button, he

walked over to the wall, shut the light switch, and in the darkness,

well above a whisper, said, “Hit me.”

Hawkins looked at him for several seconds. And then, not for

excitement, and not from vexation, but only because he thought he

understood and had been asked for a tenderness he could actually

express, he raised his open hand and struck Tim once across the

face.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

May 12, 1954

“He sounds a little like Mr. Peepers,” said Beverly Phillips. “You

know, whatsisname, Wally Cox.”

Listening to John Adams’ clipped, nasal tones on a television set

in the State Department cafeteria, Hawkins Fuller and Mary Johnson

couldn’t disagree with her. The two of them and Beverly were having

a mid-afternoon cup of coffee amidst a few dozen other employees

who were generally delighted by the embarrassment the hearings

had caused State’s senatorial nemesis, Joe McCarthy.

The committee’s special counsel, Ray Jenkins, had become even

more theatrical than Welch, thought Mary. He clearly relished what

Senator Mundt called his “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde role” of conducting

both the direct and cross-examinations of whoever might be in the

witness chair. This afternoon it was Adams, the army counsel, who

seemed exasperated by almost everything—especially, Mary

thought, the way Jenkins kept calling Schine “this boy.” Instead of

helping to establish what Adams suggestively called Cohn’s

“extreme interest” in the private, its effect was to make Schine seem

just another all-American draftee who couldn’t possibly have stirred

up such a fuss.

Adams was now trying to rebut Cohn’s charge that back in

December he had offered to trade some juicy leads about

homosexual activity on several navy and air force bases—surely a

good subject for the McCarthy committee to investigate—in

exchange for Cohn’s pledge to drop the Fort Monmouth inquiry.

“I never made such an offer,” Adams now declared. “I never would

make such an offer. I never had such information to offer.”

Beverly and Mary avoided each other’s glance. Fuller added

another teaspoon of sugar to his coffee.

What, Adams said, he had mentioned to Cohn—without ever

suggesting a “trade”—was an ongoing investigation of

homosexuality, by Secretary Stevens’ office, at a single army base,

in the South. That was all.

MR. JENKINS: It wasn’t in Tennessee, Mr. Adams, was it?

MR. ADAMS: No, sir; it wasn’t.

SENATOR McCLELLAN: A point of order. Let’s exclude Arkansas.

MR. ADAMS: I can do that, sir.

SENATOR MUNDT: The Chair would like to raise a point of order

in behalf of South Dakota, which might also be included in the

South.

MR. ADAMS: I can include all of the states of the members of this

committee.

The camera panned the room to show the loud, prolonged laughter

that was filling it. Roy Cohn’s participation in the merriment, visible

for a second or two, was hearty enough that viewers might

reasonably think he would now, at this moment of relaxed male

fellowship, extend his hand across the table and ask Adams to bury

the hatchet.

“That,” said Fuller, “would be a hearing worth hearing. Shining a

light on Camp Pink Palmetto. I’d say this current show lacks the

really dire elements of the committee’s best work.” He went on to tell

the tale of how a witness in one of McCarthy’s investigations,

accidentally subpoenaed for 10:30 p.m. instead of a.m.—a clerk’s

typo—had shown up anyway, trembling before the night watchman.

Mary guessed he’d gotten this story from Tim. She and Fuller

spoke of him infrequently, but enough for her to be aware of the

Lenten attempt at renunciation and how temporary it had proved.

She was surprised that the boy remained in the picture amidst the

comings and goings of so many others, attributing his survival to

what must be his own desperate persistence.

Adams now spoke of a visit he’d made to the McCarthys’

apartment in mid-January, when things had begun to fray badly

between the army and the committee. Jeannie McCarthy had sat at

some distance from the two men and claimed to be writing thank-you

cards; in fact, Adams felt sure she’d been taking notes on his

conversation with her husband. The army lawyer was proud of how,

during months of “being pounded and pounded and hounded and

hounded about where Schine was going,” he’d had the temerity to

tell Cohn that the private, like ninety percent of all draftees, would

likely be spending some time overseas.

As Adams went on about this and other matters, Mary noticed in

the witness a hint of the same petulance she’d observed in Private

Schine himself. “I never asked Dave Schine for a stick of gum,”

declared Adams, when questioned about the hotel heir’s largesse

with tickets to the theater and the fights; “I am not afraid of Mr.

Cohn,” he further insisted.

“I would be very afraid of Mr. Cohn,” said Beverly.

The camera looked into the farthest reaches of the audience,

catching Perle Mesta in its field of vision; the other day her spot had

been filled by Mrs. Longworth in a wide-brimmed hat.

“That’s Jack Kennedy’s wife, isn’t it?” asked Beverly. Mary said

she wasn’t certain.

“I’m sure it is,” said Beverly, who noted the newlywed’s cute

gamine hairdo. “He’s not on the committee, is he?”

“No,” said Fuller, taking a good look at the young senatorial bride.

“She’s here to watch her brother-in-law. No one in the family seems

able to afford a comb.”

Jenkins’ assistant began questioning Adams about “Senator

Potter’s persistent concern” over the army counsel’s leaks of

information to members of the press, particularly Joe Alsop.

“I thought Potter was supposed to be a cipher,” said Mary, pointing

to his image at the right of the screen.

“He’s been getting some training,” said Fuller. “Or perhaps I should

say some marching orders.”

“You seem well informed about what goes on in his office,” she

ventured.

Beverly interrupted their banter. “You’re forgetting about your own

office.” She pointed to her watch, reminding them that Mr. Morton

had called a staff meeting for four o’clock. “Maybe you want that new

girl putting us all to shame.”

Fuller nodded in the direction of the former girl, Miss Lightfoot,

who sat close to the television, unhurriedly drinking her tea and

taking notes on the proceedings. “It’s just not the same without her,

is it?” he asked, feigning a wistful sigh.

Miss Lightfoot’s former colleagues, after hearing one more partial

piece of the story from one side of the Caucus Room’s tangled web,

began strolling back to the Bureau of Congressional Relations. Fuller

and Mary walked a step or two behind Beverly.

“Even the brewer’s been watching,” said Mary. She’d given up and

begun referring to her fiancé by the only name for him that Fuller

ever used.

“This is turning into a long engagement, isn’t it?” he asked.

Mary pursed her lips.

Fuller pressed her. “Want to talk about it?”

“With you? Heavens, no.”

“Yeah, you do,” said Fuller. “Let me know when and I’ll pencil you

in. By the way,” he added, pointing toward her open-toed footwear,

“your feet are too cold for those shoes.”

At eight minutes before five, just prior to adjournment, Jenkins’

assistant was moved to ask Adams whether it wasn’t true “that many

of these remarks or abuses that you have detailed on the part of Mr.

Cohn were actually made in a facetious or jovial vein?”

Quite the contrary, Adams replied. “On the subject of Schine,

nothing was funny. Nothing was facetious. Nothing was jovial.” Tim

heard this last exchange on the radio in Potter’s Capitol office. He

was happy to be overworked, fielding calls while rewriting a speech

and folding one stack of papers into another. The more he had to do,

the less time there was for being lovesick, which he’d been more

often than not since Charlottesville. In the hotel room there, after a

ferocious storm of sex that had followed the slap to his face, he had

for the first time been allowed to lie all night in Hawkins’ arms. But

when the two of them returned to Washington, things reverted to

their regular pattern, making him miss the near-hysteria he’d felt

during the unexpected travel idyll, and causing him to consider the

possibility that there really was no such thing as happiness or

unhappiness. Maybe there was only intensity—and then everything

else.

He now heard Tommy McIntyre and Senator Potter, fresh from the

Caucus Room, coming into the outer office. Tommy’s sharp voice

was telling the boss that he needed to get a friendly photograph

taken with Welch’s bemedaled brass in the front-row seats.

“Tomorrow, pull yourself out from behind the table the minute

Mundt rings the lunch bell. Let the shutterbugs get a shot of you

instead of Joe. If they see you leaning on your props—one of ’em

maybe lit up by mistake—they’ll come over and take a picture,

believe me.”

Potter said nothing, and Tommy filled the silence with

congratulations for the way the senator had this afternoon “followed

the script” in questioning Adams about leaks.

“I still don’t understand,” Potter wondered, “why you didn’t want

me going after Schine a couple of weeks ago.”

“Because I don’t want you tearing into a soldier, even that one.

Anywho, Charlie, remember the picture when you’re back in there

tomorrow.”

With this reminder, Tommy left the premises to head back to the

SOB, where he’d get the latest on the Maine campaign from Mrs.

Smith’s assistant.

Tim had two letters for Senator Potter to sign. Once he heard him

settled down at his desk, he knocked softly on the door of the inner

office.

“Come in, son,” said Potter, “though I’m afraid I don’t have long.”

The senator explained he was expected at home in Arlington in half

an hour.

“Say hi to Mrs. Potter for me,” Tim requested.

The senator smiled. “Will do. What have you got there?”

“A couple of things for signatures. Plus some telegrams from

Lansing, and two out-of-state interview requests, if you want to

consider them now. The Boulder Daily Camera and the San

Francisco Examiner.”

Potter allowed himself an awed little whistle over the immense

circulation of the latter publication. He dropped the slips of paper

onto his blotter.

“So what do you make of it all, Tim?”

Surprised to be asked, Tim fought against his stammer to declare

that things looked “pretty much as you said, sir. Somebody is not

telling the truth.”

“Yes,” said Potter, “but who?”

“I hope it’s the army, sir, but I guess that wouldn’t be much to be

happy about, either.”

“No, it wouldn’t be.”

After a pause, Tim became bolder. “Mr. McIntyre thinks McCarthy

and Cohn cooked up all the memoranda. He’s sure Mr. Adams is

telling the truth.”

The senator gave a soft, nervous laugh. “Mr. McIntyre tends

toward strong opinions about everything.”

Tim laughed, too. “The other day he told me you’re still trying to

get used to him. Which I guess makes sense: he hasn’t been in the

office much longer than I have.”

Potter’s smile was suddenly thin and tired. He looked over toward

the bookshelf, where a Detroit Tigers cap crowned a cigar humidor.

“Oh,” he said softly, “I’ve known Mr. McIntyre for years.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

June 2, 1954

“Sir, I probably don’t have any wisdom on this subject at all.”

Roy Cohn’s testimony had drawn even longer lines than usual to

the Caucus Room, but his affectations of modesty, however shrewd,

were disappointing those who’d come to see fireworks. For weeks

he’d been attracting notice for the mutterings and glares he would

exchange with Bob Kennedy, who had encouraged ridicule of Dave

Schine’s record as anticommunist gumshoe and thinker. Spectators

who came every day like courthouse inveterates were still hoping the

two young committee counsels would get into a fistfight before things

adjourned sine die.

But here was Cohn, at last before the footlights of television,

expected to thrust and parry and soliloquize—and all he would do

was “sir” the committee: “It is hard to answer that, sir.” “Sir, that is a

little high for me to pass on.”

He even conceded the likelihood that President Eisenhower

opposed communism as strongly as he did, an admission that came

in response to a soft question from Senator Potter—a tricky changeup from the series of fastballs the lawmaker was throwing. Tim had

seen Tommy McIntyre scripting the queries yesterday afternoon, and

the soundness of the Irishman’s approach now became evident: the

simple questions seemed more damning than Cohn’s answers

seemed exculpatory.

SENATOR POTTER: Did you threaten to wreck the army?

MR. COHN: No, sir. Not only did I not threaten to wreck the army,

but Mr. Adams never believed that for one minute.

SENATOR POTTER: Did you threaten to get Mr. Stevens’ job?

MR. COHN: No, sir, and if I had done that, Mr. Adams would not

have acted the way he did, I am sure.

What emerged, however filtered, was Cohn’s sense that last winter

Adams had been too dumb to respond sensibly to threats that had

indeed been made.

“You can catch your breath, Charlie,” offered Acting Chairman

Mundt. Senators were wanted on the floor for two quick votes; the

committee would take a ten-minute recess.

Tim used the time to annotate the previous day’s transcript and

comb through press requests, as well as to hold a place for Mrs.

Potter in the spectators’ front row.

“You got enough room there, son?”

“Yes, sir, thank you,” said Tim to one of Welch’s telegenic officers,

a General Airlie, according to the nampelate beside his large fruit

salad of decorations.

“What do you do here?” asked the general.

“I work for Senator Potter.”

The officer nodded respectfully. “I had my picture taken with him

the other day.”

Tim might have mentioned how his real boss, Tommy, had last

week scolded Potter for not yet “watching the birdie with the brass.”

But he looked for something else to kindle conversation and came

up with the way Senator Potter planned “to propose a law that would

ban Communists from joining the army.”

General Airlie smiled. “Son, I can’t say I’ve found them dying to get

in.”

Tim laughed.

“Have you been in the service yet?” asked Airlie.

“No, sir,” said Tim, ashamed that the general would surmise how

he’d chosen, like most of his friends and classmates, to wait for the

draft instead of enlisting. He felt an absurd temptation to confide—as

if it were a tale of heroism—the story of how he had at least kept

himself vulnerable to call-up by not admitting to “homosexual

tendencies” when given the chance.

“I’m guessing you’re a college graduate,” said General Airlie.

“Well, you’ll find we’ve still got plenty to offer fellows like yourself—

whether you come to us or we come to you.” He smiled gently.

Tim nearly saluted. The army itself—apart from its lawyers and

political administrators, what it was when left to do its duty outside

this room—sometimes seemed to him the way he imagined Father

Beane’s Chinese chapel: “a clean, well-lighted place,” forthrightly

positioned on good’s salient against evil.

He nodded to the general and went back to annotating the

transcript, which six weeks into the hearings confirmed the near

impossibility that any definitive picture would emerge from them.

During recent days McCarthy had been arguing the duty of federal

employees to leak to him any information they had about

ideologically suspect colleagues; he wanted everyone to know how

much he missed doing the committee’s real business of fighting

“brutalitarian regimes.” Even so, one could measure the

embarrassment he had been suffering the past several weeks by a

speech in which the vice president had gone out of his way to

declare that the real exposure of Communists was being

accomplished by J. Edgar Hoover and Attorney General Brownell. “I

prefer professionals,” said Nixon, “to amateurs on television.”

No matter how murky the truth about Schine remained, the

hearings were going the army’s way. Twenty-four hours ago, Senator

Flanders had taken the Senate floor to ridicule his colleague as an

anti-Semitic and possibly homosexual version of “Dennis the

Menace.” In contrast to what might have happened even a month

ago, there had been no outcry over the denunciation.

The president’s decision to float above the battle, in a kind of

military observation balloon, had been vindicated to his strategists.

This afternoon, as Cohn retook the witness chair, Ike, the recipient of

his Communist-hunting compliments, was at a Washington Senators

game to benefit the Red Cross.

“I would like,” said Senator Potter, who now resumed his

questioning, “to have you comment on the extent of Communist

influence in our government.”

“Yes, sir,” said the still-modest Cohn. “It can only, of course, be a

comment, because I don’t know all the facts.”

“When did that ever stop him?” whispered Miss McGrory.

“During the 1930s and 1940s,” said Cohn, “the Communist Party

of the United States was, I would say, remarkably and unbelievably

successful in placing Communists in a number of key spots in our

government.” But sheer numbers, he explained, weren’t important.

“One is too many. I think Stalin or Lenin, one of the top Communist

theoreticians, once said something to the effect that it takes a

thousand people to build a bridge; it takes one person to blow it up.”

For a moment Tim thought he could feel the Caucus Room expand

with history and purpose. Something important was being offered for

discussion. But the senator and the witness soon returned to the

question of whether, on or around December 9, Adams had offered

to trade Cohn an air force scandal for the Fort Monmouth

investigation.

“Somebody is not telling the truth,” said Potter, reiterating what

had become his catchphrase.

“Somebody is certainly mistaken, sir,” responded Cohn. “It is

certainly not us, sir.”

“So,” said Potter, with the logic Tommy McIntyre had supplied him,

“perjury has been committed.”

“Well, sir,” answered Cohn, “somebody is certainly mistaken, and,

once again, sir, I am not.”

Tim noticed that Cohn might be denying no more than stupidity; he

had not denied lying—let alone denied that the eleven memoranda

over his name had been typed on an office machine he was never

even near.

When the session ended and the lights went down, the witness

gathered his papers and stood up just two feet from Tim, who still

occupied the seat Mrs. Potter had decided to pass up for an

afternoon’s shopping. Full of anger and a certain relief, as if he could

now shed a cloak that had made him itch unbearably, Cohn stepped

up to Tim’s left ear and whispered: “If your soldier-boy boss isn’t

careful, he may find that his balls go the way of his legs.” Not waiting

for McCarthy, he exited the room.

Tim said nothing, just stood there breathing a little hard over the

first words Cohn had ever spoken to him directly. When Tommy

came to collect the transcript he’d been working on, Tim repeated

Cohn’s remark.

“That’s nothing to worry about,” Tommy reassured him. “Charlie’s

balls are safe. They’re in my pocket.”

Tim frowned, prompting Tommy to complain. “What are you

stewing about? It was a good afternoon. For Charlie, for all of us.”

“I’m fine,” said Tim, who wanted to get out of the room as fast as

Cohn had. In exiting, he allowed himself one glance in Potter’s

direction and realized that Tommy was right: the senator appeared

perfectly content, pleased with the crispness of his own

performance. He wore the look of serene dignity that he could

maintain for hours at a time, the same expression he’d no doubt

worn when reading one of Everett Dirksen’s five unpublished novels,

a task he’d undertaken, he explained to Tim, “because Senator

Dirksen values my opinion.”

“Come on,” called someone from the crowded elevator car that

was just about to close. “You’re skinny enough to fit in!”

Tim emerged from his distraction to realize that the voice belonged

to McCarthy, who was forgoing, as he often did, the Senators Only

car. As Tim squeezed into place, he felt a gentle, almost fatherly,

hand on his shoulder. “Pete over there better not complain,” said the

senator, indicating the elevator operator. “Not when he’s owed me

ten bucks since Thanksgiving!” The tightly packed car, its

atmosphere perfumed with bourbon and a moment’s unforced

laughter, descended toward the street.

CHAPTER TWENTY

June 19, 1954

“Drink, Skippy.”

Tim downed two inches of the highball.

“More,” commanded Fuller.

“What’s it that people say? ‘It’s a little early in the day for this’?”

Tim pointed to the clock beside the radio.

“Eleven-forty-five a.m.,” said Fuller. “You think so?”

Tim drank more while Jo Stafford sang “Let’s Just Pretend.” He

looked away and said, softly, “You’re nice to let me come over,

Hawk.”

He’d arrived five minutes ago, in a state. He was calmer now, but

even so, Fuller decided to pull him a couple of inches lower onto the

couch cushions. He stroked the hair at Tim’s right temple with the

side of his index finger, the way one would a cat’s whiskers. Tim

turned to bury his face in the hollow of Hawkins’ neck, surprised by

the comfort he could take in the smell—amazed, really, that

something still so exotic and sought had also become familiar,

longstanding.

“Start again from the beginning,” Fuller said.

“I was at my desk by five after eight, I think—even though it’s a

Saturday.”

“Ah, yes, a workday. I seem to have forgotten.”

“I was working with the hearings transcript,” Tim explained. “The

part from Thursday, the very last day. The thirty-sixth day of all that.

And you know what I was realizing?” He took another swallow of the

highball. “How it’s always easier to follow the printed words from the

morning sessions. By the time things would get restarted in the

afternoon, a lot of them had put away three drinks at lunch. The

sentences would get longer and sloppier and angrier, even with Mrs.

Watt cleaning up what the stenographers took down. Anyway, there I

was a little while ago, typing out my boss’s closing remarks for a

couple of Sunday editors who are planning to run bits of what every

senator said.” Loosened by his own drink, he treated Fuller to some

pompous mimicry of Potter: “‘I wish to assure the American people

who are watching that this is not normal.’”

“Making fun of Citizen Canes!” said Fuller. “There’s hope for you

yet.”

Tim sat up straight but still clutched one of the pillows on the

couch. “And then of course there’s the big bombshell statement that

got him all the headlines. ‘There is little doubt that the testimony on

both sides was saturated with statements which were not truthful and

which might constitute perjury in a legal sense…. The staff of the

subcommittee will have to be overhauled.’ God! It’s been quoted so

many times I’ve got it by heart! All the Sunday editors think it’s in the

transcript, but you won’t find it there, Hawk. The ‘perjury’ and

‘overhaul’ stuff was in a statement Tommy McIntyre had me

mimeograph an hour before the close of the hearings. He passed it

out to the reporters without Potter ever having seen it, let alone

composed it. McCarthy went white when he got a copy! It’s what the

Democrats were hoping for all along—a Republican saying out loud

they’ve got to fire Cohn! Now there’ll be a vote to do that, and Potter

will join the Democrats and make it 4–3. He never would have said it

on his own, and he said no such thing in the hearing itself. Tommy

tricked him—but you know what? Potter kind of likes it. They’re

drawing him as a lion in the cartoons. He’s a big hero of free speech

and fair play now. And it’s all phony.” He shook his head and finished

off the drink. “All phony. Potter was more surprised by what he said

than McCarthy was. All phony.”

“Steady there, Skippy.” Hawkins took the empty glass and pulled

Tim back down on the couch. “Tell me when you heard the rifle shot,”

he said. “And tell me how you knew what it was. From all those

childhood moose-hunting trips up Ninth Avenue?”

“I didn’t know what it was. Except that it was unbelievably loud. I

checked the paper on the streetcar coming over here: the wind today

is north-northeast—perfect for carrying the sound from the SOB to

the Capitol. Honest, I thought the Bomb really had gone off.” The

week had begun with Operation Alert, a ten-minute civil-defense drill

that halted traffic across the city and saw white-armbanded marshals

herding pedestrians into the doorways of stores and office buildings.

“Senator Hunt got there at eight-thirty,” Tim continued. “He brought

the rifle from home, they’re saying, even though he always had a few

guns in his office. I got all this from Miss Cook, who went over there

to help out. Afterward.”

Tim’s agitation and gestures had subsided, but noticing how pale

he still looked, Fuller reached over to put the fan on a higher speed.

Along with its dry run for the apocalypse, Monday had brought the

beginning of an early, unbearable heat wave.

“Miss Cook says he moved some pictures of his daughter and son

from a bookcase to his blotter. Maybe so they’d be the last thing he

saw before he pulled the trigger. He did it sitting in his desk chair.

Miss Cook also says he left notes to everyone in his family and to

half the staff. And that just last week he sent his papers off to the

University of Wyoming archives.”

“The radio is saying it was his health. That he got bad news from

Walter Reed a couple of weeks ago.” Fuller spoke matter-of-factly,

making a casual effort to control Tim’s excitability—which, left to

itself, veered ungovernably, they both knew, between something that

charmed Fuller and repelled him. “Hunt did,” he pointed out, “quit the

race for a second time. The day after his physical, I think.”

“You don’t believe that, do you?” asked Tim.

“You mean me of all people?”

“Yeah, you, who’s always knocking me off the turnip truck. An hour

after it happened Hunt’s office put it out on the wire that he was

going to the hospital because of a ‘heart attack’! You remember what

happened with his son in Lafayette Park. How he got arrested for

trying to pick up a cop? Well, Tommy says a week ago Senator

Welker and Senator Bridges were letting Hunt know that if he didn’t

pull out of the reelection race his son’s record would be an issue.”

Hawkins, who had never told Tim about the lie-detector test

ordered up by Bridges’ protégé, Scott McLeod, pretended to laugh.

“‘How to Be a Man,’” he said cryptically, getting up to make a second

drink that he said they could split.

“You know what was the first thing I saw on my desk this

morning?” Tim asked. “A ‘subpoena.’ They made the invitation to the

farewell party look like one. Everybody was going to celebrate the

end of the hearings on Monday night, all together, Democrats and

the press included. I’ll bet Kenneth Woodforde would’ve been there,

knocking one back with Cohn. Well, now maybe they’ll be going to a

funeral instead. These stupid hearings.”

“They’re over, Timothy.” Hawkins returned to the couch with the

second highball. “They ended with a whimper. And a bang.”

“Yeah,” said Tim, taking the first big sip. “They’re over, and they

were about nothing. Or, as Welch would say, they were all about ‘the

’tis and the ’taint.’ Which puts it better than ‘Somebody is not telling

the truth.’ You know what? Nobody’s been telling the truth, my boss

included. And you know what else?” Tim asked, sitting up again to

project a louder indignation. “You know what Jenkins said at the

end?” He took a deep breath to begin a baritone imitation of the

Tennessee counsel: “‘Is it askin’ too much of inscrutable Fate to

hope that the paths of all of us will sometime cross again?’ Like he

wants to have a reunion, or start an alumni association. What a

dick.”

Hawkins laughed as loudly as Tim had ever heard him. “Now you’ll

be getting amorous, Skippy, because you always do when you’re

angry. And I don’t have a lot of time.”

The circles that had been under Tim’s eyes in April were gone, but

Hawkins noticed that his pupils were dilated almost to the point of

death. Even so, he could feel his belt being loosened. “Have you no

decency?” he asked, quoting the words that had gotten Welch so

many headlines and making them both laugh. “Have you at long last

no decency, sir?” He caressed the back of Tim’s head, which had

already gone to work on him, but after a minute he quietly withdrew,

pulling Tim up beside him. “Don’t finish me off,” he whispered. “We’ll

save things for another day.”

The last two words struck Tim’s ears like the gift he was never

allowed to take for granted, never permitted to expect. With “another

day” for once in the bank, he decided to borrow against it. “I came by

looking for you last night,” he admitted. “I know I’m not supposed to.”

He drank an inch of the second highball. “So where were you?” he

persisted.

“Early or late?” asked Hawkins.

“Let’s say early,” Tim answered, picking what might be the easier

answer to bear.

“At the Sulgrave Club. Near whose elevator, I may have told you,

Joe McCarthy once kicked Drew Pearson in the balls.”

“How did McCarthy even get in the door there?” Tim experienced a

short surge of ethnic fellow feeling. “A place like that must make him

feel like Martin Durkin.” People still joked that Ike’s Labor secretary, a

union man, had made for a cabinet of “eight millionaires and one

plumber.”

Hawk leaned over and kissed him. “Ah, the pluck of the Irish.”

“So who were you with there? Some Episcopal bishop?”

“Close. Joe Alsop.”

“Pardon me.”

Fuller turned serious, made his embrace more sheltering. “You say

the hearings were about nothing. Do you want to know what they

were about? I’ll tell you.”

Tim looked him in the eye. “Are you saying you know what Cohn

has on McCarthy? Did Alsop tell you what he was hinting at in that

column?”

“Cohn holds nothing over McCarthy,” said Hawkins. “Even Alsop

gets things wrong. But in the months since that column ran he’s

managed to get them half right.”

“What is it, then?”

“It’s what Schine has on McCarthy. Something a house detective

in one of the Schine family hotels saw Joe doing. And apparently

photographed.”

“Doing what?” asked Tim.

“Can’t tell you,” said Hawkins. “Because I don’t know, and neither

does Alsop. But it happened last fall, during one of those committee

trips to New York, when your Mr. Jones would play at being a

senator, and when old Joe was getting tired of Schine’s laziness, not

to mention a little wary and weary of the whole Roy-and-Dave show

and the rumors in the press. He was thinking about cutting Schine

loose. And then suddenly Schine—what is it that people say?

—‘knew too much.’”

“Well,” said Tim, “I guess the draft notice made everything moot.”

“No, the induction made things worse. All at once Schine would be

needing a slew of favors down at Fort Dix. And McCarthy was

powerless to refuse. The most he could do, when Cohn kept

pressing, was complain a little about Schine to Adams and some

others. But he never complained about him in front of Roy.”

“Because Roy would threaten him with what Schine had.”

“No. Roy doesn’t know that Schine has anything over Joe. He

thinks Joe went through two months of nationally broadcast hearings

because Joe sees Schine as the same paragon he sees. Love is

blind.”

“But as my grandmother still says, ‘The neighbors ain’t.’”

“Yes,” said Hawkins, “though some of them are a little too

fastidious to believe what they’re seeing.”

Tim was still struggling to work out the algebra of blackmail. “How

does Joe Alsop know?”

“Some smart reporter who owes him a favor gave him this story

that he’d half pieced together and couldn’t write because the other

half was missing.”

“How do you know Alsop? I never asked you.”

“People like us always know each other.”

Tim knew that “people like us” meant wealthy Protestants and not

secret homosexuals, but he still had to ask: “Is he in love with you?”

“Probably,” said Fuller. “But only enough to bat his eyes at me

from the other end of the chesterfield sofa. I’m given to understand

that he likes things a little rougher back in the bunkhouse.”

“What do you get out of it?”

“Excellent company,” said Hawkins. “Interesting information.”

“I guess you do have something on him,” said Tim, whose memory

of their conversation about Alsop’s column, swallowed up by the rest

of that catastrophic night in March, was now coming back.

“Plenty,” said Hawkins, who rested Tim’s head on his chest. He

began rubbing the boy’s back with long, insistent strokes that, for all

their strength, didn’t seem a prelude to anything.

“What are you doing?” Tim finally asked.

“Trying to stop your flesh from crawling.”

The answer, Tim thought, contained every part of Hawk’s feelings

toward him: protectiveness, affection, distance, enforcement. “How

to be a man,” Tim felt inspired to say, though he still didn’t know what

Hawk had meant by the words a little while ago.

“Yes,” said Hawkins. “A man of a certain kind.”

Tim hated hearing him say this. Not because he disputed his own

membership in the homosexual subspecies indicated by the phrase;

only because he hated being forced to acknowledge that God had

assigned Hawk to this same slum precinct in His creation.

“Well,” said Tim, eager to return the conversation to McCarthy, “I

guess I now know at least the half of it.”

“Less than half,” Hawkins replied. “You still don’t know what

McIntyre has on Citizen Canes.”

“That’s true.”

“Find out.”

“Why?”

“Despite whatever they taught you at St. Aloysius, knowledge isn’t

power. But it is insurance. Even Schine, who’s dumb as a post,

knows that much.”

“Tommy was in excelsis when things ended Thursday. But he

didn’t slow down for a second. Not even this morning. It’s the last

weekend of the primary campaign, and he says he’s going to keep

what they’re calling Jones’s ‘hidden vote’ well hidden. He was on the

phone even while the ambulance was leaving with Senator Hunt.

They must have heard the siren up in Maine, through the line.”

It was at this moment, when the half hour of Jo Stafford numbers

had concluded, that the radio announced the death of Wyoming’s

senior senator. Tim said nothing, just picked up the second highball.

“Gulp it, Skippy. I’ve got a date.”

Hawkins rose from the couch to put on a sport coat. After picking

up his keys, he seemed to realize that this was maybe a bit much

even for him. With a certain tenderness, he added: “It’s nothing,

Timothy. A friend I made during Monday’s ‘air raid.’ We were

escorted into the doorway of Quigley’s drugstore by one of the white

armbands.”

“A wartime romance,” said Tim, picking up his own jacket.

“There you go,” said Hawkins.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

June 24, 1954

“Jesus, I can almost see Ike and Mamie. Behind the pink curtains.”

“No, that’s Kay Summersby on her knees. Mamie’s in the room

next door.”

“Walking into the walls.”

“Mrs. Eisenhower does not drink. She has an ‘inner-ear

imbalance.’”

Tim stood at the railing of the Hotel Washington’s rooftop terrace,

listening to this exchange between two reporters. They were pretty

plastered, and he was getting there, too. If not the life of this huge

party high above Pennsylvania Avenue, he was as loose-limbed as

he could reasonably be in the midst of his anxiety over whether

Hawk would show up.

The night was warm but breezy; the terrace’s awning flapped, and

the party’s din had banished most people’s memory of the service

conducted for Lester Hunt two days ago in the Senate chamber. Still,

his position at the railing prompted Tim, amidst all the drink and

shouting, to recall what he’d seen looking down from the gallery on

Tuesday: the impassive, straight-ahead expressions of Styles

Bridges and Herman Welker, not far from the white, papery face of

Hunt’s son.

The conversation in the gallery, like the whispers on the floor, had

concerned not the corpse, but the count. Once Wyoming’s

Republican governor picked a replacement for Hunt, the GOP would,

by a single seat, have a real majority. In politics, too, it seemed to

Tim, there was only excitement—and then everything else. Even at

the service, the Democrats had been thrilled by new peril; the

Republicans had been electric with fresh ascendancy.

The hearings’ farewell party had remained canceled, but the

formidable, impromptu combination of May Craig and Perle Mesta

had filled the void yesterday morning by announcing this party. The

invitations to it had pictured a Maine lobster with the face of Margaret

Chase Smith. Trapped in its claws was a tiny schoolboy figure meant

to stand for Robert L. Jones, who had gotten his comeuppance on

Tuesday night. Right now Tim could see the wide hat brims of both

Miss Craig, the Maine newswoman, and Mrs. Mesta, the eternal

arriviste and party-giver, clinking like martini glasses in a selfcongratulatory toast, even if the guest of honor, Senator Smith, had

demurely decided not to come.

Mrs. Mesta had provided her usual “mostes’”: the money and

social brass that rendered political affiliation or listing in the city’s

Green Book irrelevant to her recipe for a blowout. She and Miss

Craig might both be Democrats, but they were happy to be

celebrating the triumph of at least this one Republican (albeit over

another). Along with Estes Kefauver and Henry Jackson from the

Democratic side of the aisle, Jerry Persons and Jim Hagerty were

here from the White House, and everyone seemed equally pleased

about the real conquest being commemorated—Joe McCarthy’s

recent self-decimation.

Red roses—Mrs. Smith’s signature flower—bloomed atop each

tablecloth and drinks trolley. Posters with her winning slogan (“Don’t

Change a Record for a Smear”) depended from the flaps of the

awning. Standing near one of them, Tim heard Mrs. Persons and

Mrs. Hagerty loudly agreeing that Clare Boothe Luce, so refined—

and a genius, really—was a much better choice of female

ambassador than Mrs. Mesta had been. No wonder she’d been

posted to a real country like Italy instead of that toy one Truman had

sent Perle to. Liechtenstein? Luxembourg? Knock the Eisenhowers,

if you wanted: yes, purple orchids at state dinners might be putting

on the dog, but did people really wish to see Bess Truman back

stuffing daisies into vases she’d brought to the White House from a

Woolworth’s in Kansas City?

Tim tried to lose himself in this Washington version of the

conversations he remembered between the women of Ninth Avenue

when they reeled in the washlines between one apartment and

another. But he couldn’t keep himself from looking, every minute or

two, toward the entrance.

At one door to the terrace Tim could see only Bob Kennedy, who

seemed obliged to look ashamed of himself for being here at all,

while his wife, Ethel, loudly imitated the bark of Mrs. Mesta’s poodle,

Fifi. Kennedy began an attempt to reach the circle that had formed

around one of the evening’s great catches, Vermont’s Senator

Flanders, who’d continued in the past two weeks to up the ante

against McCarthy. Before the hearings ended, he’d strode into the

Caucus Room and, before the cameras, plunked down the text of a

motion he was about to make on the floor—one that would strip

McCarthy of his committee chairmanship. Flanders had explained

that the warning was a courtesy; McCarthy pronounced it a

combination of publicity-seeking and senility and urged that a net be

dropped over the Vermonter. Senator Mundt had settled for asking

Flanders to leave the room.

And yet, here he was, his nerve and his star still rising. People

now expected him to drop his motion in favor of one by which the

Senate would issue a blanket censure of McCarthy. Indeed, a feeling

had taken hold that the hearings might turn out to have been no

more than an exercise for actors who would soon be appearing in a

much larger drama.

Lyndon Johnson’s boys, Walter Jenkins and Bobby Baker, formed

part of the cluster around Flanders, though Baker, about as young as

Cohn, was really talking with Eddie Bennett Williams, another legal

prodigy and a buddy of Scott McLeod who was thought to make a lot

of money getting people security clearances. Williams was also a pal

of George Sokolsky, McCarthy’s Hearst columnist, and rumor had it

that he’d already been asked to undertake Joe’s defense again

censure.

Bobby Baker wanted to know whether this rumor was true, but

Williams’ answer was drowned out by the sudden crowing of Mrs.

Mesta—“You old rascal!”—her way of reminding the just-arrived

Drew Pearson that she’d forgiven him for all the nasty things he used

to write about Harry Truman. The ex-president and newspaperman

were now frequently in touch, not so much to bury the hatchet as to

plunge it jointly into McCarthy’s back.

“And you, too!” cried Mrs. Mesta, this time to Senator Kerr.

“Honey,” he replied, “you and Drew mighta been oil and water, but

me and you have always been oil and oil!”

“Oklahoma crude!” she roared back, offering their shared

geographical history as confirmation.

Senator Flanders now had competition no more than three feet

away. Joseph Welch had arrived and was talking to Miss McGrory,

whose last dispatch from the Caucus Room, after the attorney’s

have-you-no-decency speech, had been a kind of public love letter.

“After all this, can you really go back to Boston?” she asked.

“My dear young lady, can you really go back to the book page?”

Tim knew that he, too, would never again be what he had been,

and he knew it even more surely once he saw Hawk enter the room,

smile at him, and mouth the word “Skippy.” After smiling back, he

turned and looked the other way, behind him, toward the rooftop’s

railing, telling himself that if he leapt over it now he would die happy,

the mortal sin of suicide just a redundant count in God’s indictment,

earning him only a concurrent eternity in Hell.

Hawk approached with an improbable entourage: Mary Johnson

and the man who must be her fiancé, along with Mrs. Phillips and a

fellow Tim didn’t recognize. They all took drinks from a tray, a waiter

having glided instantly up to Hawk, just the way Tim remembered it

had gone at the restaurant in Charlottesville. With one hand Hawkins

selected a summery gin and tonic, and with the other he made a

discreet wave to Joe Alsop, who, engaged in conversation with Ike’s

press secretary, gave a businesslike one in return.

“Here,” said Hawk, presenting Tim to his companions, “is the real

source of your invitations.” In fact it had been a joyful, capering

Tommy McIntyre who’d pressed a fistful of Mrs. Craig’s invites upon

Fuller when he’d visited the office yesterday morning to talk to

Senator Potter about the St. Lawrence Seaway legislation.

“It’s nice to see you again,” said Mary Johnson, who reacquainted

Tim and Beverly Phillips before introducing him to Paul Hildebrand

and Jerry Baumeister.

“Mr. Fuller,” she explained to Tim, “is making us as impolitic as he

is.” Their boss, Mr. Morton, could hardly be displeased with the

results of the primary, but he would have discouraged their

attendance here, lest it appear that employees of the Congressional

Relations bureau had taken sides in a primary election.

Senator Gore’s chief of staff came over to greet Hawk, displacing

Tim from the circle of conversation. The new vantage allowed him to

watch the almost formal way in which Hildebrand held Mary

Johnson’s hand—a contrast to the easy exuberance of the arm Mr.

Baumeister kept draped over Mrs. Phillips’ shoulders.

“My mother,” Baumeister was telling Miss Johnson with a loud

laugh, “didn’t feel completely keen on my going out with a divorced

woman.”

Mrs. Phillips laughed, too. “Jerry is an excellent companion. A lot

more fun than the widower turned out to be.”

“And I got her a free window sash from the hardware store!”

Hawkins pulled Tim back into the group and away from an

oncoming conga line whose members were shouting the defeated

candidate’s campaign slogan, but adding the unheroic last lyric of

the song from which it had come: “The whole town’s talking about

the Jones boy…and he’s only nine days old!” On primary day the

youthful challenger had lost by five to one.

“Yes,” said Hawkins, “the hidden vote stayed hidden.” Senator

Gore’s aide replied that the only thing Mainers now had to worry

about was Nixon’s plan to vacation in the state.

“It’s usually good to keep things well hidden,” said Tim to Hawkins.

He realized that his level of inebriation had caught up to that of the

reporters at the railing. And being out in the open with Hawk, in a

setting so much more public than even the Charlottesville restaurant,

was making him giddy. Maybe he shouldn’t have said what he just

did, but Hawk seemed to get his meaning and laughed over it:

“There are all kinds of things hidden here.”

Fuller pointed to the figure of G. David Schine, who had entered

with an attractive girl Tim recognized as Iris Flores, one of the

private’s regular girlfriends; she had been interviewed in executive

session but never called upon to testify in public. In the closed

hearing she had described herself as an “inventor” trying to market

her latest brainstorm, a new-and-improved nylon brassiere strap.

Joe and Jean McCarthy might be home tending their wounds,

while Cohn burnt the midnight oil back in the office, but here, Tim

thought, was Schine, smiling—in uniform, no less—and being

mobbed, followed around by Dorothy Kilgallen, Hearst’s gossip

writer, who took down his every word.

“Mr. Fuller.” Tommy McIntyre, full of vigor and vim, gleaming with a

hard nonalcoholic brightness, approached Hawkins and shook his

hand. He displayed a certainty—apparent from the way he nodded at

both of them—that the connection between Mr. Fuller and “Master

Laughlin,” as he sometimes called him, was hardly casual.

Hawkins did nothing to disabuse him of the idea. “So where’s the

ostensible boss?” he asked, meaning Potter. Tim wanted to sink from

the hotel’s rooftop to its basement.

“Home in Arlington with the missus,” said Tommy, neither

surprised nor displeased by the query.

Tim tried not to stammer. “It would’ve been awfully hard for him to

come here. After all, he hired Mr. Jones.”

“And he fired him, too,” said Tommy. “We like Senator Potter

having things both ways. It’s this flexibility that gives him a certain

utility. “

A secretary from Senator Kefauver’s office came and pulled

Hawkins away. “Someone I want you to meet,” she said.

Tommy took the opportunity to tug Tim in the opposite direction.

“Look at them lappin’ it all up,” he said, tracing the whole senatorial

panorama with his glass of 7Up. “Some of the girls they’ve brought

along could get ’em charged under the Mann Act. Of course, their

aides have to settle for simpler pleasures, with smaller penalties.

Jenkins over there will be heading off any time now to the men’s

room at the G Street Y.”

Tim looked skeptically toward Lyndon Johnson’s executive

assistant, a family man by all accounts.

“Oh, yes,” said Tommy. “He’ll have time enough to make it back

here after a bit of relief—even if there’s got to be an arrest, a

booking, and a fifty-dollar fine in between. He’ll tell himself it was all

the fault of the alcohol.”

“I’m not doing so bad myself,” said Tim, nervously setting down his

highball.

“You look steady enough to me,” said Tommy, whose eyes were

now fixed on Private G. David Schine.

“I’m trying to remember which does what,” said Tim. “The Mann

Act and the Volstead Act, I mean.”

Tommy laughed. “The first one strives mightily to protect

underaged innocence. Oh, it’s a terrible law to be caught violating.”

After a pause, he added: “But set a thief to catch a thief.”

Tim pointed toward Iris Flores. “She certainly looks twenty-one.”

“Oh, she is,” said Tommy, baring yellow teeth as he laughed.

“That’s not Schine’s problem.”

Was it, Tim wondered, remembering Alsop’s information, someone

else’s problem? Perhaps a problem Schine knew McCarthy had?

Was Tommy on the verge of revelation? Tim had wondered for

months why the older man kept plying him with riddles. It had to be

more than Celtic fraternity or some sadistic impulse to harrow his

naïveté. But still there was no answer, and as always Tommy—now

making a clear-eyed beeline for Senator Flanders—was off even

more quickly than he’d materialized.

From behind, Tim heard a woman’s soft Southern voice beginning

to sing “Hey There.” He felt an ice-filled glass being pressed against

the back of his neck and realized it must be Mary Johnson. He

turned around and smiled. “Me with the stars in my eyes,” he sang in

return. “That ice felt good. Where’s Paul?”

“At a phone, ordering us a car. He figures we’ll never get a cab

downstairs.”

“You’re leaving so soon?”

Mary laughed. “It’s a miracle he lasted this long.”

Tim noticed the way she said it, as if Hildebrand’s prudential

nature might be troubling her more than Hawkins’ daredevil one.

“Would you let me make you dinner some night?” she asked.

“Really?”

“Really,” she assured him. “Just the two of us.”

“Of course,” he replied, knowing there would be a third,

incorporeal presence at her table. For the first time in his life he

would be talking to somebody about Hawkins Fuller, saying his

name, making judgments and speculations about him, offering

amusing stories in which he himself figured. But were there any

stories that Tim could actually tell? Ones that didn’t have nakedness

and the bedroom for their costume and setting? Banishing this

reverie, he spoke again at last: “Hawk got dragged away to meet

someone.”

“I know,” Mary said. “I was taken over there, too.” She pointed

toward a spot by the railing.

“Oh, my gosh,” said Tim, “that’s Mrs. Wilson!”

The widow of the twenty-eighth president remained plump and

pretty, sitting in a white metal garden chair atop this hotel whose

opening she had attended in 1917. He watched Hawk standing over

the former first lady, charming her. She was playfully swatting him

with a heavily ringed and braceleted hand, its adornments probably

having come wholesale from her first husband, Mr. Galt, whose old

jewelry store survived a few blocks away.

“No,” said Mary. “Fuller was taken to meet the one standing next to

her.”

Tim noticed a well-tailored blond girl alternating her gaze between

Hawk and Mrs. Wilson, smiling as if her life depended on it.

“She’s pretty,” said Tim.

“You think so?” asked Mary, who then seemed surprised by her

own cattiness. “Some distant relative of Senator Saltonstall’s,” she

explained. “Down from Massachusetts for a summer course at the

National Gallery. Lucy something-or-other.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

July 20, 1954

Dear Tim,

The christening will be at Church of the Holy Rosary on S.I.

(Jerome Ave.)—Sunday, Aug. 1, just after the 11:00 Mass.

There will be a little party afterwards, but we’ll expect you and

Mom and Dad for breakfast beforehand.

The baby is twice the size she was when you saw her, and

Mom (who I must say was a big help) has finally decided she

can go back to Stuy Town. All the middle-of-the-night crying

does make Tom very cross, which peeves me (since he’s not

around to hear it all day), but I suppose we’ll get through this

patch. (They say even Marilyn M. and DiMaggio are having their

troubles.)

What a strange Fourth of July! I was still woozy from the

anesthetic when you all got here…not exactly the holiday picnic

you’d been expecting when you came up from Washington.

Being a week early was the last thing I’d expected, but I was so

glad you were here to see Maria when she was brand-new.

We’d missed you at Easter, and at Mother’s Day, and on

Father’s Day, too. (I miss you period, brother. Or should I say

“godfather”!) Even on the Fourth, I could tell through the haze I

was in that you were eager to get back to the ferry and Penn

Station…eager to be far away. A week ago Mom told Dad

there’s a kind of veil between you and the world these days,

which made me think of that flimsy old curtain (a “scrim”?) on

the stage in the Holy Cross auditorium. Mom says she’s sure

you leave more out of your letters than you put in.

Grandma Gaffney heard all this between Mom and Dad and

put a stop to their conversation by squawking: “If Timmy’s got

something to tell you, he’ll tell you.”

So tell us. I don’t want to pressure and pester you, but you are

my baby brother, not to mention Maria’s godfather, and I worry

about you. Think about clueing me in a little…even if you are a

government bigshot now.

With love from Frances, Tom, and Maria Loretta

XXX

P.S. Grandma G. says the baby’s name “makes her sound like a

dago.”

The pages of Francy’s letter now lay, limp with lunchtime humidity,

on Tim’s office desk. Realizing he still wasn’t ready to respond, Tim

folded the letter and put it into his left pants pocket, the right one

already being occupied by a postcard he’d received from Maine,

where Hawkins would be staying until August 1. As the baby’s

godfather, he could hardly miss going up to Staten Island that day,

but in truth, he’d give almost anything to remain in Washington, on

the chance he might be allowed over to I Street for a first-night-back

reunion.

The approaching click of Potter’s canes, along with the highpitched voice of Tommy McIntyre, made Tim clear the remains of a

sandwich and its wax paper from his blotter. Returning from a closed

lunchtime session of the subcommittee, the senator and Tommy

were pulling a small entourage of reporters, including Kenneth

Woodforde, into the office.

“A Pulitzer!” Tommy cried. “A Pulitzer to the first photographer who

gets a shot of Cohn saluting Zwicker!”

McCarthy had scheduled a subcommittee meeting to investigate

reports of subversion at a Boston defense contractor, but the

Democrats had wrested away the agenda, and Potter, by voting with

them, had just created a 4–3 majority forcing the resignation of Roy

Cohn. The committee counsel was now expected to begin his own

long-deferred military service in the National Guard at Camp Kilmer

—under the very general that McCarthy, back in February, had

pronounced “not fit to wear the uniform.”

For a second, Tim’s mind went longingly back to General Airlie

and the rest of the spectating brass that Mr. Welch used to assemble

in the Caucus Room, but another burst of glee from Tommy put an

end to any daydreaming. “Dave and Royboy will be wearing the

same shade of khaki now!” he shouted. Senator Potter tried to

project dignity against Tommy’s merriment, concluding whatever

remarks he’d been making to Woodforde by stressing “the

importance of getting back to serious investigations, ones that will

respect people’s rights while uncovering the truth. You know, Mr.

Woodforde, these Communists are real.”

“Since you acknowledge their reality,” Woodforde asked, “does

that mean you’re now ready to recognize Red China?”

Potter looked baffled.

“Wise guy,” said Tommy.

“Can’t blame me for trying,” replied Woodforde, who closed his

notebook and let the two other reporters proceed without him to

Potter’s inner office.

“There’s more of them to recognize all the time,” said Tim, once he

realized he’d been left alone with Woodforde. “Communists, I mean.”

“Thanks to magazines like The Nation?” asked Woodforde.

“Well, yeah, actually. It looks as if we’ve now got twelve million

more to recognize in Indochina.” A peace conference at Geneva,

following the Communist victory at Dien Bien Phu, was about to

divide Vietnam in two.

“You mean those twelve million people who’d be so much happier

and freer being ruled by the French?”

“Yeah, those,” answered Tim, trying to speak with a smile. “The

ones who are having their new country designed by Molotov.”

“Two new countries,” Woodforde reminded him.

“Right. Korea, Germany, China, now Vietnam. All those big half

loaves, and the Communists always stay hungry.”

“The Communists will be evacuating South Vietnam within ten

months,” said Woodforde, reciting what had been pledged at

Geneva.

“You don’t believe that, do you?” asked Tim. “Or that they won’t kill

any more French priests in the meantime?”

“None that don’t have it coming.”

Tim shook his head and turned on the radio, not in any real display

of anger, just to make plain that he couldn’t continue a conversation

in this vein.

Over the airwaves, the voice of Roy Cohn was explaining the toll

that this past year had taken on his parents in the Bronx. Senator

Potter, tape-recorded ten minutes earlier, was wishing him well. A

statement from McCarthy’s office, just released and now being read

by the announcer, struck a less forgiving note: “The resignation of

Roy Cohn must bring great satisfaction to the Communists and

fellow travelers. The smears and pressures to which he has been

subjected make it clear that an effective anticommunist cannot long

survive on the Washington scene.”

Woodforde was smiling—over this formulation that might soon

become McCarthy’s epitaph for himself—when a colleague from

U.S. News stuck his head in the door: “Come on down. Flanders is

starting his speech.”

Woodforde waved for Tim to join them in the gallery. “Here’s

something we can all agree on, no?”

Still uncertain about the censure movement, Tim nonetheless felt

glad of a truce and agreed to accompany the two reporters. He fell in

step beside Woodforde, wondering as they double-timed it down the

corridor why some part of him felt drawn to this left-wing provocateur.

The gallery was more crowded than the floor. Democrats—worried

about appearing overeager—were thin on the carpeted ground

below press and spectators. But rhetoric was soon off to the races.

Flanders invited his colleagues to consider “the Senator as Führer,”

even if that role had come to McCarthy “without conscious intention

on his part.” A chance for Joe to change his ways was being offered,

the Vermonter insisted, “in a spirit of Christian charity.”

“See,” Woodforde whispered to Tim. “Even the priests approve.”

“Paul says it’s over a hundred degrees in St. Louis.”

“I guess we shouldn’t complain,” said Tim.

Mary Johnson, who’d had to persuade the boy to remove his

seersucker jacket, fluffed the chicken hash on the burner and

disagreed. “Oh, sure we should complain.”

“Doesn’t it get even more steamy than this in New Orleans?” Tim

asked.

“They know how to build shade there. We used to spend half the

day in the dark, behind the shutters.”

She looked at him as he set out the plates and napkins, and had

trouble believing he would spend half his life like that, hiding in

shadows. He reminded her a little of Lon McCallister, that slight,

sweet actor who’d had to kiss Katharine Cornell in Stage Door

Canteen and had just walked away from the movies at thirty. Right

now she herself felt a little like the grand Miss Cornell, or at least Our

Miss Brooks, though she couldn’t be more than a few years older

than Tim.

“So, have you heard from him?” she was suddenly moved to ask.

He brightened up as if they’d decided to go straight to dessert.

“A postcard from Bar Harbor,” he answered, reaching for it in his

pocket. “‘Dear Skippy,’—that’s a nickname he has for me—‘Nothing

up here but the Bucksport papers, and even they still echo with

praise for Citizen Canes.’ That’s what he calls my boss. ‘I won’t

return until the first, by which time an air conditioner is supposed to

be installed in every front window of 2124 Eye Street. You can come

over when you need to get that scapular unstuck from your

overheated skin. Sheen’s TV show, by the way, doesn’t reach these

parts, so Mother will have to remain in the clutches of the

Reformation for a while. HF.’”

She saw his face contract with embarrassment as he finished—not

because it was too much; because it was too little. Where were

“love” and “wish you were here,” or even a double entendre about

the lighthouse pictured on the front of the card? The scapular might

suggest intimacy, but of a small, controlled sort, a rationing prompted

not by fear of the postman’s prying eyes, but wariness of the boy’s

ravenous heart.

She had to give him the chance to display his feelings, had to

force herself to say some words that would allow that: “You must

miss him.”

The gratitude on his face was immediate, though he stopped short

of saying anything.

“We even miss him in the office,” she declared, helpfully. “Though,

of course, he is impossible.”

“He is, isn’t he?” said Tim, whose laughter was still more nervous

than relieved. As if remembering his manners—and that he ought to

share such pleasure—he asked: “Is Paul impossible, too?”

Mary thought for a moment. “Paul is, I’d say, very…possible.”

Tim smiled. “Is that a compliment?”

“Possibly.” She doubled her Southern accent to keep him amused,

while realizing that this was not a question she wanted to entertain.

“Okay,” she said, “the hash is finally hotter than the room.” She

poured a tumbler of ice water for herself, and a glass of milk for him.

He reached for it quickly, as one would for a ringing telephone. “Did

he tell you that? About the milk-drinking, I mean.”

“Yes,” said Mary, glad to give him this small, additional thrill,

though in truth, while Fuller might be indiscreet about the boy’s

existence, he never said too much about Tim himself.

She had gone as far as she could in one night. She could not take

conversation about Fuller, let alone Paul, any further. But what else

could she ask this boy about? He had less ambition than any young

man she’d ever met in Washington. He already had a career—a

vocation, she supposed—in Hawkins Fuller.

“So,” she said, resorting to a topic of the day, and a question that

didn’t come out as well as it might have. “Do you think the army will

make a man out of Roy Cohn?”

The Sand Bar’s piano player started in on “Some Enchanted

Evening,” and Tim ordered a bottle of Senators beer. He couldn’t

remember the one that Mary’s fiancé brewed, but this would do fine.

And he’d be fine here. He had heard Hawk mention this place once

or twice, and he’d decided to walk all the way to it from Mary’s

apartment.

As exciting as it had been to talk with her about Hawk—and as

grateful as he’d been for the permission—he had ended the evening

feeling like a specimen, a sympathetic object of study. Mary seemed

to recognize the same thing herself, and just as clearly to regret it,

but her own attempts at being natural had somehow made things

worse. In saying goodbye, she’d apologized for any awkwardness

and expressed the hope that their dinner might be considered “a first

try”—thereby heightening, once more, the atmosphere of scientific

inquiry. However appealing she might be, he’d been relieved to get

back out onto the streets of Georgetown, and now, a half hour later,

to this bar in Thomas Circle. The place was bringing him a step

closer to Hawk, the way smelling one of his shirts might do, were he

only permitted entry into the I Street apartment while Hawk was

away.

Two stools to his left, a slightly built man with dyed hair and

plucked eyebrows nodded to him. He nodded back and, never

having been by himself in a bar—let alone this kind of bar—worried

that he might have just given a signal that was open to

misinterpretation. As soon as his bottle of beer arrived, he got up,

deciding to drink it against the wall at the other side of the room. But

the man with plucked eyebrows shook his head and pointed to a sign

behind the bar. NO DANCING. NO CARRYING DRINKS.

Tim mouthed the word “thanks” just as the man’s friend returned

from the bathroom.

“You’re crazy,” said the man, resuming the argument he and his

friend had evidently been having.

“I am not—I repeat not,” said the bulkier friend, “putting in for

promotion.”

“You work at the Interior Department, Donald, not the Atomic

Energy Commission.”

The bartender, to keep them from exploding at each other, began

to sing “Don’t Fence Me In.”

“They still investigate,” said the Butch One, as Hawk would have

called him.

The fairy rolled his eyebrowless eyes and said nothing.

“There’s a Master List,” the bigger one insisted. “Of us.”

“No, there’s not,” said the fairy.

“Behave,” the bartender instructed him. “He’s the daddy.”

The two of them walked off toward the jukebox, leaving their drinks

where they were. The piano player was starting his break, so they

put in a nickel for “How High the Moon.”

The bartender, well-muscled and weatherbeaten, pointed to the

Butch One and speculated to Tim: “I guess when you’ve managed to

get out of Rich Square, North Carolina, you figure you don’t need to

be promoted on top of things. Where are you from?”

“New York City,” said Tim.

“Ah,” replied the bartender. “A hard case.” Meaning, Tim guessed,

that there was no place any bigger he could escape to, no

anonymous haven where he could be himself and—as he so

obviously needed to—relax.

Across the room a skinny Negro scolded his white boyfriend: “You

do so know. My black taffeta with the pleats!”

With a tilt of his head, the bartender signaled a bouncer to eject

the overexcited colored boy. Tim couldn’t hide a certain relief and

maybe even his feeling that justice was being done by the regulation

of such effeminacy. The bartender, he knew, could see him pining for

normality, for the chance to believe he still lived with the rest of the

world.

“It was more fun in here ten years ago,” the barman assured him.

“Soldiers every night. Of every stripe and kind.”

The cat still had Tim’s tongue, and the bartender made one more

attempt: “Let me guess. He’s married. Or ambisextrous?” Tim

laughed a little.

“Bingo,” said the bartender, moving away to mix someone else’s

drink. “Relax, apple pie,” he said by way of farewell. “But be careful

who you talk to.”

Tim wondered about the advice: Might someone actually hurt him?

Maybe there was a Master List? Could the Negro’s boyfriend, or

even the guy with no eyebrows, actually be an informant?

He stayed only another minute. While riding the streetcar home,

passing the Star’s building on Pennsylvania, he reached over the

open window to clean his hands in the raindrops that a

thundershower had left upon the glass. Then he dried himself with

his handkerchief, not wanting to smudge the ink when he took

Hawkins’ postcard, once more, from his pocket.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

September 8, 1954

The defense of Joe McCarthy against censure had begun presenting

itself this morning, but the senator’s talented young lawyer, Edward

Bennett Williams, still seemed to be spending the bulk of his effort on

keeping his client quiet. As to the allegation that McCarthy had

abused General Zwicker during the subcommittee’s February

hearings in New York, Williams had so far offered only the testimony

of a salesman who’d taken a tourist’s peek at that day’s brief open

session and could report that he had heard General Zwicker, under

his breath, refer to the junior senator from Wisconsin as a son of a

bitch. Which, it was now implied, had justified all that followed.

The censure hearing now stood in lunchtime recess, so Tim

lowered the radio on his desk and ate his sandwich. He looked out

the window at the Capitol lawn, still strewn with tree branches blown

down the other day by Hurricane Carol. Mary Johnson’s little kitchen

window, which Tim was now used to sitting beside through long,

difficult conversations about Hawkins Fuller and Paul Hildebrand,

had lost a pane of glass during the storm, whereas at Hawk’s

apartment, where Tim spent the hurricane’s worst hours, the loud

hum and rattle of the new air conditioner had blunted one’s

awareness that anything unusual was happening outside.

The appliance, extravagantly extolled by Hawk, was never off.

“Are we doing this just to keep warm?” Tim had laughingly asked

while they had sex one unseasonably cool, but still air-conditioned,

night. “That’s always the reason for doing this,” Hawk responded,

leaving unclear whether he was referring to his own low emotional

temperature or the futility of all human endeavor.

Over the past month, Tim had actually been allowed to spend the

night a couple of times. On these occasions, for long stretches Hawk

would hold him close, ostensibly against the air conditioner’s cold.

But even so, Mrs. Mesta’s party remained the last time they’d been

out in public together, and Tim still knew never to come over

unannounced, or with groceries, or to answer the phone without

being told to.

“Well,” said Tommy McIntyre, now hurrying into the office, “old

Joe’s hand just shook when he swore the oath.”

Tim put the radio back on; the recess was over, and there would

be no muzzling the defendant now that, at his own insistence, he’d

taken the witness stand.

“It’s a shame the republic has any other business!” crowed Tommy,

whose enjoyment of McCarthy’s travails was undiminished. “But your

friend Mr. Fuller will be here a little later, about something entirely

different.”

“My friend?” asked Tim, reflexively lying.

“He’s coming over with his boss, Morton. The great solon”—

Tommy pointed to Potter’s office—“is on their docket once again.

They’re all supposed to fret about our majority leader’s brilliant

suggestion that we break off relations with Russia.” Walking away,

Tommy added, in regard to Fuller: “Just thought you’d like to know.

Anticipation being the pleasure it is.”

Hawkins and Mr. Morton arrived at the high point of McCarthy’s

testimony about General Zwicker. The director of Congressional

Relations went in to see Potter on his own, while Fuller sat down on

the edge of Tim’s desk and began listening to the radio.

“Did you say ‘not fit to wear the uniform’?” asked Edward Bennett

Williams.

“No,” McCarthy answered. “I said he was not fit to wear the

uniform of a general.”

Tim cracked up. “The Jesuits would love that, Hawk!”

Fuller smiled.

Looking at him, Tim tried to imagine Hawkins years from now, with

a pipe, the two of them seated in front of the radio after dinner. It

was, he knew, a fantasy more ridiculous than any plot ever featured

on Mr. Keen, but the thought of it warmed him while debate

continued over Zwicker’s uniform. Tim thought of Hawk’s old navy

dress whites hanging in the closet on I Street; once or twice he’d felt

the urge to put them on, not to partake of their owner’s godlike

aspect but to assume the mantle of simple masculine normality, the

movie-and-magazine ideal he remembered from his own, presexual

World War II.

It was more fun in here ten years ago. Soldiers and sailors every

night. Of every stripe and kind.

A burst of whistling issued from Tommy McIntyre. Indifferent to the

business between Potter and Morton, he’d returned to the outer

office and cranked up the volume of the radio. “So, are the two of

you having supper together?”

“No,” Tim hastily answered.

“Good,” said Tommy, turning his face to Hawkins. “I need Mr.

Laughlin to dine with me.”

“Be my guest,” said Fuller.

The response, however casual, still implied that the permission

was Hawk’s to give, and the answer excited Tim all afternoon, long

after Hawk had left. He was still feeling a nervous pride from the

exchange when he and Tommy arrived at O’Donnell’s, down on E

Street.

They ordered the filet of sole, though Friday remained two days

away, and Tommy began their conversation with the news that

Howard Rushmore, an ex-Communist who for a little while had been

the subcommittee’s research director, had just become the editor of

Confidential magazine. “He was always pushin’ a story about Mrs.

Roosevelt and her nigger chauffeur. Well, maybe that legend of love

will finally see the light of print!”

Tim stared at the tines of his fork and figured Tommy would soon

get to the point of their being here.

After a long pause, the older man asked: “You know how he

perspires when he walks?”

Tim knew that he meant Potter. “Yes.”

“He did even then. Years before the legs were gone. I saw him do

it in ’38.”

Oh, I’ve known Mr. McIntyre for years.

“He was already trying to date Lorraine,” Tommy continued. “Her

old man was a fish dealer, a big wheel in town, and Charlie wasn’t

getting anywhere. Not as a potato farmer’s son who’d been working

in a cannery to put himself through State Normal College in Ypsilanti.

He’d wanted to go to law school, but no dough, and he’d ended up a

social worker in Cheboygan.” Tommy finished off his 7Up. “I think he

sweated from sheer strain, from the dull mighty effort he gave

everything. I remember seeing him one afternoon from behind a big

empty crate on Huron Street. His face was drenched.”

“What were you doing there?”

“Sleeping. Living. It was my first stay on what’s demotically known

as Skid Row, though in Cheboygan I never skidded. I stuck to the

fish paste on the sidewalk.” With a look, he indicated that there was

no need for Tim to ask questions. The story would come, unbidden.

“I’d been a reporter for three papers in Detroit, at least when I

wasn’t drinking. But at that point I’d been drinking since ’36, when I’d

done a little work for somebody’s campaign for governor, can’t

remember whose. Can’t remember any of that besides getting

knocked around pretty badly by some boys from the other side.”

He told the waiter to bring Tim a second old-fashioned. “And

another 7Up for myself.” Tim half understood that he was supposed

to drink tonight, in some act of surrogacy. Tommy looked at the

arriving old-fashioned in a way that suggested he was perilously

close to falling off the wagon.

“Yes,” he said, crunching a bread stick with his yellow teeth, “we

were both fine citizens of Cheboygan, Michigan. He stayed stuck in

the social-aid bureau and got to supervising it by the time he went off

to the war. But that was later.” Tommy crunched the bread stick. “In

’38 he was my caseworker, though they called it something else

back then.”

“Was he unfair to you?” asked Tim, fearing the winds of what he

now realized was an epic, ancient enmity.

“He was as just as Judge Hardy!” cried Tommy, with a laugh. “No,

let me clarify that. He was just to me.” His mottled face contracted

with anger. “Not to her.”

Tim knew he wasn’t referring to the future Mrs. Potter.

“Annie Larchwood,” said Tommy. “She’s still alive, though she

barely knows it. She’s a drinker, too. Became one after her husband,

Mike—an organizer, a Communist—got forced off his job on the line.

Need I say, Master Timothy, that he drank as well? He walked out on

her on his way to hell. Died from the stuff. I met Annie at his funeral.

Amplification: I fell in love with her at his funeral.”

Tommy’s skull looked like a grenade. Tim tried to signal that he

was paying close attention, as if that might keep the pin from being

pulled.

“She went on relief, and soon enough got to the end of the money.

To keep the checks coming, she pulled some kind of fast one, and

straight-arrow Charlie, who ran her case, too, cut her off. But then, in

a moment of weakness, when he was despairing over the

fishmonger’s daughter, he put her back on the rolls. After she agreed

to sleep with him.”

Tommy’s contempt was total—it embraced Potter’s rectitude as

much as his lapse.

“She gave in and got knocked up with the son Mike had never

managed to give her. The snot-nosed little issue turned fourteen last

year.”

Tim thought it an odd formulation. Last year?

“When I brought him to New York,” Tommy added. “He’s a filthy

punk, though he has his uses. Drink up.”

For the moment Tommy would go no further. In the brief silence,

Tim swallowed more of the old-fashioned. Then he asked: “What

makes you hate McCarthy so much?” It seemed the logical next

question; with his loathing for Potter now explained, Tommy could

move on to the next titanic grudge inside him.

The analysis that followed turned out to be patient, almost

professorial. “All of Annie Larchwood’s troubles began with the

hounding of her red husband, a better man than McCarthy or

Zwicker. All of Annie’s troubles continued with Charlie, who’s one of

nature’s blind little do-gooders. No,” he said, noting the puzzlement

on Tim’s face, “I’m not some old aggrieved Commie with a pious

beef. In fact, I’d make a pretty good anarchist; I told that to

Woodforde the other day.” He took a second and last forkful of fish.

“What I am mostly is a drunk, whether or not I’m drinking. Same way

you’re a Catholic, whether or not you’re taking Communion. Which

these days, I suspect, you’re not.”

“I hate Communists,” said Tim, trying to change the subject.

“Of course you do,” said Tommy, sweetly mocking.

“Does Senator Potter know he has a son?”

“Senator Potter knows what I tell him,” barked Tommy, before

resuming the mode of earnest tutelage. “Yes, I did have the pleasure

of imparting that news when I began helping the staff. Let’s say that

the possession of such knowledge has helped me to make our great

solon somewhat useful where the junior senator from Wisconsin is

concerned.”

Tommy finished the last of his 7Up, and with a tap of his index

finger commanded Tim to keep going on the old-fashioned. “Oh, it’s

not as if no one’s got nothing over me. Joe and Royboy know I got

imposed on Charlie by the automobile fellas, to keep him voting on

the straight and narrow. Yes, I gave the auto men a prior decade of

sober service, in the papers and in campaigns.”

Everybody’s money comes from someplace, Senator. Everybody’s

people come from someplace. Tim remembered the quick threat to

Potter, the poisoned meat in the sandwich of bonhomie that

McCarthy had served that afternoon last March. Tommy would have

heard the remark from the outer office, where he’d decided to wait.

“But Joe and Roy don’t know I got myself imposed on Charlie for

my own particular motives. And they don’t know I’ve got something

far bigger on them than they’ve got on yours truly.”

There would be no further explanation tonight. Tim reached for a

peppermint and kept his eyes on the tablecloth. “Why did you tell me

all this?” he asked at last.

“Because I’ve seen you looking at Mr. Fuller. And I know that your

life will be given to his as surely as Annie Larchwood got mine. I told

you because you’ll understand.”

Tommy pushed aside the just-brought coffee and leaned into the

table. His eyes shone with a brutal sympathy, letting Tim know that,

from this moment on, for the foreseeable future, he lived not just in

Hawkins’ clutches, but in Tommy McIntyre’s, too.

“I should go,” Tim said, weakly.

“Use it for a taxi,” said Tommy, refusing Tim’s dollar bills. “I know

where you’re headed.”

When he got to I Street, his head off-kilter from the old-fashioneds,

Tim looked up and saw that the apartment was dark. He wondered if

he should sit on the steps and wait until Hawk returned with some

weeknight conquest. For a few minutes he stood on the sidewalk,

trying to decide, until he felt an enormous, unexpected surge of

anger. In his mind’s eye, Hawk was bobbing atop the clean blue

ocean in his pressed naval uniform, while he himself was being

dragged to its weed-choked depths.

Drunk as he was, he could feel the hint of autumn in the air. A

“School’s Open Drive Carefully” poster flapped against the

streetlamp. NO DANCING. NO CARRYING DRINKS.

He walked up the building’s steps and, once inside the vestibule,

took down the super’s posted instruction that tenants keep their new

air conditioners pitched at a five-degree angle toward the street;

drips were damaging rugs and seeping into floorboards. On the back

of the paper, he wrote a note to leave in Hawkins’ mail slot:

You said knowledge is insurance. Against what? The chance

that somebody might turn out to be what he appears to be? That

somebody might not own somebody else? I’ll never own you, no

matter how many times I hum “You Belong to Me” in the shower.

But I belong to you—whether you like it or not.

After the cab ride, he had no money for even the streetcar. And so

he walked all the way home, miles, wishing he could sing in his

chains like the sea.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

November 10, 1954

With crowds to be controlled at both the eastern and western

approaches to the city, the District of Columbia police found

themselves split in two on the morning before Veterans Day. Across

the Potomac, on Arlington Boulevard, Nixon was dedicating the Iwo

Jima Memorial, and at Union Station trains were disgorging

hundreds of riders wearing “Make Mine McCarthy!” buttons. They

also carried placards (“Twenty Years of Treason!” “Joe Knows!”) that

sprang to sudden, vertical life once they hit the platform and began

marching to Capitol Hill. By eleven a.m. the corridors of the Senate

Office Building looked more like the floor of a nominating convention.

Debate on the censure resolution was at last under way, and though

things appeared to be moving in Senator Flanders’ direction, he

elected to remain behind locked doors.

Over in the Capitol building, two brightly colored items sat on Tim’s

desktop: the emerald-covered report that was now driving the

censure debate toward a vote, and an oversized birthday card for

Senator Kennedy, still recovering from back surgery in New York.

Festooned with greetings from the SOB, it now awaited Potter’s

signature here in the Capitol.

Miss Cook approached Tim’s desk, sighing: “That colored

corporal’s family is here. In the conference room.”

Tim looked at his watch. As they’d feared, Potter had failed to

make it back in time from the Iwo Jima dedication.

“Plan B,” said Tim, rushing off to the House cloakroom to press

Congressman Rhodes into service.

Corporal James Borum, a young Washingtonian who had enlisted

in the Marines in ’48 and died three years later in a North Korean

prison camp, had no connection with Rhodes’s home state of

Arizona, but once the congressman arrived in the conference room

near Potter’s office, there was at least an elected official who could

present a flag and decoration to the boy’s family.

Corporal Borum had no connection to Michigan, either, but from

time to time Potter’s interest in North Korean atrocities still broke

through the McCarthy drama like a weak, overlapping signal on the

radio dial. The senator’s office had lately decided to honor this

soldier, who had only this year been officially declared dead.

A grandmother, Mrs. Drumming, along with a brother and an aunt,

stood mute and respectful while Rhodes read the citation, though it

was apparent they would have preferred James Borum’s corpse,

never released by the North Koreans, to a medal. Tim also believed

he could detect in the brother’s face an awareness that the family,

told Senator Potter had been caught in traffic, was somehow being

honored and insulted all at once.

Tim wondered if he was supposed to say something about “a

grateful nation,” but when he shook Mrs. Drumming’s hand, he

wound up whispering, “I’m sorry for your trouble,” the words he’d

heard murmured at every Irish wake he’d ever been to.

And with that, embarrassed and relieved, he dashed off to the

Senate gallery.

The chamber was in an uproar. Desks were being pounded, as

refusals to yield reached the ceiling of the packed gallery, where all

eyes stayed on Jean McCarthy, sitting very straight under a statue of

John Tyler. Her smile, Pepsodent bright, was the same one she’d

had for the cameras the day she came back from New York with her

broken leg and Robert Jones announced his Senate candidacy.

As the debate moved toward a climax, her husband moved

irretrievably beyond his lawyer’s control. McCarthy’s buzzing

declamations stirred the reporters’ pens and thrilled the nerves of his

supporters: “It is not easy for a man to assert that he is the symbol of

resistance to Communist subversion, that the nation’s fate is in some

respects tied to his own fate. It is much easier, I assure you, to be

coy, to play down one’s personal role in the struggle for freedom.”

No, he would not let this cup pass. He would meet his end

insisting that he and freedom were one and the same. Coyness was

for others; it had been for Welch; it had been for Zwicker. Don’t be

coy with me, General…“I take it you would rather I be frank, that you

would rather acknowledge and accept the fact that McCarthyism is a

household word for describing a way of dealing with treason and the

threat of treason.”

“And so it is,” muttered one antagonist next to Tim.

“And so I shall,” declared McCarthy.

His citizen followers, their placards checked at the door to the

gallery, remained hopeful, but his dwindling corps of legislative allies

was already thinking of what-might-have-beens. After the army

hearings, when Eddie Williams began constructing a legal strategy,

Senator Dirksen had tried to start a rehabilitation campaign, but none

of the town’s best public-relations men smelled success in the client

being proffered.

If the vote goes against him, Tim thought, his followers will act as if

there’s been a coup d’état, and they’ll summon the whirlwind to fill

the vacuum. He looked over at Jean McCarthy, whose expression

had not changed, and he decided to get some air on the Capitol

steps.

Outside, he sat down behind a woman reading about Dr.

Sheppard’s murder trial in a copy of the Daily News that had been

discarded by one of the demonstrators from New York. Was there,

Tim wondered, more eternal verity in that story—the philandering

doctor who’d butchered his wife—than in this one? Weren’t Tommy

McIntyre’s politics dictated and trumped by his romantic obsession?

Kenneth Woodforde, Tim suspected, was an actual Communist.

But as such he would at least be a believer in something—as

opposed to Hawk, who believed in nothing, or Senator Potter, who

believed what he was told to. And as opposed to himself, a believer

in contradictions: that McCarthy was the devil doing the Lord’s work;

that Christ was Lord and yet His laws could be disobeyed.

Maybe real belief required imprisonment, or at least regimentation.

The POWs testifying before Potter had felt their bodies transformed

into organisms of certainty and faith—Out of that many men, nobody

cracked—by the very torture that had sought to break them. General

Airlie, perhaps never beaten or shot, nonetheless seemed to have a

creed that had been spit-polished into honest, unwavering sureness.

Which, Tim wondered, did he himself miss more? God’s love or

His authority? Where could he go—to what secular church—to turn

himself in?

He looked up at the nearest flagpole on the Capitol roof. Unlike on

the afternoon he’d been hired, nothing flew on it, not even

momentarily; no banner for Mill Valley, none for Cheyenne. No

reason to put his hand on his heart.

“Stormed at with shot and shell! Mildly they rode and—well? So

much for the ten thousand six hundred.”

Raising his glass, Fuller finished this brief Tennysonian tribute to

the 10,600 State Department employees around the world who had

by now, according to a quote from Scott McLeod in the Evening Star,

all been through the new security procedures.

“Yes,” said Mary, cutting into the last of her steak. “But only the

most elite troops have been through the Miscellaneous M Unit.”

“We happy few. We band of inverted brothers.”

She winced.

“You started it,” said Fuller.

“I know, I know,” she said, returning his smile and wondering why

she should be bothered by a direct admission of his being queer.

She wondered, for that matter, why she was out having dinner with

him here at Harvey’s. And she wondered most of all why she

continued to string out her engagement to Paul, as if they were

Victorian cousins waiting on an inheritance.

No, she was not, “in spite of everything,” in love with Fuller. She

had searched her feelings, honestly, in that department. Then what

was it?

“So, how are the capital’s cutest couple?” asked Hawkins.

He meant Jerry Baumeister and Beverly, who now went

everywhere together.

“Inseparable,” Mary answered.

“Good for them.”

“You mean it.”

“I do. Safe, companionable, detached. An ideal situation.”

“They’re thinking of getting married,” she protested.

“What could be more detached than that?”

She pushed her plate away. “Speak for your own parents.”

“Okay, change of subject: How did the brewer like the party?”

The Queen Mother had come to Washington, and the British

embassy had the day before given her a massive afternoon

reception, with room enough on the list for even Mary Johnson and

an escort. She had pressed Paul into service after Fuller mentioned

that he himself was taking Lucy Boardman, the hard little Saltonstall

relative who’d stayed on in the District after her summer course at

the National Gallery.

“He didn’t enjoy it as much as your companion seemed to,” said

Mary. “Anyway, it wasn’t a very hot ticket if the likes of me got to go.

The crowd looked like something out of Cecil B. DeMille.”

Both of them raised their heads at the sound of another voice.

“Probably even I could have gotten in.”

Two nights ago Mary had told Tim about her dinner plans with

Fuller, but she’d never expected to see him here.

Fuller was startled, too, though he didn’t let his expression

change. He pulled out a third chair from the table and, as Tim settled

himself, wondered about the gleam in his eye. Back in September,

Tim’s aggrieved note, left in the mail slot on I Street, could be

ascribed to drunkenness and the upset caused by McIntyre’s

revelations. Fuller had never mentioned it to him, just urged him to

find out the rest of McIntyre’s story.

But this?

“He missed my birthday,” said Tim, looking at Mary and pointing to

Hawk. “Eight days ago.” Then he turned to Hawk and pointed at

Mary: “She remembered.” Finally, he turned back to Mary and

pointed to Hawk: “Like I said, she forgot.”

“Maybe I’d better leave you two gentlemen alone,” said Mary.

“I’m pretty much always alone,” said Tim.

“Fuller, you should take him home.”

“Home?” asked Tim. “Where would that be? Not 2124 I Street.

That’s not home.”

“No,” said Fuller, calmly getting up. “But it’s where we’re heading.”

The two of them put Mary in a taxi and began walking west. Tim

was unsure exactly what fate awaited him; he wanted only to say

that he was sorry, that he shouldn’t have done what he just had. And

yet, after the hours he’d wound up roaming Capitol Hill this

afternoon, triply confused about the trinity of Hawkins, God, and

McCarthy, he couldn’t help himself. How easy, almost gay,

Charlottesville suddenly seemed. Right now he wanted not to be

slapped, but to be thrown under the wheels of the DeSoto that was

passing.

The silence, unbearable, continued as he and Hawkins turned the

corner onto I Street. “I’ll go home,” Tim finally said.

Still Hawkins said nothing.

“I’ll never do that again,” Tim promised.

“No, you won’t.”

Panic seized him; he waited for the next clause to strike like an ice

pick—because you’ll never be seeing me again.

Hawkins tugged him into an alley and pushed him against a wall.

“You’re right,” he said, his face inches from Tim’s. “You belong to me,

and as the advertisement says, I’m the man who has everything.

And I always will.”

He thought he could see Hawk having to struggle to get the words

out, having to make an effort to say something this cruel, and he

took a small, crazy comfort from that fact, like a man catching the

scent of flowers as he plunges off a ledge.

“Take it or leave it, Skippy. You’ve got five seconds.”

“I’ll take it.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

November 29, 1954

“It’s a great privilege to be with you tonight!”

At the distant podium, Jean McCarthy looked buxom but clerical, a

pretty white collar showing above her plain black dress. “I only wish

my husband could be here, too. I want you to know how deeply

touched Joe is by the tremendous fight you are waging.”

“Dear Christ,” said Hawkins, handing his mother’s opera glasses

to Tim. “Looks like yours truly isn’t the only State employee not

supposed to be here tonight.” With Hawk’s finger guiding his gaze,

Tim managed to see, a dozen rows down and over to the right, the

figure of Miss Lightfoot, whose hat suggested a highly alert chicken.

She was in full cry with the crowd of 13,000, chanting “WHO

PROMOTED PERESS?” while applauding Jean McCarthy.

“I can’t figure out the hat,” said Tim, who had to resist admiring the

zeal that had compelled this woman to flout the rules against political

activity by federal workers and travel all the way from Washington for

this rally in Madison Square Garden. “I think it’s maybe supposed to

be an eagle,” he guessed, still staring at the headgear.

“No, it’s the cuckoo on a broken clock,” said Hawkins, who’d never

told Tim about the interrogation its wearer had instigated, nearly a

year ago, in Room M305.

Every courting couple that Tim knew had gone to at least one

basketball game or boxing match at the Garden. In fact, Tom

Hanrahan had popped the question to Frances right here during a

welterweight bout. Tim supposed that tonight would be the closest

he’d ever get to such an experience; he’d even joked to himself that

the Garden would always be “our place” for him and Hawk, given

their both having been here before, however unknown to each other,

at the Draft Ike rally back in ’52.

He had certainly not expected to be with him here tonight. Tommy

McIntyre had called the apartment in Stuyvesant Town on Saturday,

as the Thanksgiving weekend began drawing to a close. Tim and

Frances and their mother had just come back from a matinee of

Teahouse of the August Moon (he’d been more curious to see Tea

and Sympathy), and Tommy had asked him to stay in New York a

little longer to be his eyes and ears at the anti-censure rally planned

for Monday at the Garden. Tim had thought it a strange request—

what could he see from these mezzanine seats that the papers

wouldn’t report or the radio wouldn’t air?—but he’d said yes. And

before he could think too much about it, knowing that Hawk

extended every holiday weekend as far as possible, he’d picked up

the phone and called the Charles Fuller residence at Park and

Seventy-fourth.

Mrs. Fuller had answered, her voice almost a whisper, not at all

the throaty dowager he’d been expecting. He’d almost wanted to tell

her it was “Skippy,” the namesake of her Bishop Sheen’s angel, but

she’d quickly handed the phone to Hawk, who explained that he was

on his way out to “a little party for the Saltonstall niece thriceremoved, or whatever she is.” He’d laughed at Tim’s own invitation

as soon as he heard it: “Are you trying to get me fired?” he asked,

going on to explain the provisions of the Hatch Act.

Tim hadn’t really thought of that, but knew, once Hawk cited the

prohibition, that he would say yes.

“I’m in,” Hawk had answered. “What could be more fun than a

chance to see the Hottentots drunk on political firewater?”

GOD BLESS MCCARTHY said a badge worn by the man on Tim’s

right. NO TO CENSURE, YES TO A MEDAL said his sign. The Pledge of

Allegiance, which now contained the congressionally authorized

words “under God,” had already been recited twice tonight, and a

roaming spotlight, on cue, had just fallen on the figure of Roy Cohn,

whose illumination provoked a tremendous roar as the former

committee counsel mounted the platform to give the last speech of

the evening. He was played onto the stage by the Hortonville

(Wisconsin) High School Band, whose members, living close by

McCarthy’s hometown of Appleton, had been flown to New York

earlier in the day.

“If the Senate votes to censure,” cried Cohn, maintaining the

volume if not profanity of his private conversations, “it will be

committing the blackest act in our whole history!”

“To hell with the Hatch Act,” Hawk said into Tim’s ear, over the

crowd’s screams of approval. “I should be putting this whole evening

on an expense report. Look at all the useful data I can give to

Morton. Names booed: Acheson, The New York Times. Names

cheered: Knowland, MacArthur, McCarran.”

“Yeah,” Tim shouted back. “It would have taken a regular Walter

Lippmann to figure out who’d make each list.”

“Skippy the Bitch!” said Hawkins. They both laughed as the crowd

thundered but, mindful of the need for protective coloring, they also

took care to applaud.

How easy, Tim thought, the last three weeks had been. The rules

were now plain, inviolable, the way it had been when God, not

Hawkins, had been God; the way it must be behind the Iron Curtain.

He told himself there was comfort in the end of aspiration, in knowing

this was all one would ever be allowed. He would let this be the other

Church that he was seeking, the only rules and authority he needed.

Everyone hurrahing for McCarthy knew, in fact, that his end was

near. The debating Senate had already voted cloture and would vote

on censure itself anytime now. One could picture the moment when

Jean McCarthy, in a sort of dewy, defiant mourning, would remove

her pretty white collar and make her dress completely black.

The Reverend Cuthbert O’Hara, once imprisoned in Red China—

an older, more persecuted version of Father Beane—rose to give the

benediction. Tim crossed himself, not for additional camouflage

against the crowd, but with a moment’s sincere shame over his

doubts and apostasy. He could not deny what he still believed in his

heart of hearts: that the censure of McCarthy would, despite

everything, be a victory for the Communists.

As his head came up from prayer, he tapped Hawkins on the arm.

“I’ve got to find a pay phone and make my call. You won’t run off?”

He didn’t know why he’d been asked to report in immediately—to

call collect, no less—rather than just give Tommy a description of the

rally when he got back to the office tomorrow afternoon. But as soon

as the phone in Washington picked up and he heard the older man’s

voice, it was clear: Tommy wanted the peculiar thrill of hearing Tim

reconstruct the futile rally in situ, amidst its actual dying roar. It was

also clear that the herald’s confusion and conflictedness were

exciting him in some further, cruel way.

Tim realized that Tommy was off the wagon. Through the line he

could hear the clink of a bottle and a glass, and no voice save

Tommy’s own, which gleefully interrupted his paraphrase of Jean

McCarthy’s remarks. “And to think it’s all because of Charlie’s little

boy!” Tommy cackled.

For a moment he thought Tommy was referring to himself. But

then he understood. “You mean Senator Potter’s son?”

“Yup, Charlie’s little bastard. The kid’s got ten fewer IQ points than

his father, which is saying something, but he’s a handsome enough

lad to speak to people’s weaknesses. You know what Joe’s

weakness is, don’t you?”

“Boys?” asked Tim, as flatly as he could.

Tommy laughed loudly. “Boys, girls, your old-maid auntie. When

he’s hammered he’ll grope anything—slobber over it with tender,

lustful kisses.”

This is what had happened in New York. This is what Alsop had

told Hawk about.

As the fading cries of the crowd continued to reach Tim from the

Garden’s exit ramps—“THE MAN! THE ‘ISM’! McCARTHY!”—

Tommy explained that the plan had been for the house detective to

rescue the boy “at a point where Joe had been compromised, and

photographed, yet nothing too serious had happened to the little

angel.” But there’d been “a bit of a backfire. After I’d paid him my

own good money, the damned house dick decided to bring the

picture to his boss’s offspring, our good friend Dave Schine. Jesus

Jumpin’ Christ! I didn’t realize I’d set up the little assignation on one

of the Schine family properties!”

Tim could hear Tommy pouring himself another.

“Does the boy’s mother,” Tim asked, “know what happened?”

“She’s too poor and too drunk to care,” answered Tommy, who

went on with his story. “Yes, that was my blunder. The house dick

decided the picture would fetch a higher price from the soon-to-be

Private Schine than the one it commanded from me. Dave could

keep the photo to protect Joe or to do him in. Either way, however he

inclined, it was worth something to him.”

One last multitudinous demand to know who promoted Peress

reached Tim’s ears, while out of his left eye he noticed Hawk

chatting up one of the red-white-and-blue-armbanded ushers,

somebody handsome. He cupped the receiver’s mouthpiece and

nearly shouted to Tommy: “What am I supposed to say? That I’m

sorry you failed?”

“Failed?” shouted Tommy. “I succeeded! I may have brought Joe

down a little more slowly, a trifle less spectacularly, but coming down

he is, because of those hearings. Which all derived, Master Laughlin,

from what me and Charlie’s boy managed to accomplish, however

inadvertently, in that hotel room. Every bit of pressure to treat Schine

special in the army derived from that picture—not the goddamned

nothing of a picture they wrangled over in the Caucus Room! Dave

let Joe know he had it, and from that moment on, if Royboy insisted

Dave get an ice cream sundae every morning at reveille, Joe was

ready to initial the request.”

“MAKE MINE McCARTHY!” The audience had dispersed to the

point where the chant, like an echo of something long past, barely

made it up the ramp to the pay phone, which Tim, pretending the

connection had been broken, now hung up.

He left with Hawk, walking east on Fiftieth. “I feel sick” was all he

said as they reached Broadway.

“You can’t be. You had exactly half a hot dog.”

Tim shook his head.

“Are you off your milk? Haven’t had any since noon?”

If he were drunk, the way he’d been that night at O’Donnell’s, he

really would be throwing up. As it was, he managed to keep in step,

turning south with Hawk below the Winter Garden Theater, over

which Mary Martin’s hamstrung effigy flew as Peter Pan.

What Tommy had told him: Was it the fantasy of a revenge-crazed

drunk or potentially the scoop of Kenneth Woodforde’s—maybe even

Joe Alsop’s—life? If it was true, why did the thought of telling the

details to Hawk now make him feel sicker than six old-fashioneds

would? Because harboring someone else’s filthy secret made his

own secret, his love, feel filthy as well, as if it, too, were nothing

more than appetite, compulsively gratified. Telling the story would

make things even worse. Hawk would claim to be as amused by

McCarthy’s helplessness as he’d been by the crowd’s fervor—or as

he was this minute by the city’s night crawlers, passing by with their

own secrets.

The two of them entered Times Square, where all the neon in the

world could not lift the fact of night. “Surely you’re not going to walk

me home?” Tim asked, as playfully as he could. “All the way down

Broadway and over to Stuy Town?”

“Nope,” said Hawkins, squeezing the back of his neck as they

passed the statue of Father Duffy.

“And surely the night is too young for Hawkins Fuller to be going

home by himself?” He smiled up at Hawk, showed him, as he’d been

doing for weeks, what a sport he could be.

“Yep,” said Hawkins. “Way too early.”

They were soon at Forty-third Street. Hawk faced west, ready to

cross, and Tim realized: the clarinet player.

Should he keep chattering and walk him there, be the ultimate

good sport, as they’d imagined he’d have been if they’d encountered

each other three years ago, at the Draft Ike rally?

No, he wouldn’t, because he had just seen it, only feet away,

sitting in this lurid forest of light like a cottage, its own weak, nonneon glow making it pure, a clean well-lighted place, the one he now

knew he had to reach, the place where they would take him in. This

was the secular Church he had been seeking.

“Okay, Hawk, I’ll see you in the funny papers.”

Already crossing the street, Fuller turned back for a second and

snapped off a mischievous salute.

Tim returned it and then walked in the opposite direction, toward

the little structure nestled so oddly in Times Square, like a single

cotton stitch upon a sea of sequins.

He opened its door and entered the first of the three offices it

contained. He filled out several forms, told a lie on one of them, and

then, at 10:45 p.m., raised his right hand and enlisted in the Army of

the United States.

PART THREE

DECEMBER 1954–NOVEMBER 1956

America I’m putting my queer shoulder to

the wheel.

—ALLEN GINSBERG

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

December 25, 1954

The homily was coming from Washington’s National Cathedral, but

as Mary gave half her attention to its telecast by NBC’s New Orleans

affiliate, she could hear actual church bells, their sound arriving on a

light wind from Jackson Square, half a mile away.

Her father called out from his study: “Mary, my darlin’, your

gentleman is on the telephone.”

“I’ll be right there.”

She walked, hesitantly, toward the other room, feeling guilty over

her father’s use of “gentleman” rather than “fiancé.” She had never

told Daddy about the engagement to Paul; not when it was made,

not when it was broken.

Mr. Johnson rose from his wooden swivel chair and tilted the

shade of his brass desk lamp, as if to allow his daughter a softer light

in which to conduct what the look on her face indicated would be a

difficult conversation.

“Paul,” she said, taking the receiver.

“Merry Christmas, Mary.”

“I had the television on. I could hear Wilson’s grandson—Dean

Sayre—giving the sermon in D.C.”

“Right,” said Paul, uncomprehendingly. He had no more taste for

historical trivia than for the immediate political kind.

“Are you with your family?” Mary asked.

“Yes, we’re just back from church. Mount Olivet Lutheran, not the

cathedral.”

“Daddy and I didn’t even make the effort. We’ve gotten to be very

freethinking in the last couple of years.” She tried laughing. “Actually,

his knee is bothering him. He just didn’t want to go out.”

“Knee-thinking.”

“I suppose.” Bless his heart. She felt a surge of affection toward

Paul’s effortful wit.

“Look, Mary,” he said, after a pause. “There’s a girl called Marjorie

Wheeler. She keeps books for my brother, and I’m wondering if it’s

okay for me to take her to a party next week, for New Year’s Eve.”

“Of course.”

“Okay. It just felt funny. I wanted to check.”

He was enough like other men to want her jealous over this—and

she was jealous, a little bit—but he was also nice enough for the

request to be genuine. She could picture him, a thousand miles

away, looking at his shoes.

“Honest, Paul.”

As she said it, she felt another small wave of affection. Maybe, if

he hadn’t always been so solicitous of her feelings, he might have

drowned her reluctance, overwhelmed it, and floated the romance to

an altar. But she’d been the same way with him; even now the two of

them were left stumbling through a handful of courtesies before they

could decently hang up the phone.

She had broken the engagement three weeks ago on the illogical

grounds that Paul was the marrying kind. Her attraction to that solid

type depended to some extent on a belief in herself as its opposite—

a girl still cut out for unusual adventures and unusual personalities,

like Fuller, or even Tim Laughlin. Yes, it was time to put an end to her

girlhood, but she couldn’t yet put an end to this sense of herself, or

to the feeling that the man who could truly speak to it might still walk

through the door of Congressional Relations or send a drink to her

table at Harvey’s. To marry Paul—with whom on some days, usually

bad days at the office, she felt she was in love—would be to get

married for the same reason Beverly and Jerry Baumeister now

seemed likely to: to find shelter from one’s particular storm.

She went back to the living room and saw her frail-looking father

reading the Times-Picayune. They usually cooked on Christmas, but

today they would settle for a restaurant in the Quarter, sitting down to

dinner at about the time Beverly and Jerry would be exclaiming over

their hearts of lettuce with Russian dressing, the first course of the

special at the Hotel Harrington, to which Beverly had said they would

go with her boys after seeing the tree on the White House lawn.

The NBC commentator, in an ecumenical spirit, was now reading

Pius XII’s Christmas message, apparently composed before the

pope’s collapse on December 2, the day of McCarthy’s censure—a

fact, Mary suspected, that Miss Lightfoot, had she been Catholic,

would no doubt have found significant. “If only,” spoke the stricken

pontiff, “men knew how to live out their whole lives in that

atmosphere of joy, with those feelings of goodness and peace, which

Christmas pours forth on all sides, how different, how much happier

the earth would be!”

Mary also wondered what Miss Lightfoot would think of a

homosexual joining this man’s army. Returning to Washington after

the rally in New York, Tim at first had said nothing about his

enlistment or anything else. He’d made himself scarce until she’d

called his office, at which point he spoke only of how Lyndon

Johnson, in preparation for the Democrats’ takeover of the Senate,

was managing to overwork even the Republicans.

Things had certainly not been busy in CR—it was easier selling

Ike’s foreign policy to the midterm-triumphant Democrats than it had

been to some of the former Republican majority—and so Mary had

at last insisted on Tim’s joining her for a long weekday lunch at

Reeves’ cafeteria, where over ice cream sodas he admitted that he

was due to report for basic training at Fort Dix on January 11.

She’d insisted on knowing why, and he’d responded with

unconvincing declarations about anticommunism and doing his bit

and putting his money where his mouth was, refusing all the while to

admit that volunteering was his extreme means of breaking with

Fuller. Mostly he’d concentrated on his ice cream soda, which he

may have hoped would get his weight above the minimum required

by the induction physical.

Even now she didn’t know why he’d joined, though she imagined

that he would have the self-discipline to get through it. He had been

able at Reeves’, after all, to resist asking her about Fuller, the

cherished topic of their every previous conversation. She gathered

that he’d not even seen him since the night he’d signed up in Times

Square.

He didn’t tell her the enlistment was a secret, but she’d kept it one

until leaving Washington three nights ago, when she air-mailed a

Christmas card to Fuller at his parents’ apartment in New York: Can’t

you do something about this? Or undo it?

In fact, she’d been hoping, when the phone rang just before, that it

might be Fuller instead of Paul.

Frances’s baby reached for the celery stalks in the cut-glass

centerpiece and shrieked when she was thwarted. Uncle Alan, his

nerves even now a little raw from the war, winced at the sound.

Apologizing with a glance, Frances tried to soothe her daughter with

a tiny spoonful of mashed turnips.

Except for little Maria Loretta, the Christmas dinner table had

fallen silent, Grandma Gaffney having made it clear she blamed her

own daughter and son-in-law for her grandson Timothy’s absence.

Frances’s attempt to explain it had only made things worse.

“What did you say was the name of that place?” asked Grandma

Gaffney.

“Fides.”

“Sounds like a dog.”

“It’s a Catholic settlement house in Washington,” Frances noted

once again. “On Eighth Street,” she added, not that the address

meant anything to anyone around the table. “Tim told me in his card

that he’d spend Christmas Eve giving out food baskets to the poor,

and that afterward he’d go to midnight Mass.”

Grandma Gaffney, who had not been to church in forty years and

who found pious Catholics more irritating than the Jews, once more

frowned.

“I’ll bet Tim’s just trying to save his money,” offered Paul Laughlin,

knowing his mother-in-law would find this explanation more tolerable

than any involving charity.

“You could have sent him a bus ticket,” said Grandma Gaffney.

“He didn’t seem all that happy to be here at Thanksgiving,” Tim’s

mother pointed out. She’d been crumpling a paper napkin in her right

hand. Uncle Alan wasn’t the only one with nerves.

“I’ll bet he’s just too damned busy down there,” suggested Uncle

Frank. “That’s a big job he’s got, for a kid. Though I wish he was

working for McCarthy and not this Potter guy. You watch,” he added,

wiping up some cranberry sauce with a slice of bread, “Joe’ll bounce

back.”

Tom Hanrahan, while hardly a foe of McCarthy’s, scoffed at the

possibility. “I read that Joe commissioned a poll about running for

president in ’56. I think he got three percent.”

“Tim is fine,” said Paul Laughlin, changing back the subject. “Our

card said he’ll soon be taking a couple of trips to Michigan with the

boss, but that even so he’ll get up to New York before Easter. He

promises.”

No, thought Frances, he hadn’t been happy here at Thanksgiving.

She could remember when they’d gotten home from Teahouse of the

August Moon and she’d found him in their parents’ bedroom, his

sleeves rolled up, talking on the phone with that Irishman he’d

mentioned from his office. When the call ended, she’d asked about

the cuff links he’d set down on a doily. “HF?”

“Hawkins Fuller,” she remembered him saying without pleasure or

defiance—without anything, really, except maybe a kind of

exhaustion. “It’s a man’s name. He gave them to me.”

She’d looked at her brother and left the room, saying a prayer for

him, as she was doing now, while she let the baby lick a drop of

gravy from her fingertip.

“My lung man is in the capital,” said Fuller’s uncle Ned, with some

difficulty. “When I come down to see him, you and I should have

lunch at the Harvard Club. We need to have a discussion.”

Uncle Ned’s poor health was the chief reason most of the Fuller

family had gathered here in New York instead of Maine for Christmas

dinner. Looking at Ned’s skeletal frame, Hawkins couldn’t

understand how his uncle might weather a trip to the District, let

alone why he continued to keep one of his specialists down there.

Fuller’s father was even more quiet than his brother-in-law today,

and as the first round of cocktails jingled into the room on an old cart,

Mrs. Fuller appeared so relieved by the distraction that she didn’t

bother to check her wristwatch, as she usually did, to make sure it

was at least past one.

Her sister, Hawkins’ unmarried aunt Valerie, finally put a topic

upon the air, expressing agreement with the French parliament’s

decision to reject a NATO treaty that would allow the Germans to

rearm. Valerie’s one great affair of the heart having occurred in Paris

thirty years ago, her approval of all things French was expected to

last a lifetime.

Mrs. Fuller, an internationalist who still regarded Wendell Willkie

as having been a most attractive candidate and man, wanly

disagreed: “Adenauer says he’s prepared to be patient.”

“So, in a way, was Hitler,” said Aunt Valerie. “The last time.”

From across the room, Hawkins looked at the small tableau

presented by his mother and aunt. Neither was exactly driving the

holiday spirit at full throttle. By way of contrast, a picture from

yesterday’s papers sprang to his mind: Mrs. Perle Mesta,

surrounded by gamboling orphans at the Christmas party she’d

given in her Washington apartment. The only children here above

Park and Seventy-fourth were in a room down the hall with their

mother, the sister Hawkins disliked only a little less than the one at

Uncle Ned’s New Mexico place, over which they’d all be fighting, it

now seemed, soon enough.

Hawkins’ brother-in-law, Robert, an orthopedic surgeon whose

unhappiness lay in knowing that he would never be department chief

as his father had been, began a long, almost footnotable

denunciation of the hospital that was allowing this situation. Robert’s

disappointment hung ever more thickly on the living-room air until the

girl at last called them to the table, where the food might be easier to

push around than the conversation.

Mr. Fuller sliced the ham.

“Excellent work,” said Hawkins. “Robert’s father couldn’t have

done better.” When no one laughed, he added that it was “without

question a neater job than Dr. Sheppard would have managed.”

“Hawkins, honestly,” said his mother.

“You’re right,” he replied, retracting his reference to the Ohio

surgeon who’d finally been convicted of slaughtering his wife. “He

was only an osteopath, hardly fit for comparison.”

He knew, even as she begged him to change the subject, that his

mother was thanking God for the life and mischief in him, for the

vitality that she, somewhere inside, still had a measure of herself—

even if, except in the televised presence of Bishop Sheen, she

retained no ability to display it. Mrs. Fuller was now dutifully back on

the subject of German rearmament, pointing out to her sister that

even Churchill was for it.

“It will provoke the Russians,” declared Valerie.

“And this time they’ll overrun both the Germans and the French,”

said Mr. Fuller, verbal at last. “And probably our own boys over there

to boot.”

Hawkins found himself imagining the front lines of such a war,

maybe a year or so from now. They’ll have to put rocks in his

pockets, he thought, just to keep him from bouncing out of the jeep.

When international affairs were exhausted, Robert got everyone to

the mince pie with a renewed recitation of the hospital’s

underappreciation of orthopedists. Hawkins tried to remember: Didn’t

Mary’s father need to get his knee fixed? Hadn’t that also been in her

Christmas card? He excused himself and went to his old room,

across from the one inside which his sister’s children were still

stuffed. On the desk, beneath the St. Paul’s pennant and the picture

of Bill Tilden—who couldn’t have guessed that one?—Mary’s

envelope still sat. It was next to a pair of whimsical mittens that the

relentless Saltonstall girl had knitted. He supposed she wanted him

to think of her as a spirited girl, Marie Antoinette playing the

milkmaid.

He took a piece of stationery from the desk’s middle drawer and

wrote: “Dear Skippy, I didn’t raise my boy to be a soldier….”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

January 10, 1955

“It’s hard to know what to save,” said Tim, looking at a Herblock

cartoon of McCarthy as a baboon. He’d clipped it from the Post eight

months ago.

“Save yourself,” said Tommy McIntyre, who’d just approached the

desk that Tim was cleaning out. “Let Uncle Sam feed you three

squares a day. Put on a little flesh. Get away from all this.”

“Oh, he’ll be back,” said Miss Cook, bustling in with Tim’s

separation form. “Look at Senator Barkley!” Harry Truman’s vice

president had in November been elected to his old Senate seat and

the other day restored to his committee chairmanships.

“Perhaps even ‘the Jones boy’ will one day reappear among us,”

offered Tommy.

“Where is Bob Jones?” asked Miss Cook. Seven months after the

Maine primary, no one seemed to know his location or what he might

be doing. With no response to her question, Miss Cook proceeded to

muse on the difficulty of keeping up with all the changes on the Hill—

in particular, of trying to imagine the Democrats’ Senator McClellan

heading what everyone would almost certainly keep calling the

McCarthy committee.

“As hard to believe as another Roosevelt in the Congress,” said

Tommy, reminding them that both branches of the family, Teddy’s

and FDR’s, had for most of this century confined themselves to the

other end of Pennsylvania Avenue. But last night, Jimmy Roosevelt,

the second son of the late president to be elected to the House, had

stolen the show at the Congressional Club reception.

“You take care of yourself,” said Miss Cook. “And send us a

postcard.” She gave Tim a kiss, and left him alone with Mr. McIntyre.

“You going to wait around for Charlie? To say goodbye?” asked

Tommy.

“I don’t think so,” said Tim, recalling the lie in his Christmas card

home. I’ll be visiting Michigan with the boss. He hadn’t needed such

embellishment, but he’d been determined, and still was, not to tell his

mother and father and Frances about enlisting—not until he was

irretrievably at Fort Dix. And he’d be there in less than twenty-four

hours, if he could keep himself, for one last day, from tearing across

town to the State Department or, even worse, the apartment on I

Street.

“But I did like Senator Potter,” he finally said. “He was nice to me.”

He paused, regretfully, and added: “I could have worked harder.”

“You worked hard enough,” Tommy assured him. “And when

Charlie caught you looking out the window, he just figured you were

in love.”

“I was in love.”

“You are in love. But don’t worry, Timothy. Charlie thinks it’s a girl, I

guarantee you. You know the extent of his imagination.”

Tim went back to filling the box. He had never admitted anything to

Tommy, but never lied to him either, certainly never pretended there

was a girl.

“You won’t forget Mr. Fuller,” said Tommy, in the low tones of a

fortune-teller. “Not just because you’ve started toting a rifle. Any

more than I forget her by hoisting a glass.”

“Are you hoisting one these days?”

They were both surprised by his nerve in asking. Unlike Tommy’s

questions—asked only to make plain that the asker already had the

compromising answer—Tim’s was an actual inquiry, a way of

learning whether there was anything he should be doing to help this

cruel, loving man.

“Yes, I am, Timothy. I am indeed.”

“I could tell from the phone call I made from the rally. When you

told me all that awful stuff.”

“Awful?” countered Tommy, already again combative. “You might

consider all the good that ‘awful stuff’ did.”

“What good has it done you?”

McCarthy had fallen but Potter was still on his prosthetic feet, and

Tommy, his hunger as yet unappeased, looked to be on his way back

to the Cheboygan gutter from which he’d been plucked. However

sincerely Tim had asked his last question, he could feel the thrill of

its aggression, a sensation similar to what he’d experienced one

night a few months ago when to his astonishment Hawkins, with

some wordless guidance from his hand, had insisted that Tim

penetrate him. The act had ended up as another form of submission,

during which he seemed to be gathered in, enfolded and protected in

a different way from the usual, but for an instant, at its beginning, he

had enjoyed a sense of himself as being brutally in charge.

Now, as then, he subsided quickly into a renewed willingness to

serve. “There’s a Father Hackett,” he told Tommy, “over at St. Peter’s

on Second and C. He meets on Monday nights with people who—”

“People who are drunks?” asked Tommy.

“Yes.”

“Why should you want me sober? After all these terrible things I’ve

done and insisted on pouring into your ears, I should think, Timothy,

you’d be glad to see me trampled by the pink elephants.”

Tim wrote out the church’s address and Father Hackett’s name on

one of Potter’s business cards. He handed it to Tommy, whose

bloodshot eyes he was now close enough to see. He could also

smell a peppermint fighting the whiskey on Tommy’s tongue.

“You said it yourself,” declared Tim. “We’re alike. But I don’t have

what you’ve got to fall back on.”

“A taste for drink to prop you up?”

“No,” said Tim. “I’m you without any anger. And I have a feeling I

scare you.”

I didn’t raise my boy to be a soldier.

Here in the apartment it was even harder to decide what he should

pack or throw away. He could put Hawkins’ letter into the silky cloth

flap inside the suitcase lid—but what was he to do with the empty

milk bottle? Bring it to Fort Dix? Should he have shipped it to

Frances and Tom’s on Staten Island with the other stuff he’d sent

this afternoon, which wouldn’t arrive in New York until he himself had

reached Jersey?

One suitcase was all he’d carry; he supposed its contents would

fill about half the footlocker they’d give him in the barracks. Stuffing

his missal in between some underwear and socks, he again resolved

to make his confession before Easter. It would be too risky to let an

army chaplain hear it; he would take a bus into town, or even wait till

he had a pass for New York City.

Folded inside the missal was a prayer he had clipped from the

Star, a newly approved English version of the words for extreme

unction, murmurs to bring the dying back from the brink or escort

them safely over it. O Redeemer, we implore Thee, by the grace of

the Holy Spirit cure the illness of this sick man and heal his wounds;

forgive his sins; and drive away from him all pains of mind and body.

In Thy Mercy, give him his health, inward and outward…. He had

memorized the sentences, and he whispered them now.

Without a knock, the door opened. Hawkins, in his Harris overcoat,

came toward him, stopping inches away, looking first into his eyes

and then around the room. Picking the milk bottle up from the desk,

he reached into his pants for two cents, the refund for an empty. He

gave Tim the pennies and put the bottle into one of his overcoat’s

huge pockets.

“Do you want the cuff links back?” Tim asked.

Hawkins took hold of him, tightly, and pressed him against the

overcoat, damp with drizzle. “You don’t need to do this,” he said.

“Yes, I do,” said Tim. “Besides,” he added, trying to sound

cheerful, “the draft will get me eventually.”

“I’m not going to wait for you, you know.”

It was hardly a possibility that required denial. The two of them

burst out laughing.

“Come on,” said Hawkins, tilting his head toward the front door.

“Finish up.”

They were going out? Tim didn’t think he could bear it, though it

would be worse if Hawk started pushing him toward the bed, now

stripped of its sheets.

“I have a five-thirty bus to catch,” said Tim. “A.M.”

Hawk threw the last handful of things into the suitcase before

picking it up and moving him out the door.

The night was warm and the drizzle had just stopped, and the

Capitol, shiny as mercury, seemed like a spaceship ready to

disgorge Michael Rennie in The Day the Earth Stood Still, which Tim

now remembered seeing one Saturday night up at Fordham with

Bobby Garahan. Hawk said they would pass up the streetcar and

walk down Pennsylvania Avenue, whose shabbiness, he declared,

was not a disgrace but rather a gesture of humility by the strongest

republic on earth. “You think so?” Tim asked, trying to keep the air

crowded with chatter, dreading the wordless moments when the

swish of the rattan suitcase against Hawkins’ coat was the only

sound.

“Two more blocks,” Hawk said, pointing to the Old Post Office,

their destination, a gigantic Romanesque pile between Eleventh and

Twelfth streets. Once there, Hawkins took them around the back to

an unlocked door. “Tip from an FBI friend,” he explained.

Hoover’s Bureau now had a portion of its training academy in the

building, which the Postmaster General had long ago ceded to a

motley assortment of small federal agencies and government record

collections. Fuller led Tim through the dim after-hours light to a bank

of elevators. “Not that one,” he said, instructing Tim to wait for

another car. “Number one is solely for the use of Edgar and Clyde.

Or so I hear.”

They rode to the ninth floor, as high as any of the elevators went.

Stashing the suitcase by a radiator, Hawkins then piloted them

through a door and into the clock tower, which rose several stories

and could be scaled only by ladders attached to its stone walls. Up

they climbed, past the kind of narrow windows designed for medieval

archers holding off a siege. Going first, looking like a tweedcostumed Errol Flynn, Hawkins made fast acrobatic progress toward

the tower’s bell-less belfry. His sudden arrival at the top, where no

windows or screens enclosed the arches, startled a dozen pigeons

from their nighttime roost; they clattered into flight, taking off in the

direction of the White House.

He pulled Tim up the last steps and onto the belfry’s floor, so that

the two of them stood above the tower’s northern clockface, looking

down on Pennsylvania Avenue and the Star’s building across the

street. The sight of it, and its streetcar stop, was so painful that Tim

moved to another arch, one that faced more to the east. Through it

he could see the Navy Yard and the smokestacks of St. Elizabeth’s,

the insane asylum still holding Ezra Pound.

“You think I’ll wind up there?” he asked.

“Doubtful,” Hawkins replied. “I have the higher actuarial risk. You

know, the mad Mayflower type.”

Softly, Tim said, “I have to get over you.”

“Yes, you do.”

“Then let’s take desperate measures!” Tim brightly cried, turning

around to face Fuller with a smile. “Hawk,” he said, pointing to the

overcoat’s pocket, “hand me that.”

Fuller gave him the empty milk bottle, which Tim took back to the

Pennsylvania Avenue arch.

“Hold me over the ledge.” The tower’s stone shelf extended far

enough out to block any view of the sidewalk below. “Just hold my

ankles so I can lie on my stomach and see over.”

Hawkins gave him a skeptical look but took hold of him above his

loafers. “This may be the only part of you I’ve never touched.”

“Don’t make me laugh,” said Tim, inching forward on his stomach

until he could finally see the sidewalk. No one was coming. The milk

bottle, still in his right hand, caught the moonlight. Empty of gold or

frankincense, it was still the most precious casket he could offer up

to God, the treasured thing that he could renounce along with its

original giver. He loosened his hand and let it fall three hundred feet

to the ground. The sound that came back up wasn’t glassy at all, just

a small pop, the kind made by a gun that had been fitted with a

silencer.

Hawkins reeled him in and set him down. “You can keep the two

cents,” he said.

In one corner of the belfry there was a small pile of blankets, none

too clean, left over from others’ trysts. Fuller moved the stack to a

different corner of the tower and sat down on it. Their faces, he

explained, would be awakened by the light of the sun when it rose in

the east. “Don’t worry,” he said, coaxing Tim toward him. “I’ll get you

to your bus.”

As the wind rushed through the arches, Hawk held him, tenderly

stroking the side of his face, trying to transfer from his own body

what Tim realized, with fresh despair, was relief at his departure.

He clenched his teeth, summoning the resolve to say it: “Promise

you won’t write.”

“I promise,” Hawkins said.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

March 11, 1955

69th Infantry Division

Fort Dix, N.J.

March 11, 1955

Dear Francy,

Well, I’m 5½ weeks into it, and maybe this time I’ll get the

whole way through. “Last time, you will recall”—as one of our

old serials used to say—I made it to nineteen days before that

chest cold put me in the camp hospital. That got me “recycled”:

everybody who drops out has to start over from the beginning,

because it’s too hard to find slots in medias res. (How much

Latin do you remember?)

So, guess what? This round, for everything except knowledge

of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, my first set of marks are

even lower than the last. This is attributable, I guess, to natural

incompetence and a tougher company commander, a second

lieutenant who’s very demanding but nice enough underneath.

So far he’s called me “shitbird” only twice, and he’s allowed us

to perform the rifle-reassembly test in simple lights-out darkness

instead of with blindfolds. (Some commanders do that—I’m not

kidding.)

So: two and a half weeks to go.

Coming in, back in January, I was told to gain ten pounds; I’ve

managed to lose three. It’s so cold here that the barracks

furnace (coal! just like 9th Avenue) never stops puffing. But for

real bone-rattling chill, nothing can beat last week’s bivouac. We

were doing “camouflage and concealment” maneuvers, and I

couldn’t puncture the can of evaporated milk with the opener:

the stuff had frozen solid!

I’ve got the top bunk again. The other seven guys in the

squad are mostly like the ones I used to give a wide berth to

back at St. Agnes’, but I’ve made friends with a nice doctor (they

draft them in droves) who’s got a wife (pregnant) back home.

Strange to think of Dad being here in the CCC twenty years

ago. (He once told me it was the only place he ever saw reefer!)

I’m sorry I haven’t written. You scold me about it worse than

Mom, who’s sort of given up on the subject. You ask if I’m

running away from something, or someone. Mostly the drill

instructor! He’ll actually pound you on the back if you’re not

marching fast enough with your rifle. (The M-1 is a lot easier to

reassemble than it is to carry.)

I might have to welsh on my Easter promise. On Sunday, April

10th, I could be on my way to wherever it is I’ll be doing

Advanced Individual Training (not as customized as it sounds). I

don’t have my assignment yet, and God only knows what they’ll

decide I’m suited for, but that’s the story.

Say hi to Tom and kiss Maria Loretta for me.

Love,

Beetle Bailey

P.S. Please don’t worry. All shall be well.

Timmer xxx

Folding the letter, he wondered what it would be like to run away

from something with somebody, the two of you fleeing the same

thing together. In the papers, Princess Margaret’s RAF boyfriend

was now saying that they would be willing to accept exile if they were

allowed to marry. It sounded like the grandest of fates: to be safely

joined in some realm beyond the one that had refused to provide the

two of you a place. Of course, all of this first assumed that both of

you actually wanted each other.

He had trouble being ashamed of writing so few letters, not when

he always had more to leave out than put in. Was he really

supposed to tell Francy about the guy in the squad who was, he felt

sure, like himself—this draftee clerk from a New York City

government office who had pronounced the old olive-drab uniforms

more “attractive” than the new Army Green ones and observed that

camouflage-and-concealment sounded “a little like Max Factor’s

latest”?

Maybe that guy would be the one to bug out? To go sobbing to the

headshrinker in the camp hospital? Actually not, thought Tim. More

likely it would be the loudmouth from Bridgeport who loved to hold

his M-1 in one hand and his crotch in the other, and say—

This is my rifle

This is my gun

This is for killing

This is for fun—

as if it weren’t the two-hundredth time they’d all heard it.

The falling marks he’d just mentioned to Francy still had him

slightly above average in “coordination” and “resourcefulness” (no

one understood how they measured it), but below par in

“aggressiveness.” All this had probably been predictable from the

Armed Forces Qualifying Test he’d taken at the examining station in

D.C. before leaving for Fort Dix. He’d run into Kenneth Woodforde at

a cafeteria right after sitting the exam, and the journalist had mocked

his enlistment, revealing himself to be 4-F and expressing regret only

about having gotten his classification on physical rather than moral

grounds. “They discovered my bad shoulder before my voter

registration,” he said, the first concrete indication Tim had ever had

that Woodforde might really be a Communist.

Department of State

Washington, D.C.

March 11, 1955

Dear Dog-Face,

I don’t know how you can sign yourself that way, and it’s the

last time I’ll ever use it as a salutation, but there you go.

Thanks for the snapshot. White sidewalls, no? Isn’t that what

they call the haircut? They make you look even younger.

Are you sure they can’t detail you back to civilian life for a

week or two? I could use some extra help here: Senator

Knowland wants to start World War Three by having the 7th

Fleet intercept a Finnish tanker that’s heading to Red China to

deliver jet fuel, and Beverly is spending more time over at the

Congressional Secretaries Club than she is here. Someone in

Senator Stennis’ office bent the membership rules so she could

take a small wisecracking part (“very Eve Arden,” she says) in

“Revisin’ and Extendin’,” the revue they’ll be doing to benefit

some clinic in Georgetown for retarded children. I think Mrs.

Nixon was pictured with a couple of them in yesterday’s Star.

(The children, not the secretaries.) So if you see a mushroom

cloud, it’s the result of Beverly not being at her typewriter to

send Senator Knowland and his colleagues those gentle policy

pleadings from Mr. Morton.

Even so, it’s hard to blame her. These days she appears to be

the happiest person on the floor; maybe in the whole building.

When I told Paul—yes, we’re still friendly, and yes, he’s still

dating the bookkeeper—that you hadn’t been notified about your

advanced individual training (have I got the name right?), he

said to be sure and tell you not to let them turn you into a beanburner, which I gather is a cook, and which I gather his

bookkeeper is a much better one of than I. (I know you’ll be able

to straighten out the grammar of that sentence.)

Let me know what they do make you into. And where they’re

sending you next.

Love,

Mary

“Plucky wog!” exclaimed the Englishman at Couve de Murville’s

table.

With his own two hands, Prime Minister Nehru had the other day

saved himself from a knife attack, knocking a would-be assassin off

the running board of his limousine.

De Murville, the French foreign minister, nodded impassively to his

lunch companion here at the Harvard Club, but the Englishman’s

loud compliment caught the attention of Ned Fuller and his nephew,

Hawkins.

Still, Ned had no time for thinking about subcontinentals; the

Germans were again crowding his mind, thanks to Hawkins’ aunt

Valerie, who the other night at dinner in New York had loudly voiced

her distress over France’s belated capitulation to German

rearmament. “Fortunately, the Frogs are still carping about the Saar,”

Ned now told his nephew. “That gives her a little encouragement.”

Hawkins sipped a spoonful of consommé.

“I’m afraid,” said Uncle Ned, “that you and I have some important

things to talk about. More important than whether you or your sisters

are going to get my place in New Mexico.” He coughed into his water

glass; the lung man down here was not doing much good.

“You mean the world situation?” asked Hawkins. “The French and

the Germans?”

“No, your father’s financial situation.”

Hawkins pushed away the soup bowl. “Tell me it’s unexpectedly

good. I’m all ears.”

“It’s terrible. Bad investments. And bad choice of a girlfriend. The

latest one.”

“Myrna.”

“Maura,” Ned corrected. “It’s bad enough he pays her bills. But he

seems to be paying her debts, too—all the freight her last boyfriend

wouldn’t pick up. And your mother is only making things worse.”

“Mother doesn’t make scenes.”

Ned lit a cigarette. “No, she doesn’t. And she doesn’t make

investments, good or bad. What she’s been making are a lot of

charitable donations—to Catholic charities, no less. She’s spent

down a lot of her own capital, and your father’s besides.”

“Each according to her means,” said Hawkins.

“Meaning?”

“She can’t quite bring herself to kneel at Sheen’s altar rail. So she

sacrifices at the teller’s window.”

Ned shrugged and blew a smoke ring.

“What are the implications?” asked Hawkins.

“For you?”

“Of course.” Hawkins pierced the cracked crab with his fork and

smiled.

“Rather dire,” said Uncle Ned. “How do you feel about living off

your salary? It may come to that. I hate to tell you, but you’re not

even getting that house in New Mexico.”

Hawkins looked at the choice forkful of crab. “Should I send this

back and get a hamburger?”

“Don’t worry about me,” said Ned, who was paying for lunch.

“Cancer’s already tightened my belt. And I never had that much in

the first place. Maybe a fifth as much as your profligate parents.”

Living off his salary: Hawkins judged the idea to be no more

endurable than it would be to any of his Harvard trust-fund buddies

who’d gone into publishing. One might as well tell Lucy Boardman’s

father to live off what Wellesley paid him to teach art history.

“Pull your chair back,” said Uncle Ned.

Hawkins obliged.

“Just trying to get a look at you. See how expensive your tastes

are.” Ned paused, consideringly. “I can’t see the shoes. I hope they

aren’t in a league with the suit.”

Hawkins finished his crab and asked for a cigarette while they

waited for coffee. His shoes and suits were good enough to last a

long while, he thought. But at some point he’d need money for

trouble. One day his luck would run out; he would slip up in a way

that required more than the fifty dollars for a men’s-room arrest at

the Y. Money, put to bail or blackmail, would be what saved him.

“The nerve of Dad to be spending everything on his own

indiscretions!”

Hawkins laughed as he said it, but Ned, unsmiling, coughed hard,

rose from his chair, and waved off his nephew’s assistance. “Let me

head to the gents. I’ll be fine.”

As he waited for his uncle to return, Hawkins drank his coffee and

regarded both de Murville and the Gilbert-and-Sullivan character at

the other table. They were beginning to blur into a portrait on the wall

when the waiter approached with a message.

“A phone call, Mr. Fuller. From a Mr. Sorrell at the Pentagon.”

“Thanks.” Hawkins headed for one of the telephone cabins,

thinking how much easier it would be to focus for a moment or two

on Skippy’s future instead of his own.

He understood from a letter he’d seen on Mary’s desk that there

still might be time to affect a decision about Private Laughlin’s AIT,

even if his Fort Dix days with the Fighting Sixty-ninth—there was

nomenclatural combination!—would be over in a couple of weeks.

He knew someone, of course. He’d left the message with Sorrell

just an hour ago.

“Andy,” he said, taking the receiver. “You always were quick.”

“Got your own little Private Schine, do you?”

“What about the Monterey Language School?”

“That’s hard to do. Actually, it’s hard to do anything like this, but I’ll

accomplish what I can. Tell me his aptitudes.” He chuckled at the

word.

“Writes nicely. Clever. Terribly sincere right-winger. No particular

drive. A tender disposition. Would be a wonderful boy Friday to some

major general.”

Sorrell’s leering chuckle became a full laugh. “I see.”

Fuller said nothing, just waited for an answer.

“Well,” Sorrell at last replied, “maybe USAIS, the information

school in upstate New York.”

“I suppose that’s better than having him learn to type all over again

at Fort Benjamin Harrison.”

Or, God forbid, putting him into a combat arm. He once more

pictured Tim bouncing toward a European death in some jeep, the

same mental image he’d had at Christmas, but filled in this time with

the detail of the white sidewalls he’d seen in the picture on Mary’s

desk.

“Give me until tomorrow morning,” said Sorrell. “I’ll do what I can

to get him back to you smooth and unscratched. The way you like

them, right? At least sometimes.” Getting no response, Sorrell added

hopefully, “I’m still that way myself, you know.”

Fuller laughed. “Thanks, Andy.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

June 22–24, 1955

The bugle notes of reveille, tinny and recorded, reached the barracks

at Fort Polk by means of a loudspeaker, but Tim had no need for

them. He had already been up for an hour, on his knees in the

nondenominational chapel. As on other mornings, he was finding

that its pale brown walls, unadorned by any graven image, lent a sort

of abstract severity to the devotions he was trying to perform.

If the First World War had seemed to hang over Fort Dix, thrown

together in 1917, it was the Second that shadowed Fort Polk,

onetime center of the Louisiana Maneuvers, whose millions of

broiled and dehydrated participants had, more than a decade ago,

included Tim’s uncle Alan. Recently reopened to quarter the First

Armored Division, Polk was still operating at only a fraction of its

1940s self.

The built-in shade that Mary Johnson had described as a constant

of New Orleans architecture didn’t seem to figure at this installation

seven miles from the town of Leesville. He’d arrived after a confusing

final week in Jersey. First he’d gotten orders for the U.S. Army

Information School at Fort Slocum, but then an assignment officer

overruled them on the grounds that he was already better than most

USAIS graduates at the things they got taught. And so he’d been put

in this on-the-job training slot instead: working on The Kisatchian, the

camp newspaper here at Polk, where he’d shown up carrying the

same suitcase he’d taken from D.C. to Fort Dix back in January.

He’d also brought along a Davy Crockett cap rifle, a friendly present

from several other shitbirds in basic, where he’d been widely

conceded to be the single worst marksman in the company. So

much, he thought, for above-average “coordination.”

When he finished his prayers this morning, he’d be reporting to

Major Brillam, The Kisatchian’s editor. Tim liked him and the work,

which could involve almost anything: rewriting recipes submitted for

publication by officers’ wives; printing the official instructions for

dealing with radiation skin burns; editing a local enlistee’s original

story on the remarkable intelligence of somebody’s pet ostrich in

Metairie.

This week he’d been laying out stories on the UN’s tenthanniversary celebrations in San Francisco. Ike had talked of “my

country’s unswerving loyalty” to the organization, and old pictures

from its founding—some with Alger Hiss seated behind Secretary of

State Stettinius, just as he’d sat behind FDR at Yalta—had been

reappearing over the wire services. I will not turn my back on Alger

Hiss. Forget what Acheson had said; was there anyone, Tim

wondered, who had watched his back around Hiss?

Days at The Kisatchian were longer than they’d been at the Star,

and Tim tended to find most of his off-duty entertainment in the

paper’s office. He almost always wound up back there after dinner in

the mess or a late trip to the PX. There were so few books on the

base that he’d yesterday bought an issue of Good Housekeeping,

since it promised a whole novella by John P. Marquand. The

barracks radio was always tuned to the fights or hillbilly music, and

he realized that by the time his enlistment was over, most of the

serials to which he’d remained so faithful would be gone from the

dial. He’d once driven into Leesville with some guys in his squad to

see This Is Cinerama! and on the base they’d all been made to

watch Face to Face with Communism, an armed-forces feature

about an air force sergeant spending a nightmare furlough in a U.S.

town that appeared to have been taken over by American

Communists. Happy ending: the sergeant learns it was just a roleplaying exercise by the vigilant locals.

Major Brillam always called him “son,” as Potter had, and the

officer had been impressed to discover in his file that Tim had

worked for a United States senator. He threw as much responsibility

his way as possible. The other week he’d told him that “We’re trying

to avoid creating more Ronald Alleys,” Alley being a thirty-four-yearold officer who’d betrayed his fellow POWs in Korea; since one of

Brillam’s buddies worked in Indoctrination, the two officers had

decided that Tim should talk to a class on the base about his

experience with Potter’s atrocity hearings.

The recruits snickered when Tim wrote on the blackboard and his

chalk line wandered uphill, but they all took notes and one or two

wound up regarding him as a person of worldly experience. However

fraudulent that had made him feel, the episode did encourage him to

believe that he was doing something purposeful. The same went for

his work on the paper. The other day he’d written a story on an

operation by the “Winds of Freedom” campaign, which had launched

a fusillade of hydrogen-filled balloons from a field in Bavaria.

Designed to explode at thirty thousand feet over Czechoslovakia, the

balloons had showered down pamphlets listing Free World radio

frequencies for the captive citizens below. The Czech UN delegate

had expressed annoyance at the provocation, prompting Tim to write

that “the winds are blowing, literally and otherwise, from West to

East.” Major Brillam later told him that the “otherwise” was okay, but

the average cracker wasn’t going to know what the Sam Hill “literally”

meant.

What was the motto his doctor pal at Fort Dix had taught him?

First do no harm? Well, when he couldn’t be doing something useful,

that’s what he now vowed to do in the world: no harm to others or

himself. He would keep his head down, the way he had on the

obstacle course while crawling on his stomach with live ammunition

flying overhead, or even the way he’d kept it down during the rollercoaster scenes in This Is Cinerama!

Lingering in the chapel, he checked his watch and closed his eyes

to say the last of his prayers, but all that came to mind, yet again,

was his failed attempt at confession, at St. Francis Xavier in

Manhattan, on the Saturday afternoon before he’d left Fort Dix.

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been eighteen months

since my last confession.

He’d been able to hear Father Davett, identified by the nameplate

on the confessional, shifting on his bench behind the sliding panel.

The “eighteen months” had made the priest anticipate something

exceptional, so he was moving closer for a better listen.

I missed my Easter duty, Tim had continued, hopelessly, aware of

how much further he had to go.

Father Davett: Yes?

I was in love with a man. The memory of Tommy McIntyre’s voice

—“You are in love”—had seemed to find him in yet some further

abyss, a pit of lying.

How old are you?

Twenty-three.

Did you have impure thoughts about this man?

No.

He’d said it with conviction, believing that to say yes would be

bearing false witness against the ecstatic, starlit thoughts he’d

always had of Hawk.

Somehow he’d tried to keep going, to see if he could reach a

merciful middle ground.

Father Davett (confused): Did you have carnal awareness of this

man?

Yes.

Have you ceased to?

Yes.

Are you sincerely sorry?

No.

Father Davett (exasperated): Then why are you here?

I intend to stop. I have stopped.

That is not enough. You must be sincerely sorry.

I can’t be sincerely sorry.

How could he explain? Without Hawk’s love in return, his own love

had become unbearable. He had stopped because what they did

together could not be sprung from the world of shame and

suppressed terror and blackmail, from Tommy McIntyre’s extortive

market of secrets. He’d once believed that he and Hawkins had lifted

themselves above the wicked Earth by doing what they did in bed,

but that sense had been replaced by a realization that joining their

bodies only chained them to the electrified cage of who had what on

whom.

His love had been real—literally divine, if that meant inspired from

above. He would now renounce—as he’d refused to, the first

morning after, at St. Peter’s—but he still would not regret.

Maintaining this last distinction might be the only courage he ever

showed in the world.

You must, Father Davett had finally said, be sincerely sorry. That

is demanded for every mortal sin.

As if on a diving board, he had remained unable to leap. I can’t.

He’d realized that the priest thought all of this a quibble, that he

would have preferred him to lie, to make a good confession by

making a bad one.

Renunciation shows consciousness of guilt. Therefore you are

sorry.

No. I can’t give that to God.

Why not?

It’s too much.

Nothing is too much to give God.

I’ve already returned to Him the best gift He ever gave me.

What is that?

The man I loved.

After that, Father Davett had slid shut the screen, driving him like a

moneychanger from the temple.

Even so, even now at Fort Polk, he craved the forgiveness and

release that the deep-voiced, by-the-book priest might have

provided. And he knew that he would try again.

THE NATION

Washington, D.C., bureau

June 22, 1955

Dear Laughlin,

You’re fondly remembered in Potter’s office. About an hour

ago McIntyre gave me an airmail stamp and suggested I write

you. “A foine idea,” as he might say.

You’ve just missed a great show here. McCARTHY: THE

COMEBACK. The audience found it so unintentionally hilarious

it closed two nights after opening. The plot is easily

summarized:

A rare dry weekend had left the leading man well enough to

come to the Hill on Monday morning, day before yesterday,

carrying with him the text for a resolution. It insisted that

President Dulles bring up the “satellite” nations when he talks to

the Russians in Geneva next month.

But the Democrats had a handy high horse to ride in

opposition: “Sir, do you not sufficiently trust the President, a man

from your own party, to let him negotiate with a free hand?”

Before long even Knowland and Co. had to hop on. The whole

bunch of them voted the thing down, 77–4, a couple of minutes

ago.

Nonetheless, for two days our Savonarola of the Dairylands

must have felt alive again. He chewed up the Foreign Relations

Committee calendar and had a dozen reporters following him

around, as if it were the grand old days of ’53 and he’d just

hounded another Jewish bookworm to the poorhouse. Every

flashbulb that popped threw a smile onto his face, like he’d

thrown one more jigger of bourbon down his gullet.

Bob Stevens, Secretary Milquetoast, has resigned to go back

to supervising the family fortune. (Do they allow you to include

actual armed-forces news like this in that paper you’re putting

out?) More significantly, Ridgway has retired, because he

realizes the army he gave his life to is now obsolete. The Air

Force will conduct the next war, while his old branch of the

service will be left to herd radioactive civilians through the

bombed city streets. (Thanks, by the way, for that touching bit of

meteorology you sent, the balloon story. But put your own finger

into the wind and you’ll begin to feel which way it’s really

blowing. Did you somehow miss seeing the real papers the day

the Warsaw Pact was formed last month?)

McIntyre insists you’re fleeing some great sorrow, but won’t

say which. Forgive me, Laughlin, but you don’t look to me as if

you’re built for a life of passion.

See you when you’re back here on a pass sometime. My new

painter girlfriend will cook you a meal. She extends abstract

expressionism right onto the dinner plate.

Regards,

Kenneth Woodforde, 4-F

P.S. About Potter’s little burp of courage last year: can you tell

me if there’s more to the story than’s been told? Strictly off the

record, of course.

“You’ve heard of Darkness at Noon, Miss Johnson?”

“Yes, Fuller.”

“Well, the summer solstice has given us brightness at dusk. Or at

least what should be dusk. Too nice not to be out in. I’m leaving a

little earlier than usual.”

“Leaving earlier than early, you mean.”

“Leaving now, to be precise.”

McCarthy’s Geneva resolution had sent the Bureau of

Congressional Relations into action on Monday morning, but victory

had proved so easy that by Wednesday there wasn’t much left to do.

Now, on Friday, things were even slower, and once Fuller left, Mary

decided she would answer Tim’s latest letter before going home

herself. In her reply she would take care—as Tim always did—never

to mention Fuller. Unnatural as this seemed, she knew it was for the

best. A more difficult task would be responding to the kind of

political-religious tract that Tim’s most recent letter, like the one or

two before it, had started to resemble.

She at least had quiet enough in which to concentrate, Beverly

having left early, too. Quite stagestruck now, Bev had a part in the

Bethesda Players’ production of The Little Foxes; Jerry was helping

to make her hoop skirt with some wire he’d brought home from the

hardware store he still worked at.

Department of State

Washington, D. C.

June 24, 1955

Dear Tim,

Well, it’s a silent Friday afternoon here, befitting a world on

which peace has apparently descended. Why didn’t anyone

think of it before? I refer to this Molotov resolution out in San

Francisco—a stroke of genius, I should say, simply to proclaim

the arrival of “peace, cooperation and friendship.”

I can imagine what you

Someone had entered the office. With no one at any other desk—

Miss Lightfoot’s replacement had left early, too—Mary got up to greet

whoever it was.

The visitor, heavyset but attractive, perhaps a bit over forty,

motioned for her to sit back down at her typewriter while he strode

toward her.

“Miss Johnson, you don’t remember me. The name’s Fred Bell.”

“I’m afraid I don’t.”

“The last time I saw you, a couple of years ago, I was bringing you

a cracker with some fish on it. At the Estonian embassy. Actually the

Lithuanian. We were borrowing the place.”

“Oh,” said Mary, bits of that sad little evening coming back to her.

She recalled her skirt feeling too long, and Fuller taking off into the

night.

“I own some shoe factories up in Massachusetts. I’m on the

deportees’ committee.”

“Yes,” said Mary. “I’m remembering something about a violinist.”

“Pretty close,” said Mr. Bell. “Oboe. My cousin. The one who gets

to play music in Tallinn. The other cousin, the peasant, is still

deported, still on a Soviet collective. You and me also talked about

eggs. And then your handsome boss whisked you away.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Losing. Like always.” He laughed. “A bunch of us rushed down on

Monday when we got word of the resolution being introduced. We

were dumb enough to think we could help it pass. Real controversial,

wasn’t it? ‘Please, maybe, could you just possibly, if it isn’t too rude,

bring up the satellites? Oh, too provocative? Too dangerous? Sorry!

We apologize!’”

Mary nodded, deciding not to mention that she’d spent two days

marshaling votes against the proposal, even though she’d known in

her heart that its only objectionable aspect was its toxic sponsor.

“A couple of us have stayed in town making the rounds. Without

much point, as usual. But I’ve seen everybody I could on the Hill and

figured I’d come over here. I still have your handsome boss’s card.”

He showed it to her. “I’ve learned that barging in has more chance of

success than calling ahead.”

“I’m afraid that both the handsome boss and his boss aren’t in.”

Mr. Bell shrugged. “More of my luck. Maybe I should have called

ahead.” He put Fuller’s card back in his wallet. “You’re pretty

handsome yourself. You can use that word with women, can’t you?”

He’d almost, Mary thought, said “dames.”

“I’m not sure I’m old enough for ‘handsome,’” she replied.

“Have dinner with me.”

“You’re married. A guess.”

“I’m married. A good guess.”

As if another voice were talking for her, she asked: “Where would

you like to go?”

CHAPTER THIRTY

July 23–24, 1955

Tim had sweated through his first shirt on the five-hour bus ride from

Fort Polk, but here in Mr. Johnson’s remarkably cool library a second

one was holding up fine. He had put in for his weekend pass nearly a

month ago, and Mary had promised they would have some time

alone after dining with her father. Tim and Mr. Johnson had been

conversing for the past ten minutes, while they waited for her to

finish getting ready. About a quarter of the books in the room

appeared to be bound in leather, and about half of those were in

French. Mr. Johnson had explained that on his mother’s side he was

a Claurin.

“Things are looking up,” the older man now declared. “Never

before have East and West wasted so little time reaching a

deadlock.”

Ike was coming home from the Geneva conference tomorrow,

having proposed joint aerial reconnaissance and the sharing of

military blueprints between America and Russia. It remained doubtful

that the Soviets would say yes.

Tim laughed politely before replying. “Nixon thinks the summit

‘cleared the air,’” he said, venturing toward a difference of opinion

with his host. “But I think it made things worse.”

“I can’t claim the East-West bon mot as my own,” Mr. Johnson

responded. “It came out of some man’s column in the TimesPicayune.”

Mary had warned her father about the recent overheated

expressions of faith and politics in Tim’s letters, and Mr. Johnson

was trying to keep the conversation light. His daughter decided that

she would do the same. Entering the library, Mary declared, “I’m

always happy to hear Nixon criticized. Even if it’s from all the way

over on that side.”

More perfumed than Tim remembered, she leaned over and gave

him a sisterly kiss.

“Very Audrey Hepburn, no?” she asked, touching her new shorter

haircut. “That’s the intention, anyway.”

“I think I miss the style you had,” Mr. Johnson said, wistfully. “Your

mother’s hair fell to her waist every night as she came into our bed.”

The phrasing jarred them all with its intimacy, and Mary wound up

returning the conversation to affairs of state, explaining that the

president’s cable from Geneva, describing the progress of the

conference, had arrived at the State Department early Thursday

afternoon, just before her departure for New Orleans on the ovenlike

Crescent. “So I was very up-to-date. On that and other things

besides. We even knew about poor Cordell Hull.” The death of

FDR’s secretary of state had occurred only this afternoon, but on

Thursday morning awareness of its imminence had sent some

longtime employees scrambling for black crêpe to hang, once Mr.

Hull was gone, from the department’s Twenty-first Street windows.

Strong spicy smells were coming from the kitchen. Josephine, a

Negro woman who took care of Mary’s father during the week, had

come to cook their meal. “It’s a treat to have you here,” Mr. Johnson

insisted to Tim, “and it will be a treat to have Josephine’s dinner.

Most weekends I subsist on something frozen that she’s left, or a

plate of red beans and rice that I can manage to make myself.” He

looked skeptically at Tim’s thin frame. “Are they feeding you well

enough?”

“Oh, just fine, sir.”

“Well,” said Mary, “they’re already getting Capitol Hill ready for

your return. They’ve finished the foundations on that new Senate

Office Building, the one going up where that little slum on First Street

used to be? They’ll have the whole thing done in a couple of years.”

She realized, suddenly, that she needed to concoct a fib. “I got all

of that from Beverly. I think I wrote you about how much time she

was spending on the Hill this spring.”

Tim, certain that she’d gotten this architectural update from

Hawkins, who visited the Capitol twice a week, just nodded.

Mary now surmised what he was thinking, which was not at all

what had made her worry. She had lied to protect a secret of her

own, not Tim’s feelings. She’d seen the construction herself, during

the two weekends Fred Bell had come down to Washington to see

her, weekends the two of them had spent in a little room at the top of

the Carroll Arms. Each Sunday afternoon, when Fred would phone

his wife in Massachusetts to report on all the preparation he was

doing for the next day’s lobbying, she would take a stroll around the

Hill that took her past the construction site.

“I may not come back to Washington at all,” said Tim, “but if I do I’ll

be your neighbor a couple of times a month. The Army Reserves in

D.C. are so hard up they drill in a State Department lecture room!

Right at Twenty-first and C.”

His face flushed with nostalgia for the handful of visits he’d made

to Hawkins’ office. Mary saw his color rise and wondered how on

earth she’d be able to tell him what she had to.

Mr. Johnson excused himself to check on Josephine.

“You’re sure you won’t stay here tonight instead?” Mary asked

Tim. He’d checked into a guesthouse in the Quarter. “Dauphine

Street is quieter than most, but still, it is a Saturday night, and—”

“You’re forgetting I grew up a few blocks from Times Square,” he

said, laughing. “Trust me, this is nothing! And if you’re worried about

the money, remember: I’m making seventy-eight whole dollars a

month on top of three meals a day and all the milk I can drink.”

“I need to talk to you about something after dinner.”

“Are you getting back together with Paul?”

“No, no. But it does concern an engagement.”

“Beverly Phillips and Jerry Baumeister!”

Mr. Johnson was coming back into the library.

“No, not them,” she whispered. “It’s somebody else.”

“Josephine’s boy,” Mr. Johnson announced with a certain wonder,

“wants her to take him to Disneyland.” The amusement park’s

opening had been all over television last week.

Mary looked at Tim from the corner of her eye. No, he hadn’t

guessed the news she had to tell him.

“Fantasyland?” he asked her father, trying to ascertain which

precinct of Disneyland interested Josephine’s boy particularly.

“Frontierland?”

Mary excused herself to get a pack of cigarettes from her

bedroom, and once there, standing still with her left hand on the

dresser, she remembered the conversation that Fuller had drawn her

into on Monday afternoon, just before close of business.

Getting married? she’d asked, incredulously.

Having children, too, no doubt, he’d answered.

Why, Fuller?

Why not?

Because you’re—

Because I am, even so, good value for her money.

No, you’re not.

He’d said nothing, just smiled.

Why now?

A hitch in time saves nine. He’d begun moving toward the door by

that point.

Should I say anything to him? she’d asked. I’ll be seeing him this

weekend, you know, when I’m back home.

I know. I keep reading the letters you deliberately leave open on

your desk.

What should I tell him, Fuller?

That it makes no difference. He’d already taken his hat from the

clothes tree.

Of course it makes a difference, she’d protested.

Does Mrs. Bell make a difference, Miss Johnson?

You’re a son of a bitch.

Yes, I am. He’d then put on the hat.

No, you’re not.

No, I’m not, he’d said, without any archness, before asking,

quietly, for a simple favor: Make it easy on him.

She now lit one of the cigarettes and returned to the library, where

there seemed to be a lull in the conversation between her father and

their guest.

“Tim has just finished explaining to me the difference between

Frontierland and Fantasyland,” Mr. Johnson told his daughter. “But

we’ve concluded that Josephine’s son wants to go to another land

entirely.”

“Which is that?” asked Mary.

“Tomorrowland,” said her father.

Tim’s brown eyes were wet and huge. She could see that, in the

time she’d been out of the room, he had guessed the identity of the

groom.

“Hello, darlin’! Why so sad?”

He thought the voice might be a prostitute’s, like the one he’d

heard on Bourbon Street a half hour ago, but here on Dauphine, a

little before midnight, the words were coming not from a doorway but

a low second-floor balcony, and the voice belonged to a man. There

were two men, actually, near the railing. One of them had curly gray

hair; the other, the one who had spoken, was somewhat younger,

maybe in his thirties, but already balding.

“I’m okay,” Tim called up to him.

“Heavens, really? We’d hate to see you when you were under the

weather. You come on up here.” He pointed to an entrance that led

first to a back garden and then the apartment upstairs.

Still struggling, as he’d been for the last two hours, with the single

faint image he had retained of the woman he now thought of as her,

the way she’d appeared last year on the Hotel Washington’s rooftop,

Tim went into the garden. Passing flowers thick and fragrant, their

stems stronger-looking than the white wrought iron of the bannister

and balcony, he fought off another picture, recently assembled by his

imagination, in which Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins Fuller and their children

sat surrounded by bicycles and wrapping paper on a Christmas

morning.

The younger man already had a drink for him. “I’m Wel, short for

Jeffrey Wellison. And you are?”

“Timothy Laughlin.”

The older man, introduced by Wel as Mr. Shaw, extended his hand

while clicking a Tums between his teeth. Tim could see a roll of the

tablets lying on the tray with the pitcher of drinks. Very tall and

possessed of fine posture, Mr. Shaw was probably no more than

forty-five. His hair—Tim could see this close up—was more than

curly; it was like coiled wire. His features had a Negro aspect, and

Tim wondered if he might be an octoroon or even a mulatto, terms

he knew from the movies. Whatever he was, the man’s whole

manner marked him as an aristocrat.

“And tell us,” he asked, “what brings you to New Orleans, Mr.

Laughlin?”

“I’m in the army.”

“You’re not really!” shrieked Wel. “We would have welcomed you

with trumpets if we’d known! As it is, you should sit down.”

“Are you on a pass?” Mr. Shaw asked.

“Yes, I’m a private, a communications specialist at Fort Polk. I go

back tomorrow.”

“Now, Clay, you heard him. He’s on a pass, so making one in his

direction would be redundant.”

Mr. Shaw laughed apologetically at his companion’s remark, and

peeled another Tums from the roll. Tim found himself surprised that

anyone living in this city, awash in spices, might actually suffer from

heartburn.

Wel poured a little sachet of powder into his own drink. “Atoms for

peace!” he exclaimed, lifting the glass in what appeared to be a toast

to himself.

“Forgive Mr. Wellison’s flamboyance,” said Mr. Shaw. “The

granules are just a sweetener.”

“Sure they are,” said Wel, before stage-whispering the word

“Benzedrine” in Tim’s direction.

Mr. Shaw returned a bit helplessly to the notion of atoms for

peace, making it the occasion for a general toast: “To the spirit of

Geneva. And to Private Laughlin’s arrival in our city.”

Tim took a sip of what he guessed was a martini. He followed it

with a shrimp whose strong sauce Mr. Shaw seemed to be avoiding.

“There is no spirit of Geneva,” said Wel. “In fact the man on the

radio was saying that China’s going to attack Formosa before all the

bigwigs have cleared out of Switzerland. While everybody’s

distracted, the Russians won’t be able to restrain the Chinks. Not

Chinks. He called them something else. Chiclets?”

“Chicoms, I suspect,” said Mr. Shaw.

“Is he right, honey?”

“Yes,” said Tim.

“Well,” said Mr. Shaw, with the slight nervousness that seemed

habitual to him in Mr. Wellison’s presence, “if any world war does

break out, we have Private Laughlin here to defend us.”

“And plenty of vodka to offer the invaders!” cried Wel, suddenly

agreeable.

“I thought it was the Chinese who were coming,” said Mr. Shaw,

gently.

With a volume that startled the two older men, Tim all at once

declared: “Bulganin wants the Chinese to act as ‘observers’ in

Europe! Peacekeepers!”

Mr. Shaw recovered from his surprise and shook his head,

agreeing to the irony and injustice of the prospect. Wel, losing

interest in the international situation, busied himself by emptying one

half-full bowl of peanuts into another.

Embarrassed by his own volubility, Tim changed the subject,

asking Mr. Shaw: “What line are you in, sir?”

“So sweet!” exclaimed Wel. “He makes you sound like a shoe

salesman, Clay. And he sounds a little like Dorothy Kilgallen.”

Mr. Shaw made a forbearing expression: “I’m in international

trade,” he explained to Tim. “Imports and exports. Mostly putting

other importers and exporters together with one another.”

“Clay’s a matchmaker,” said Wel, who was combing his hair in

front of a heavily framed mirror. “When he travels the world, I feed

the cat here and have his mail forwarded.”

“How long have you been friends?” Tim asked.

“About ten years,” Mr. Shaw explained. “Since just after the war.”

“We’re in the ‘just friends’ stage now,” Wel added. “Sisters. It

comes to that with the seven-year itch. Well, seven months in our

case.” He laughed at Tim’s evident perplexity. “I don’t think he’s seen

the movie, Clay. He was probably at The Seven Little Foys instead.

Anywho,” Wel announced, picking up his cigarette lighter from the

tray, “I’m going to leave you two and mosey back home to Chartres

Street.”

“You don’t live here?” Tim asked. The apartment wasn’t just fancy;

it appeared to be enormous.

Wel shook his head. “More convenient all around.” He gave Tim a

peck on the cheek—“Say hello to all our fighting men!”—and made a

fast exit.

“May I freshen your drink, Timothy?”

“Thank you, Mr. Shaw.”

Without Wel, the room itself, however ornate, seemed to acquire a

more masculine aspect. Mr. Shaw now appeared almost huge, more

handsome and less guarded. Tim had the sense that Wel’s

departure had occurred because he’d completed his work by

bringing a guest here. Looking toward what seemed to be the largest

bedroom, beyond a set of French doors, Tim noticed a silver crucifix

attached to one of the walls. In a corner stood a black bullwhip, like

something the Lone Ranger might have captured.

Mr. Shaw, topping off their drinks, saw him looking and laughed.

“Don’t be alarmed, Private Laughlin. That’s left over from Mardi

Gras.”

The martini glass, with its high center of gravity, threatened to spill.

Mr. Shaw took it from his hand and set it on the table, then placed an

arm over his shoulders. The exotic-looking man sighed with what

seemed a craving for something deeper than sex, some wildly

imbalanced alignment. Tim recognized it through an awareness of

the same desire—its other, symmetrical half—within himself.

“I think you should stay here tonight,” said Mr. Shaw. “You’ll be

perfectly safe.” He pointed to the whip. “We can put that between us,

like Tristan’s sword.”

There was a brief silence, perhaps encouraging. And yet the

gentlemanly Mr. Shaw soon sensed, whatever might be in the air,

that his guest was too sad and nervous to go much further. So he

made them both some coffee, told some army stories of his own (a

Bronze Star rested not far from the crucifix), and listened to an

anguished outpouring about Hawkins Fuller. After an hour or so

passed, he was walking Tim to his rooming house across Dauphine

Street, and telling him: “You’ll hear again and again that he’s ‘not

worth it.’ And that will be true. It will also be the stupidest thing

anyone ever says to you.”

According to the Sunday-morning paper, two hundred and fifty

thousand children were receiving Communion in Rio de Janeiro this

weekend; Cardinal Spellman, in Brazil on a visit, had said a midnight

Mass prior to the huge outdoor Eucharist.

Sitting in the back of the cathedral in Jackson Square, Tim envied

the privileged innocence of these quarter million boys and girls he’d

just read about, but mostly he wondered what Saturday-night stories

might be told by the tired morning-after souls in his midst, right here

in New Orleans. He checked the bus ticket stuck in his missal—and

then noticed a small green light go on, indicating the presence of a

Father LeTour in the confessional just ten or twelve feet from the

pew.

It didn’t seem possible: all his life he had known only Saturday

confessions. But perhaps this city’s superabundance of temptation

necessitated a few freewheeling shortcuts toward forgiveness. He

noticed that three or four people had already lined up at the booth

with their still-brand-new sins—lucky, shadowed souls who within a

half hour would be kneeling at the altar rail, as newly innocent as any

Brazilian boy or girl.

On impulse, he acted: put his bus ticket back into the missal,

marked his seat in the pew with the book, and got up to join the line,

which was moving quickly. Father LeTour appeared to be passing

out absolution with the speed of a chaplain on the battlefield.

He would try not to think. He would try just to do it, to get back to

and then somehow past the point at which he had been refused by

Father Davett. He could not live forever without God’s full presence;

he could not—having last night understood that Hawkins was gone

forever—accept the permanent loss of God’s grace, too.

His mind raced with logic and analogy: McCarthy had called

Geneva a “dismal failure,” since there hadn’t been any talk of the

satellite countries, whose enslavement was the moral crux of the

whole Cold War. That was the truth—and shouldn’t the truth be

accepted even from a sinner? Furthermore, shouldn’t a sinner be

accepted if he told the truth? Which was to say, couldn’t he himself

be accepted back into the Church with just renunciation of what he

had done, unaccompanied by any admission of regret?

He had wanted to stay with Mr. Shaw last night. He had not been

very drunk, just sad and shocked over Hawkins’ engagement. Mr.

Shaw’s exotic allure, his potent combination of the hulking and

effeminate, had attracted him. There had been, as they’d sipped

coffee, one repelling moment—a gentle, last-ditch suggestion that he

put on what appeared to be a child’s set of pajamas—but more than

anything else Mr. Shaw had seemed manly and cherishing, qualities

that he himself, now denied both Hawk and God, desired intensely.

What had stopped him from getting into bed—he knew the whip

would never stay in its legendary place—had been the thought of

Hawk, who, he’d decided months ago, near the end, should be the

only man he would ever know in this way.

So, he now reasoned, while the person just ahead of him in line

entered the confessional: if Hawk had once been sin, he was now

the giver of chastity. Why couldn’t those two things cancel each other

out and let Timothy Laughlin go back to being what he’d once been?

Why couldn’t he, safely reunited with God, retire the active memory

of his earthly love, frame it like the picture of some dead loved

soldier on a mantelpiece?

“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned; it has been twenty-one

months since my last confession.”

No shifting, no sense of surprise from Father LeTour. The priest

replied in what Tim now recognized as a Cajun accent: “Yes, young

man?” The “young” sounding like “yoang.”

Tim had so often replayed his abortive confession to Father Davett

that he could now recite his own part from memory. But Father

LeTour seemed to be working from a different script, or none at all.

To each admission that emerged from Tim’s lips, the priest replied,

merely, Mmm-hmm.

“I intend to stop. I have stopped.”

“Mmm-hmm.”

“But I can’t say ‘I’m sorry.’ I can’t give that to God. It’s too much.

I’ve already returned to Him the best gift He ever gave me.”

Father LeTour at last came to soft-spoken life. “And what was

that?”

“The man I loved.”

“Did you give him back to God in the spirit of a gift?”

Tim had to admit that that hadn’t been the case; his return of

Hawkins to God had been grudging and desperate.

“No, Father.”

“Can you give him back to God in that spirit?”

“Yes!” said Tim, well above the confessional’s normal whisper. “I

can.”

“Then say three Hail Marys and do that. God loves you.”

A little before eleven a.m., with his two hands clutching the missal

and part of his mind unable to stop wondering why Father LeTour,

unlike Bishop Sheen, did not use the subjunctive—God love you—

Tim walked down the cathedral’s center aisle and received the Body

of Christ Our Lord.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

September 25–28, 1955

“So, is it true?” asked Fred Bell. “Do they really stand him on a box

before the cameras roll?”

He and Mary had just seen the decidedly short Alan Ladd in The

McConnell Story.

“That’s what they say,” she answered. She hadn’t paid much

attention to the picture—neither the based-on-real-life heroics of the

title figure, nor the scratchy little voice of June Allyson as the air

ace’s perfect wife. Truth to tell, she would have been content not to

go to the movies at all, and to spend the evening as they’d spent the

whole afternoon, upstairs in the Carroll Arms, in bed with just room

service and each other—though minus the bottle of Hildebrandfamily beer that had been standing up, accusingly, in the ice bucket.

It was now half past twelve on Saturday night. The Sunday papers

had long since reached the streets, but here in a candy store a block

from the Ambassador Theater, Fred was displaying more interest in

the radio than in the already-obsolete Star, for which he’d just put

down his fifteen cents. A Washington news announcer was reporting

on a press conference still going on out in Denver, not far from

where the president had gone for a fishing vacation.

So much for the “digestive upset” that had been reported this

morning! The doctors were now admitting that Ike had had a heart

attack and was in an oxygen tent, and that Vice President and Mrs.

Nixon had “gone into seclusion, leaving their young daughters at

home on Tilden Street in the care of a trusted secretary.”

“Fred,” said Mary. “There’s a radio back in the hotel.” Which she

hoped he wouldn’t listen to once they got there. Fred might be only

the third lover she’d had, but of that small sample he was far and

away the best, full of ardor and eye contact; she was eager to get

back to doing just what June Allyson and Paul, staring at her through

the Hildebrand label, would no doubt disapprove of.

At last she felt Fred’s hand on the small of her back, urging her out

of the store and onto Eighteenth Street.

“Taxi!” he called.

But once the Diamond cab arrived at the curb, she heard him ask

not for the Carroll Arms but for Tilden Street.

“Where on Tilden?” the driver asked.

“Just drive down the three-thousand blocks. Past the embassies.”

“What are we doing?” asked Mary.

Fred continued instructing the driver. “I don’t know the exact

number, but there’ll be a little crowd on the lawn, newsmen and so

forth.”

“We’re going to the Nixons’,” said Mary, having just remembered

Tilden Street from the radio.

“Yeah,” said Fred. “To stand outside the house.”

“Why?”

“Because if this is the moment, I want to be there.”

“The moment when Ike dies?”

“The moment when we get a president who’ll actually fight, who’ll

roll them back.” He proceeded to review for her the vice president’s

steely anticommunist credentials. Sure, Nixon sometimes had to say

things against McCarthy or in favor of Geneva, but everybody knew

that the man who’d brought down Hiss and Helen Douglas would

stand up to the Russians—if he were blessed with his own

presidency.

“Blessed?” asked Mary, looking at Fred’s excited profile while a

string of Connecticut Avenue streetlamps flashed their glow onto and

off his skin. He appeared even more aroused than he’d been behind

the heavy curtains of their room in the Carroll Arms.

The car radio was explaining just how Nixon had learned the

seriousness of Ike’s condition, when the taxi caught up with the

twenty or so reporters and gawkers on the vice president’s front

lawn. At an upstairs window, behind sheer curtains, the silhouettes of

two small girls, delighted by the commotion, were jumping up and

down on a bed.

Fred told the cab to wait, and once on the sidewalk with Mary he

put some questions to a man with a microphone and a walkie-talkie.

No, he learned, there really wasn’t any news. The press conference

in Denver had just ended, and a heart specialist had flown out to

Colorado, but that was about it.

Mary took Fred’s arm and drew him back to the curb. “I want to

ask you something. Are you hoping that the president of the United

States will die?”

Fred paused for a moment’s thought before replying. “I’m hoping

the president will fight.”

“The current president,” Mary insisted. “You want to see the hero

of D-Day die for Estonia?”

He looked straight at her. “I landed on Utah Beach eleven years,

three months, and nineteen days ago. I do the arithmetic every

morning when I brush my teeth.”

There wasn’t much to say to that; she looked longingly at the cab.

“Maybe you should take it,” said Fred. “I’m too keyed up. I’ve got

to stay awhile more.”

“All right.”

“You’re not mad?”

“No. Confused maybe.”

He was already looking for a way to make it up to her. “How about

I pick you up for church?”

“No, thanks,” she said, laughing from sheer surprise. “I’m not

going by myself, and I’m not going with you, either.”

“Come on,” he cajoled, smiling in the mischievous way he ought to

be smiling back at the Carroll Arms, coaxing her over some new

threshold of adventurousness. “There’s a Polish church on Thirtysixth Street,” he explained. “Father Kaminsky does the eleveno’clock Mass, and he’s a spellbinder. I guarantee you he’ll have

something to say tomorrow morning.”

She looked at him disbelievingly, but he persisted, as if she were

only displaying a customer’s last bit of resistance toward the product

being offered: “I went to hear him once with a guy from the Polish

group that sometimes makes the rounds with us down here.”

“Fred, I am not going to Mass to pray for the ill health of Dwight D.

Eisenhower.”

“Well, I wouldn’t do that, either.”

“Let’s say you wouldn’t do that exactly.” She looked back toward

the cab, whose meter was still running. “Call me sometime before

you go back home.” She accepted a kiss, against her better

judgment, and got into the taxi, still carrying the copy of the Star from

the candy store.

Inside her place on P Street, she made herself a drink and climbed

into bed with the paper, passing up its stale front page in favor of the

book reviews and wedding announcements—“the ladies’ sports

pages,” Paul used to joke, though in Washington you would

sometimes find the groom’s name, not the bride’s, in the headline:

MR. HERBERT ENGAGED TO WED. No matter how pretty the future

Mrs. Herbert might be, her fiancé’s father had been governor of

Ohio, and that settled that.

There was the phenomenon again, in the upper-right-hand corner:

MARRIAGE OF MR. FULLER ANNOUNCED. The news was being spread

by his soon-to-be in-laws, Professor and Mrs. Chester Boardman of

Wellesley, Massachusetts, parents of Lucy Catherine, the fiancée.

“The bridegroom-elect, a deputy assistant secretary in the State

Department’s bureau of congressional relations, is the son of Mr. and

Mrs. Charles Fuller of New York City.” The little story had everything

right: St. Paul’s, the war record, Harvard, Paraguay, Oslo.

Mary put aside the paper and wondered if she’d even tease Fuller

about it on Monday. No, she could no longer do that. Too many

things had galloped beyond the pale, herself included maybe.

At least the item wouldn’t run anywhere near Fort Polk. She had

heard from Tim only once since New Orleans, a letter full of talk

about the Eucharist and the Russians’ persecution of Cardinal

Mindszenty. His merry side had been there in one of the margins—

an ink sketch of Major Brillam hurling an editorial thunderbolt against

whatever laxness had permitted weevils to invade the mess hall—

but mostly the letter shook with a febrile zeal that left her both upset

and envious. Fred, too, had this electric susceptibility, this touch of

true-believing that must be connected to male ardor in bed. The little

Irish tiger cub: she now remembered Fuller dropping that offhand

excuse when he arrived at the office even later than usual one

morning.

All of them, from Hawkins Fuller to Beverly Phillips, were dangling

from the world tonight, unaligned nations or shaky protectorates,

struggling toward independence or falling into unwise alliance. She

felt a pang for Paul and his simple marital urge. If she’d let things

turn out differently, the two of them might be climbing into bed right

now, turning off the television in some nice house in Alexandria.

She herself was caught between two banked fires. Her recent

pursuit of passion, for all its illicit pleasures, seemed at the moment

as obligatory as another person’s quest for security and the norm. If

she were truly carried away by love, and Fred, she might by now be

turning the handle of some basement printing press, cranking out the

latest stack of Free Estonia Now pamphlets, helping her man to turn

the tide. As it was, come Monday she and Fuller, if Ike remained

alive, would no doubt be spreading the message of continuity, steady

as she goes, to the fire-breathers on the Hill, shoring up all the

caution Fred wanted to blast away with liberty’s blowtorch.

She let the Star fall to the floor, and she clicked off the light.

“You know,” Senator Goldwater reflected, “I’d ten times rather play

cards with Hubert. Dick Nixon is one of the shiftiest sons of bitches

I’ve met since I got here in ’52.”

Fuller smiled, even tilted his head back to accentuate amusement,

though he really didn’t need to strive for effect. He liked this

handsome half-Jew, half-Episcopalian from Arizona.

“May I tell that to Mr. Morton?” he asked.

“You can tell it to the goddamn New York Times, for all I care,” said

Goldwater. “Though I know you won’t.”

“No, sir.”

Fuller stood up to leave, having gotten what he wanted—an

assurance that Goldwater, like the other bellicose senators he had to

visit, would throughout the tense coming days confine himself to

supporting get-well-Ike resolutions, and not overcompensate for any

appearance of governmental distraction by having America rattle its

missiles in their hardened silos. So far only McCarthy was believed

to be scenting opportunity within the crisis. Several reports since

Saturday had him thirsting anew for politics, not just Jim Beam.

“Two more stops to make,” said Fuller, shaking Goldwater’s hand.

But his progress toward Senator Hickenlooper’s office was halted in

Goldwater’s reception area by the sight of Senator Charles Potter

and Tommy McIntyre.

Citizen Canes was sturdily upright, his balding head under a

cheap, snap-brim Stratoliner that the missus had probably picked up

at Herzog’s, thinking it would make him look snazzy. Which was not

an adjective one would apply to McIntyre, with his rheumy eyes and

gin-blossomed cheeks. He appeared to need a couple of canes

more than Potter did.

“A pleasure, Senator,” said Fuller, extending his hand. “Even if this

accidental encounter doesn’t save me any labor. There’s no need, of

course, to come see you in this uncertain time. We know your

instincts will be superb.”

Tommy coughed. “You’re laying it on pretty thick today.”

Fuller, tilting back his head in the same move he’d used on

Goldwater, felt almost relieved that the broken-looking Irishman

hadn’t lost his nasty gab.

“I appreciate the compliment,” said Potter, catching sight of the

man he’d come to visit. He raised one of his canes and winked its

little electric light. “Barry!”

Goldwater waved him forward.

“I’m here to pick up my model,” Potter explained to Fuller. With the

excitement of a boy, he headed toward the inner office, pointing as

he went to one of several plastic miniatures of the RC-121, the

“flying radar station,” that were on display. Goldwater, a colonel in

the Air Force Reserves, had piloted the plane over the Pacific last

weekend.

Left alone with Tommy, Fuller was delayed in taking his leave by

some compliments the ravaged little man had to offer.

“Congratulations on your engagement. I saw mention made of it in

the Star.”

“Thank you, McIntyre.”

“I’m sure she’s a beautiful girl.”

“Very.”

“I lost my girl almost a month ago.” Tommy shifted his gaze to the

window. He had a look of sheer agony, and the dampness on his

eyes had swollen into actual tears.

My girl? Was this, Fuller wondered, remembering Tim’s piece of

the story, the drunken woman in Michigan, the labor widow

supposed to be at the heart of McCarthy’s implosion?

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

Tommy’s face turned angry, and not so much toward the world as

toward Hawkins Fuller in particular. “One can’t count the number of

women who have been betrayed by men, nor the number who will

be. What’s your girl’s name again?”

“Boardman,” said Fuller. “Lucy Boardman.”

“That’s right, that’s right,” McIntyre responded, as if to suggest he

was updating the police files he kept in his head. “By the way, back

at the office we don’t hear nearly enough from your friend, Private

Laughlin.”

“What are you hearing from the constituents? Good wishes for the

president’s health, I imagine?”

“Actually,” said Tommy, “most of the wires concern the acquittal of

those apes who killed the Till boy down in Mississippi. It’s nice to

know more than a few people don’t believe a colored fellow should

necessarily be beaten to death for whistling at a white woman.”

The remark vibrated with Tommy’s shrill sympathy for the

oppressed, but it also carried a threatening whiff, an intimation that

Fuller, a sexual trangressor himself, must find stories like the Till

boy’s particularly unsettling.

Fuller confined himself to some cool, safe sarcasm: “‘No Negroes

on the jury because none are registered to vote in the county.’ That

was the official local explanation. Which I suppose we’ll report with a

straight face over the Voice of America.”

“A nice part of the country for your boy to be in.”

“It’s time for me to call my office,” said Fuller. He tipped his hat to

avoid shaking Tommy’s hand, and when he got to a pay phone at the

end of the corridor he rang the bureau.

Mary picked up.

“I was expecting to hear Beverly,” said Fuller.

“She’s down the hall collecting some telexes.”

“Why isn’t the new girl doing that? We do have a receptionist now,

don’t we?”

“She left early. She’s gotten engaged, as a matter of fact. Just at

lunchtime. Her mother came by to take her out for a celebration.”

“There’s a lot of that going around. And the mothers seem to like

it.”

“Well, my mother’s dead, Fuller.”

“So’s mine, almost.”

“Let me get your messages.”

Cold as ice, thought Fuller. Things could not be going well with the

married shoemaker.

“Congressmen Lovre and Dies returned your calls,” said Mary.

“And Senator Pastore’s office phoned—nothing urgent. Also, the

boss has talked to C. D. Jackson, who’s come down to the White

House from New York. Everything seems to be fine. Mr. Morton says

there’s no need for you to see Senator Bridges, or even Welker.”

“Good,” said Fuller. “The natives aren’t restless. Ike can breathe

easy in his oxygen tent.”

“Last but not least,” said Mary, “your fiancée phoned to say that

she’ll be coming by the office at five-thirty. She’d like for the two of

you to go out for an early dinner and a movie.”

“What’s playing?” Fuller asked.

“I highly don’t recommend The McConnell Story. June Allyson and

Alan Ladd.”

Have you ever frequented a Washington, D.C., establishment

called the Jewel Box, at the corner of Sixteenth and L streets?

The tufted purple walls. The bartender who looks a little like Alan

Ladd.

“Miss Johnson, you’ll need to ring the future Mrs. Fuller and tell

her that Monday is my night out with the boys.”

A day after their surprise wedding at Grossinger’s, Eddie Fisher and

Debbie Reynolds were in D.C. The ceremony had been put off until

Monday night, in deference to Yom Kippur. “Eddie is of the Jewish

faith,” reported the wire-service story in the New Orleans Item. It was

with a similar sense of responsibility that the bridegroom had

postponed the couple’s honeymoon, so that he could keep a

commitment to perform for the Coca-Cola bottlers holding their

convention at Washington’s Statler Hotel.

“So, does this go in?” asked Private John Nontone, holding the

Eddie-and-Debbie clipping. Though a day old, the story might still

find its way onto the “Lighter Side” page of The Kisatchian.

“Yep,” said Tim, speaking from his experience at the Evening Star

and almost six months here. “Eddie is a vet. He was even in Korea.

I’ll rewrite it to highlight that.”

“You’re the boss,” said Nontone, a twenty-year-old from Delaware

who’d arrived at the base three weeks ago.

“You want one of these?” asked Tim, offering Nontone a cookie

from the package that had just arrived.

“God, they’re awful,” said Nontone, after a single bite.

“I know.”

“I hope your mother or your girl didn’t make them.”

“A friend’s girl,” Tim explained, as he went to work on a page

layout. “I guess it’s the thought that counts.”

Gloria Rostwald, Kenneth Woodforde’s painter girlfriend, was the

baker, and the cookies she’d produced resembled little cinderblocks.

They were cookies trying hard to be something less frivolous than

cookies; the gray squares wanted you to know that they would no

more be caught wearing sprinkles or icing than one of their maker’s

paintings would sport a representational figure.

The box they’d come in had contained no note from the baker,

only one from Woodforde, written on Saturday night and urging Tim

to be careful with the enclosed edibles:

Unlike Eisenhower, you might have real digestive problems after

eating these. That was a nice little smokescreen, don’t you

think? Here’s hoping Nixon, now that he’s in charge, doesn’t add

a year to your enlistment. As it is, the Italians are one election

away from a Communist government (yes, people do choose

such things), so NATO may not prove much in the way of a first

line of defense for the good old USA. Which I’ve started to see

more than enough of in my (old) Chevrolet. The magazine has

me out in the hinterlands looking for hot progressive prospects

for next year’s elections. I’ll let you know who they are as soon

as I find any.—KW

Once he finished answering Francy’s latest letter—ducking her

exhortation that he come home for Christmas—Tim would have to

send Woodforde’s girlfriend a thank-you note, maybe with a p.s.

telling Woodforde himself that, if leprosy could be pushed back, then

communism could, too. The sermon during Sunday’s radio Mass for

shut-ins, which Tim had listened to before going to church on the

post, had been all about advances being made against the disease

in Dr. Schweitzer’s lab and Father Damien’s old colony. What, the

radio celebrant had wondered, should Christians do when such a

familiar symbol of dispossession and God’s mysterious ways

became extinct? Rejoice!

“Here’s another one,” said Nontone, coming back with a second

clipping. “In?”

The item concerned the decision of Marie Dionne, one of the

quintuplets, now past twenty, to return to the convent she’d left,

homesick, the year before.

“Out,” said Tim, leery of letting Major Brillam think he was riding

his own hobbyhorses onto the pages of The Kisatchian. Around the

base he was known, cheerfully enough, as a holy roller, even if when

applied to him the term meant something different from what it did in

the Louisiana hamlets just beyond Fort Polk’s perimeter.

Actually, the Dionne story interested Tim quite a bit, because these

days—in a way he hadn’t allowed himself in years—he was thinking

a lot about the seminary, and how he might apply once he’d finished

up with the army. Now that he was past Hawk, had made his

renunciation and been reconciled to the Church, he was beginning to

believe he might be allowed to move beyond the whole issue of his

“tendencies”—as he’d so far managed to do here in the army. He

didn’t know whether he had a real calling for the priesthood, but he

cherished the idea that he might still receive one—a sudden,

glorious annunciation that could happen anywhere, in the motor pool

or even the PX.

Right now, waiting for his mail (with army logic, letters arrived

more slowly than parcels), he went back to reading his biography of

Cardinal Mindszenty. He had arrived at the prelate’s “Statement of

November 18, 1948,” made just weeks before the Russians arrested

him, forced him into a clown’s costume, and beat him with

truncheons:

Such a systematic and purposeful net of propaganda lies—a

hundred times disproved and yet a hundred times spread anew

—has never been organized against the seventy-eight

predecessors in my office. I stand for God, for the Church and

for Hungary. This responsibility has been imposed upon me by

the fate of my nation, which stands alone, an orphan in the

whole world. Compared with the sufferings of my people, my

own fate is of no importance.

Tim could feel in this pronouncement the peace and strength that

certainty give, a serene immunity from persecution or even simple

need. He had returned to the book a half-dozen times yesterday, and

would get back to it as soon as he opened the two envelopes

Nontone was now handing him.

One had been sent by his mother, who these days addressed him

with the nervous politeness someone might employ in a first

approach to a skittish Korean orphan. Today she was asking what

he’d like to have for his birthday, still five weeks away.

The second envelope appeared to have no return address, just a

Washington postmark, but there was, Tim now noticed on the back

flap, a small handwritten name: Miss Beatrice Lightfoot. Inside,

neatly cut from the Sunday Star, was the item MARRIAGE OF MR.

FULLER ANNOUNCED. The bridegroom-elect, deputy assistant chief…

to be married on Saturday, December third.

Tim’s mind gave no thought to the sender, or to how she had

known where to find him. The anger and despair that swept through

him—worse now than that night in New Orleans—arose only from

his dispossession. He was seized by a sudden, dizzying lust for

Hawkins, for the long-ago smell and taste of him. He felt hollow,

literally, without the man he loved inside him.

This unexpected tumult would have been a furious temptation had

its object been anywhere near or obtainable. As things were, the

storm of sensation could only torment Tim like a punishment without

a crime, a midnight visit from the secret police. But, unlike

Mindszenty, he had no peace or strength or certainty. His

reconciliation with God, he knew, was just a tar paper shack, ready

to be blown to bits while his cries went unheard on the wind.

He closed his eyes and prayed for help.

“From the look on your face I’m guessing you don’t like to travel.”

Major Brillam was standing over him.

“Sir?”

“You haven’t gotten your orders yet?”

“No.”

“Your unit’s headed to France. I’m going to miss you, son.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

December 16, 1955

“I therefore announce my candidacy for the Democratic presidential

nomination,” declared Senator Estes Kefauver. “I intend to conduct a

vigorous campaign. As in 1952, I will enter a number of state

primaries. I am a firm believer…”

Here in the second row of a chilly ballroom at the Willard, the

Star’s Cecil Holland leaned over to pick up the trademark coonskin

cap that had landed beside him when Senator Kefauver tossed it, for

the photographers, into a nonexistent ring.

“If you’re so cold,” whispered Holland to Mary McGrory, “why don’t

you make use of this?”

“It’s not even twenty degrees outside,” she answered softly, while

assessing the fur cap’s possibilities as a muff. “It would be rather

pretty without the tail.”

“The tail is all Kefauver’s going to be,” declared Joe Alsop, to

Holland’s right. “They’ll waste him as the VP candidate on another

losing run by Stevenson.”

“You think so?” whispered a man from the Baltimore Sun. “He just

said he wouldn’t take the second spot.”

“He’ll take it,” said Alsop, perfectly certain. “From what I hear,

Stevenson’s heart is in worse shape than Ike’s. If Adlai gets an

electoral miracle, he won’t get an actuarial one, too. He’ll drop dead

during his first year in office. That’s the way Estes will be thinking

come the convention. He’ll take it.”

A young woman from the Scripps-Howard papers, appalled by

such ghoulishness, shot Alsop a glance. For good measure she paid

Kefauver a compliment, telling the reporter on her left: “Pretty

shrewd of him to get in on the Davy Crockett craze.” She pointed to

the coonskin on Miss McGrory’s lap.

Alsop groaned. “Oh, God,” he complained to Holland. “Poor little

nitwit.”

Holland laughed, knowing as well as Alsop that the cap derived

not from Davy Crockett but one of Kefauver’s early campaigns,

during which an opposing political boss mocked him as a “pet coon.”

At the lectern, the senator was now citing assurances he’d gotten

from Harry Truman himself that the former president wouldn’t block

his nomination in favor of Stevenson’s, as he’d done in ’52.

Kenneth Woodforde turned around to the third row and whispered

to Tommy McIntyre, one of the dozen or so Hill staffers mixed in with

the press this morning: “Stevenson doesn’t need Truman now that

he’s got God.” The Illinois governor’s recent move from the Unitarian

to the Presbyterian Church did look calculated enough to make even

the girl from Scripps-Howard roll her eyes once it was mentioned.

“He’s come to understand,” Woodforde explained to Tommy, “that

the deity really is the insurance salesman down the street, not that

cosmic To Whom It May Concern.”

Miss McGrory, in a voice even softer than Woodforde’s whisper,

defended Stevenson. “He’s still a Unitarian. There’s no UU church

near his farm in Libertyville, so he’s making do with the

Presbyterians.”

“Careful, Mary,” said Cecil Holland. “I’ll have to take back

Kefauver’s coonskin if you’re still so madly for Adlai.”

“Kefauver himself is a little like God,” announced Alsop, in his

most mandarin way, not bothering to whisper at all. “He spends more

time hearing the afflicted than in giving them relief.” He referred to all

the committee investigations the Tennesseean had held since

coming to the Senate in ’49—hearings on organized crime, steel

prices, juvenile delinquency, boxing. Most of them had produced

more television coverage than legislation.

Right now Kefauver was answering a question about which

primaries he’d be entering; it was followed by another about what the

polls were showing. He could not, of course, comment on the most

important sounding of all, which would take place tomorrow at

Eisenhower’s Gettysburg farm, when Dr. Paul Dudley White put his

stethoscope on the president’s chest. If all was in order, the eminent

cardiologist had promised, Ike could make his own decision about

whether to run for a second term.

Bored with Kefauver’s optimism, Tommy spit into a paper cup and

wondered if there was a bar open anywhere in the Willard at tenthirty a.m. He tapped Woodforde on the shoulder and asked, “Why

are you wasting your time with this? You ought to go up to New York

and find Welker. Write a few hundred words about the egg running

off his face.”

Woodforde laughed. The Idaho reactionary and his wife, about to

embark on a Caribbean cruise out of New York, had the other night

been sitting in their cabin when a surprise party of revelers burst in

with platters of caviar, a giant floral wreath, jeroboams of champagne

—and two flashing cameras. The bon voyage bounty had all come

from the hard-left longshoremen’s union, whose leaders thought they

could embarrass the senator with all the gun-crazy McCarthyites

who kept voting for him out there in the Wild West.

Tommy handed Woodforde a press release he’d gotten from

Welker’s office this morning decrying the “obvious attempt to get

even with the Senator for his outspoken criticism of communism and

his personal fight against the Commies.”

Woodforde smothered some laughter over the last mimeographed

word, too childishly crude for even McCarthy to use. He whispered to

Tommy, “It’s usually about now that Welker starts hinting he’s up

against the fags to boot. But I’m not sure that’s going to work with

Tough Tony Anastasia.”

Cecil Holland leaned across Miss McGrory’s coonskin muff to

remind Woodforde that the stevedores’ union was pretty full of

Communists.

“Yeah,” said Tommy, “ones with TVs and houses in Levittown.” Not

his kind of Communists, not the ones from twenty years ago, the

ones like Annie Larchwood’s husband.

Miss McGrory shooshed the males around her, and then declared:

“At least Kefauver is more or less self-made.” A stenciled biography

reminded the reporters here that he’d worked his way through law

school waiting tables.

Ignoring Miss McGrory—the sort of genteel liberal that wearied

him—Woodforde turned back once more to the combustible

McIntyre. “So this defector coming home: are Potter’s constituents

complaining they’ll be contaminated by having him in their midst?”

After several years in China, Richard Tenneson, a Korea POW

who’d gone over to the enemy, was today returning to his family’s

farm—but in Minnesota, not Michigan, Tommy corrected. “They can

complain to Humphrey,” he told Woodforde.

“This guy’s not exactly one of the all-American stoics Potter had

before his committee. Even now he’s not fully contrite.”

“No,” said Tommy. “If this kid had testified, Charlie would have

pitched such a fit his canes would’ve shorted out.”

“And Potter’s apoplectic moments are pretty few and far between.

Wouldn’t you say so?”

“Charlie doesn’t have many moments one could even call

conscious,” said Tommy, spitting again into his cup. “And I don’t have

to tell you that that’s off the fucking record.”

Undeterred, Woodforde got to his real question: “Then what

accounted for his apoplexy, or at least high dudgeon, a year and a

half ago? At the end of the army nonsense.”

The memory forced Tommy’s yellow teeth into a big smile: “You

mean his burst of moral fervor?”

“Yeah,” said Woodforde, trying to make his insistence appear

casual. When Tommy said nothing more, he tried another tack. “Who

else knows anything about it? Besides you, that is.”

Tommy’s grin retracted itself into a wary pout. “Oh, it’s a very small

circle. Like the number of Kefauver’s advisers with any sense.”

“Would it include my old acquaintance Private Laughlin?”

Tommy wheezed, phlegmily, while rising from his chair. “I think I’m

allergic to that goddamned coonskin.”

“Étaient-ils Résistants?” Tim asked. He pointed to the knot of men

cheering on the National Assembly candidate who’d just cited his

wartime service from the steps of the Rheims city hall.

The man standing next to Tim answered in English, and with

knowing laughter. “Oh, we were all resisters. Every one of us!”

With no translation for the meaning to get lost in, the remark’s tone

seemed to contain equal measures of sardonic pleasure and shame.

Tim decided not to press the matter, settling for self-mockery about

his bad French. “Un américain évident, oui?” he asked, pointing to

himself.

“Yep,” said the Frenchman, sounding the syllable like a movie

cowboy. He stubbed out his Gitane, shook Tim’s hand, and obeyed a

summons from his wife, who had just emerged from the bakery. The

pair walked away from the mairie, indifferent to the rest of the

political speech.

They were an exception. Tim and two guys from the radio unit who

had passes today had been told not to wear their uniforms, since all

varieties of French political passion seemed to be rising with the

approach of the January 2 elections. Coming into town, Tim had had

no need to consult Jerry Baumeister’s old pocket dictionary, which

he’d been sent over with by Mary, to grasp the pro-Communist

slogans and À BAS USA he’d seen festooning the walls and alleys.

There were so many signs for so many candidates that you half

expected the plaster baby in the city’s Christmas crèche to be

holding one, too.

The cathedral was Tim’s destination this afternoon, but he found it

hard not to get caught up in the auditory duel that was starting

between the orating candidate—now blaming Prime Minister Faure

for the loss at Dien Bien Phu—and an opposing claque that shouted,

over and over, “Salaud!” Tim could hear Gallic echoes of “Who lost

China?” in the exchange, and for a moment he imagined himself

back in the Senate Caucus Room a year and a half ago. The

dangerous memories surrounding that time at last propelled him

toward the cathedral and onto his knees, beneath the haloed carving

of an unknown saint.

Some nearby votive candles looked like the pipes of an organ in

flames, and the church’s chalk walls, wrested over centuries, block

by block, from plains all over Champagne, bore not only the marks of

the First World War’s bombardments but also scars from the French

Revolution. Tim reckoned that he had been repairing his own shelter

for nearly a year, starting over whenever some gust, like the news of

Hawk’s engagement, knocked it down. There were times when he

was beginning to believe he’d built himself a snug little chapel, but

there were still those other nights when it would be blown away in an

instant, and he would have to dig himself a foxhole with a few

desperate prayers, hoping to stay hidden from harm until morning.

Earlier today, at the café near the mairie, he’d had a ham

sandwich and some pâté de grives, a regional specialty that the

waiter eventually confessed was made from the thrushes one saw

fluttering in and out of the local bushes. Tim had eaten what he could

of it while reading the Herald-Tribune’s article about a Budapest AP

correspondent named Marton who with his wife had just been

arrested and tried as a spy. Their fate? Unknown. Tim imagined

them in a cell down the hall from Cardinal Mindszenty.

These stories of freedom’s instant and complete disappearance

had an ever-tighter hold on his thoughts. He’d lately been making

himself read a book called Religion and the Modern State by an

Englishman named Dawson. He’d acquired it on his one trip to Paris,

when he’d gone looking for mystery novels in an English-language

bookshop, and he was carrying it with him even today. Its thesis—

that all the kingdoms of state would disappear, become useless, “as

soon as the light comes”—had made him understand more exactly

the nature of his patriotism. The intense attachment he felt to his

own country—the world’s bulwark against totalitarianism—derived

from America’s permitting him to go about his real business in the

world, which was the search for a revelation so great, for a peace so

absolute and ecstatic, that he would in time be lifted away from the

world entirely. His own country, his own state, allowed this quest; the

opposing state didn’t. And yet, if his life and everyone else’s

managed to fulfill itself, then even America would subside into

irrelevance. Right now one had to protect it from its enemies, but

finally it would drop away like the first stage of a rocket that took one

to a thoroughly different universe.

He had tried, clumsily, to explain all this in a letter to Kenneth

Woodforde, who had replied with a telegram that the mail-room

officer handed over with raised eyebrows: CONGRATULATIONS,

LAUGHLIN, ON BECOMING A MARXIST—STOP—YOURS UNTIL THE

STATE WITHERS AWAY, KW.

He had taken to praying with a fervor beyond anything he’d

previously achieved in his life, and to fasting as well, at least

occasionally—not for any penitential credit the effort might provide,

but for the lightheadedness it brought on, the physical floating he

could feel after about thirty-six hours. Longer than that, he’d joked to

Woodforde, and he couldn’t do his job for the benevolent, temporary

nation-state.

And yet maybe these moments of exultation were no more than

spiritual dizziness, and he himself was just a “dizzy dame,” what

Hawkins used to call the nightclub-obsessed boyfriend of some older

man he knew. He would never be a systematic thinker or half as

quick as Woodforde. In fact, along with the Dawson book he had

purchased a copy of T. S. Eliot’s essays—partly to further his

religious way through this dangerous, secular world, but also, he

knew, because when he saw the spine he had been seared by a

memory of Hawk standing naked in the dark, purring the lyrics of one

of his Eartha Kitt records:

T. S. Eliot writes books for me;

Sherman Billingsley even cooks for me;

Monotonous…

The bus back to Verdun left at three-forty, and when it pulled out

from the center of Rheims, Tim found himself sitting amidst several

men and women in their sixties, American husbands bringing their

wives back to the war they had fought four decades before. Verdun

itself was a kind of giant tomb for the month-after-month slaughter of

1916, though that battle held none of these men’s particular

memories. They had arrived with the rest of the Americans the

following year, for the last of the blood and derangement, which still

on occasion exploded from the region’s landscape, when some

farmer’s tractor disturbed a shell that had been slumbering for forty

summers.

This was the kind of story Tim wrote up for The Com Z Cadence,

the official newspaper of the army’s Second LOC, or Line of

Communication, a significant stretch of the Americans’ everburgeoning Cold War home away from home. Running from Verdun

to Orléans to La Rochelle, the Second LOC had been established as

a backstop, in the event the First LOC, strung through Germany, got

overrun by the Russians. The Yanks may have come late to Verdun

back in ’17, but this time they’d come to town early, manning the

7,965th Area Command in advance of the next war.

The Com Z Cadence—the Last Voice You’ll Hear, as the staff liked

to joke—specialized in morale-building local color and human

interest. In the last couple of weeks Tim had done stories on the

flower sellers outside the U.S. cemetery at Varennes, and the neveridle two-thousand-foot runway at Saran. His biggest accomplishment

had been a story he’d freelanced to Stars and Stripes itself about the

engineering depot at Toul, where Caesar’s legions had once camped

and where their American successors, after spending a first winter in

tents, had by now built a whole town of warehouses, barracks, and

chapels. They’d even fielded a baseball team called the Toul-Nancy

Dodgers.

The bus let the tourists off in town and continued to the base,

whose horseshoe-shaped welcome arch reminded him of the neon

sign greeting tourists to Reno, as he’d seen it years ago on a

postcard sent by Uncle Frank. Inside the caserne, Tim shared a

large room, down the hall from the First Signal Group’s

cryptographers, with seven other guys. The barracks dated from just

after the Franco-Prussian War—a war he’d barely heard of—and

some recruits said you could still smell the stables that had once

been on the ground floor. Tim’s own floor, the third, was served by a

single shower, which provided a measure of hygiene hilarity for

letters to Francy and Tom, communications that he kept

immaculately free of the politics and religion he sent to Mary and to

Woodforde.

“Un visiteur—pour vous!” said the local woman who manned the

message desk.

Tim cocked his head in disbelief.

“Oui!” she insisted, pointing to the little excuse for a lounge down

the hall and to the right. “He is here on, how do Americans say, his

honeymoon?”

For one moment, his heart pounding, he thought it might be Hawk:

to be married on Saturday, December third. It was the sort of thing

he would do, a show of the brazen insouciance he couldn’t live

without displaying. But then he realized it had to be Jerry

Baumeister, who must have made his mariage blanc to Beverly

Phillips and come here on a side trip from Paris to show her another

portion of the culture behind his now useless master’s degree.

Once inside the lounge, Tim saw that he was wrong in this guess,

too.

“Paul!” he exclaimed.

The “brewer”—he could hear Hawkins saying it—extended his

hand.

“Private Laughlin.”

“Where’s Mrs. Hildebrand? Congratulations. I just heard.”

“Thanks,” said Paul, who went on to explain that his wife, Marjorie,

until recently his brother’s bookkeeper, was resting in town at the

Hôtel Bellevue on the Avenue de Douaumont, which neither of them

could really pronounce. They’d been married last Saturday, the

tenth, and had come over to Paris on TWA. Even though it was a

honeymoon, Marjorie wanted to see the patch of ground in Ardennes

where her brother had been killed late in ’44, as well as the “Red

Schoolhouse” over in Rheims, where the Germans had surrendered

to the Allies. When they were through with this historical circuit, they

would start making their way to London.

Tim told them he could get information from FAFLO, the FrenchAmerican Fiscal Liaison Office—“we’ve got initials for everything”—

about discounts for a Europabus they could take from Paris to

Calais.

Paul nodded thanks.

“She never told me you were getting married,” said Tim, lowering

his voice and somehow unable to say “Mary,” as if the new Marjorie

Hildebrand might actually be here instead of at the hotel.

“She asked me to check up on you,” explained Paul. “Make sure

you were okay.”

“I write to her more than to my sister!” Tim said, with an overhearty

laugh. “She knows I’m fine.”

“She says you don’t talk about much except God and the

Communists.”

Tim hoped his hand was covering the title of Dawson’s book. He

continued speaking through simulated laughter: “She doesn’t tell me

much, either. Like about your getting married, for instance!”

Hildebrand wondered what she did and didn’t tell this kid, whom

he liked well enough despite his condition, which he probably

couldn’t help and might still be young enough to grow out of. Had

she confided her sputtering affair with the Estonian—as she’d

confided it to him? He doubted it, since in his own case Mary had

almost made a present of the story, an intimate parting gift on the

eve of his marriage.

“Did she tell you,” asked Paul, “that her friend Beverly has left the

office?”

“Really?”

“Yeah, just a couple of weeks ago. She’s joined the staff of some

Illinois congressman. She made a connection with his office when

she did that charity show on the Hill. Mary says she never liked

working for State after they fired her friend Jerry.”

“I came over here with some of his French books.”

Paul nodded. “Are you allowed to show me around?”

“Sure,” said Tim, pointing the way forward. They walked back

toward the message center, but after several steps, more to test

himself than anything else, he stopped and asked: “Did Mary go to

Fuller’s wedding? On the third?”

“Yes,” said Paul, reluctantly. “In fact, I was her date.” A part of him

wanted to rest his hand on the kid’s shoulder, but too much else in

him was repelled by the possbility as soon as it came to his mind.

“That crazy woman, the one who used to be in her office, showed up

at the back of the church.”

“Oh, her,” said Tim, laughing.

Nine hours earlier Fuller had been traveling from Union Station to the

I Street apartment in a cab that got trapped in traffic around Dupont

Circle. A colored man had just leapt to his death from the top of the

Connecticut Avenue underpass.

“They want to kill me! They want to kill me!” the man had shouted

to the policemen urging him toward safety. The remark had been

passed down two long lines of idling vehicles by a morbid pedestrian

walking the sliver of space between them.

“And I suspects he’s right,” Fuller’s driver, also colored, had

whispered, sadly and to no one, while his passenger thrummed his

fingers on a beribboned package containing a silver bowl.

Married thirteen days ago, Fuller and Lucy had gone for their

honeymoon to Acapulco, a destination that made his aunt Valerie

sniff with surprise that her nephew’s old-money bride should be

aping the flashy Catholic Kennedys. As it turned out, the wedding trip

had been cut short several days ago by the death of Uncle Ned,

whose funeral in New York Fuller was returning from today. Lucy

would stay on there for one more night, then go up to Massachusetts

for a few items she wished to bring with her to their new home.

He, in the meantime, would take possession of the little brick

house, attached on one side, over in the Parkfairfax section of

Alexandria. The development had sprung up quickly during the war,

but was leafy and handsome by now, a half-time home to many

younger congressmen, and, these days, if Fuller wasn’t mistaken, to

Citizen Canes himself. His own possessions from I Street would go

over tomorrow in a truck driven by the built Italian boy who

sometimes did yard work for Andy Sorrell, and who, Andy assured

him, could be had.

Lucy had been highly presentable at the funeral, never overdoing

a gesture. She’d had a veil on her hat, but a small one, and it had

been pulled back, off her face. She’d looked appropriately grave

without shedding tears. And yet, while the money on both sides of

her family was older and ampler than what had ever been on either

side of Fuller’s—and although the art-historian father had put a thick

patina of culture onto the Boardmans—there was something of the

arriviste about her. She betrayed a strong, potentially useful

insecurity that made her seem almost a shopgirl who felt she had to

keep earning her splendid new husband. With the actual shopgirls of

the world, her manners and aspect of entitlement carried the full

birthright of arrogance, but in all that concerned Fuller she displayed

an undisguisable nervousness. Unchecked, this might grow toward

panic and make her demanding, but properly managed, it should

keep her nicely off balance, Fuller reasoned, just the way she’d been

in the three days between his application for the marriage license

(easily revokable) and the actual wedding, which had been carried

out down here, quite modestly, at St. Margaret’s Episcopal.

The phone had been ringing when he came into the apartment this

afternoon: Lucy, half-teasing and half-nagging about his having

neglected to get it turned off. He made a note to do so as she went

on to explain how she wanted them to go hear the Yale Glee Club in

Lisner Auditorium on Monday night. Her father had been a member

“eons ago,” and the concert could be her and Fuller’s first trip into

town together from Parkfairfax, assuming he didn’t himself want to

arrive at the auditorium directly from the office.

To all of which he had responded, without audible irony, “Yes,

dear.”

His reasons for marrying had proved stronger than ever at Ned’s

funeral, held inside St. James’ Episcopal on Madison Avenue, a hell

of a lot fancier than St. Margaret’s on Connecticut. Fuller’s least

favorite sister had been wearing a big turquoise amulet, as if it were

the latchkey to Ned’s New Mexico house. His father, now judged to

have lost much of his sense ahead of his money, was mostly

shunned by his own partners. And his mother, looking neither

particularly resentful nor present, had worn a gold Catholic crucifix

with a chunky graven image of Christ’s cadaver attached to it, the

whole thing more vulgar and a lot more expensive than his sister’s

necklace. Both his parents were under sixty and already doddering.

Aunt Valerie, buzzing with vitality and animus, could be seen turning

into some baleful family retainer out of Balzac, wondering what she

was to do with these ancien régime characters she’d been saddled

with.

A good thing old man Boardman had paid for the little wedding

down here in D.C. In fact, at the subsequent funeral Fuller had found

himself guessing that the new in-law might quietly be kicking in to

help out with Uncle Ned’s departure, Ned having been pretty badly

depleted at the close. As Fuller had listened to the tiny boys’ choir,

which he’d sung in himself twenty years before, he’d wondered if

either of his parents had even remembered to make the customary

donation for the little angels’ high-pitched services. Probably Mother

had, unless she’d recently spent that pittance, too, on Irish priests

bringing the Word to South American Indians.

Now, as he poured himself a drink, the late news was murmuring

out of the television, which Lucy, on her one inspection of his

“bachelor apartment” had suggested might not be large enough for

the place in Alexandria. Maybe he’d just give it away to the Italian

boy tomorrow morning. In any case, its swan song here, now coming

through the mesh, would be these dronings by Kefauver about the

important work he’d done investigating juvenile delinquency.

That’s me. I’m your hoodlum, your little j.d.

Fuller looked at the kitchen chair, surprised to remember the

ardent kisses of a particular morning, and the way Skippy hadn’t

been able to unzip either of their pants fast enough. All in all, a much

more bravura display than what he could expect from the one in the

bedroom now, this sweatered college kid he’d met ice-skating on the

C&O canal a couple of hours ago. He already couldn’t remember the

name, only that he’d been calling him Dicky, for Dick Button, under

the small bit of available moonlight. His own name would remain a

convenient secret, since he’d removed the strip of paper from the

doorbell down on the first floor—the one bit of packing he’d

accomplished so far.

“Be right in,” Fuller called out to Dicky, who was lying on the bed,

still in his sweater, as patient for his unwrapping as Lucy had been

on the wedding night at the Hay-Adams.

He looked again at the kitchen chair, remembering the morning

he’d been strapped to McLeod’s magic, inquisitorial machine;

remembering, again, the hour before that, here.

Have you ever considered yourself to be in love with another

male?

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

May 24, 1956

“Welcome to the 7,965th, sir.”

Major Conroy, the public-affairs officer, shook Senator Potter’s

hand and escorted him to the small dais that had been set up at the

front of the enlisted-men’s club. “I know you’re already acquainted

with this fellow.”

“Hello, son,” said Potter, shaking Tim’s hand. “Good to see you in

uniform.”

Tim thought Potter didn’t look entirely certain about whom he was

greeting. More than a year had passed, after all, since his departure

from the office. But there was no time for more than a handshake.

He’d been assigned to write about this quick visit from several

members of the Armed Services Committee, who were over here

inspecting several American installations and were soon to leave for

the LOC’s headquarters in Orléans. Potter did not have a seat on

Armed Services, but as a war hero who’d escaped with his life from

this region, he had been invited to junket along by Scoop Jackson,

his old Democratic colleague on the McCarthy committee.

The other Democrat here was Mississippi’s John Stennis; Mrs.

Smith of Maine and Styles Bridges of New Hampshire made up the

Republican side of the delegation. “Stylish” Bridges, Hawk had

always called the latter, who looked a little like the actor Lyle Talbot.

Moving quickly to his seat, Tim didn’t shake hands with any senator

besides Potter, though he felt a slightly ridiculous desire to ask Mrs.

Smith if she knew what had become of Robert Jones since she’d

beaten him in the primary two years ago.

“We haven’t had this much excitement here,” announced Major

Conroy, “since Billy Graham dropped in last summer!” Amidst

general laughter he turned the proceedings over to Senator Stennis,

the senior majority member, who explained through his bad teeth

and impenetrable Southern accent that the group would be winding

up its fact-finding travels at the new NATO air-forces headquarters in

northern Italy.

“Unfortunately,” Mrs. Smith added, “Ambassador Clare Boothe

Luce won’t be there to greet us. She’s home in the States for a bit,

recovering nicely from a bout of illness. I was hoping for a bit of

female company, but it appears I’ll have to keep putting up with

these gentlemen instead.”

“Ah, Mrs. Luce,” whispered Kenneth Woodforde. “Mother Superior

as imagined by Harry Winston.”

Besides a man from the AP, who wore a button saying FREE THE

MARTONS, Woodforde appeared to be the only American covering

the delegation. Weeks ago he had sent a letter with the news that

he’d be traveling with the senators, and he had laughed when Tim

replied by asking if The Nation would be paying his way over. He

was here on some money advanced to him by Harper & Row, for

whom he was producing a book called Armed and Dangerous:

America’s Permanent War Footing, an exposé of defense-contractor

gluttons and their legislative ladles in both houses of Congress. It

would be as strident, he promised, as the publisher would permit.

Picking up on Major Conroy’s Billy Graham remark, Senator

Jackson told the recruits who’d been mustered to attend the event:

“We hope that during your period of service over here you have

absolutely no excitement whatsoever. We just want you to do your

jobs in peace and then to come home in one piece.”

Amidst the applause and whooping, Woodforde asked Tim: “So

what were you doing when they dragged you over to this show?

Peeling potatoes?”

“Wrapping up a Princess Grace souvenir wedding plate to send to

my mother.”

“I hear the heir she produces will look a lot like William Holden.”

“Do you have a question?” Senator Jackson inquired, testily,

pointing to Woodforde.

“Yes, I do. Why, when the United States professes to support the

United Nations as a freewheeling arena for the airing of differences,

have your senatorial colleagues on the Internal Security Committee

been calling for the expulsion of the Soviet delegate, Arkady

Sobolev?”

Jackson replied with the kind of scorn Tim remembered him

displaying once or twice in the Caucus Room. “Mr. Sobolev

understands a little about expulsion himself. As you know perfectly

well, five young Soviet sailors recently defected and were given

asylum while they were in New York City. And not long after that

some of Sobolev’s muscle men managed to hustle them onto a

plane out of New York and back to Moscow. Anyone want to take

bets on whether they’re still alive? You’re confusing a diplomat with a

thug, Mr. Woodforde.”

Woodforde maintained a smirk as he wrote down Jackson’s

response.

Senator Bridges, a natural grandstander, decided to lighten the

moment with a little pandering. He pointed to the sign at the back of

the enlisted-men’s club and began reciting its injunction: “‘In the eyes

of foreign people, you are a mirror reflecting everything the United

States looks like and stands for. By your appearance and actions, so

is your country judged.’ Good advice. But I’ve got only one question

for the men: How are they feeding you?”

During the derisive roar that followed, Woodforde spoke loudly into

Tim’s ear: “Christ, he might as well be Bob Hope with the golf club.

I’m half expecting Virginia Mayo to come out.”

When the ruckus died down, the AP man asked the senators

where Estes Kefauver, a member of the committee, was today.

Mrs. Smith replied that she “shouldn’t speak for the majority” but

“could only imagine he’s campaigning in Florida.” Stennis, who

wished no success for Kefauver, a desegregationist from the

neighboring state of Tennessee, pursed his lips. While this went on,

Tim regarded Potter, the only one who’d said nothing so far—as

mute as he’d typically been on the McCarthy committee. He looked

absent, even lost. Perhaps his mind was back in ’45 now that he’d

returned to France, but still, unless a roaring automotive economy

carried him over the finish line in Michigan, he looked like a bad

prospect for reelection two years from now.

“You have a pass at twenty-one hundred hours,” Woodforde told

Tim.

“I do?”

“Yes, the public-affairs officer seems to believe that even The

Nation’s man can be brought around by a full display of cooperation.

Everything’s supposed to be at my disposal until tomorrow morning.

Including the correspondent of The Com Z Cadence.”

“You’re not following them to Orléans this afternoon?”

“I’ll catch up with the marionettes in Italy.”

“Okay,” said Tim, tentatively. “I’m just a little worried about time.”

He was on deadline, he explained, with another story—about the

Spiritualaires, a singing quintet of Negro servicemen.

“You’ve got time,” Woodforde assured him. “And I’ll bring you up to

date on things back home. Your old boss, McIntyre, has all kinds of

interesting matters to impart. About some of your old friends.” He

looked at Tim, waiting for the last remark to register. “So where do I

come by for you?”

Sure enough, when nine p.m. arrived, it became clear that Major

Conroy had permitted Woodforde into even the caserne. Arriving

punctually to take Tim out for a beer, the writer rolled his eyes while

pointing to copies of National Review and Encounter that lay atop

Tim’s footlocker.

Tim explained that the first was part of a subscription his father

had gotten him, and the second a single issue he’d picked up at the

English-language bookshop in Paris.

“We know,” Woodforde explained, “that National Review is made

possible by the family money of a crazy individual. It’ll be a while

before we learn where Encounter’s money comes from, but when we

do you’ll realize it’s as much an organ of the United States

government as The Com Z Cadence.”

“Are you ready for a drink?” Tim asked, giving him a serene smile.

The two of them walked back to the enlisted-men’s club where the

Senate delegation had been presented this morning. The makeshift

dais was gone, and a handful of GIs were hoisting Cokes and beers.

“I’ll bet most of them spend a year in France without ever drinking a

glass of wine,” Woodforde observed.

“Why didn’t you bring your girlfriend over? What painter could

resist Paris?”

“No American with the least bit of talent has gone to Paris to paint

in twenty years. They go to your hometown, New York City, Corporal

Laughlin.”

To someone whose idea of the artist’s life remained easels and

berets near the Moulin Rouge, this was a revelation like one of

Hawk’s old life lessons, those ex cathedra pronouncements meant to

complete what the two of them jokingly used to call his “education.”

“So,” said Woodforde, sitting down at one of the oilcloth-covered

tables, “how are the Negroes?”

“You mean the Spiritualaires?” asked Tim, brightening.

“Yes. God’s Mills Brothers.”

“They’re terrific. They may even make a record.” He started to sing

“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” in the lowest register he could manage.

“I’m sure you’ll write them up as proud Americans happy to be

serving in our color-blind army.”

Tim downed half his beer and felt merrily combative. “You know,

they get an English translation of Pravda at the HQ in Orléans, and it

sometimes makes its way up here. The last copy I saw had a story

on some Young Communist League members who want to be sent

to Siberia. To help ‘build the nation.’”

Woodforde pointed to the sign Senator Bridges had hammily

quoted this morning: You are a mirror reflecting everything the

United States looks like and stands for. By your appearance and

actions, so is your country judged. “You think what your clean-living

minstrels are experiencing is really so different from a little forced

labor?”

“They’re not minstrels, and of course it is.”

Woodforde smiled with indulgent superiority.

“Are you a Communist?” Tim asked, sincerely. “Or just an antianticommunist? I’ve always wanted to know.”

“Communism hasn’t arrived,” Woodforde explained, as if it were a

genre of painting that hadn’t yet made it to New York. “When it gets

here, it’ll be something quite different from Stalin, though its

opponents will keep waving that bloody shirt forever.”

Tim could see that Woodforde had been rattled, if not quite toppled

over, by press reports of Khrushchev’s big “secret speech,” in which

the current dictator had apparently laid out the crimes of the former

one to their full, breathtaking extent. Even so, the chasm between

the writer and himself was still too wide to keep shouting across, so

Tim narrowed the divide to the spectator sport of domestic politics,

mentioning a wire-service story he’d seen about a televised debate

between Stevenson and Kefauver.

“Two wet firecrackers,” declared Woodforde. “Amusing, though, to

see the great liberal Stevenson allowing the voters of Florida to

believe that, race-wise, Kefauver might as well be Paul Robeson.

Wait until Kefauver’s people start spreading the story of the ‘pansy

party’ Adlai’s supposed to have attended over here in Paris not long

ago.”

“Is that true?”

“Does it matter? Besides, when it’s all over, Joe Alsop will have

been proved right. Kefauver will take the number-two spot. And then

they’ll both lose together.”

Tim got a mental picture of the columnist ogling Hawk at the

Metropolitan Club’s coat check—I could tell you what I’ve got on Joe

Alsop—a picture first imparted on the awful night, a month or so

before the hearings began, when Hawk had come to the Capitol Hill

apartment. Maybe the two of us can become the three of us.

“I have a friend,” said Tim, “who calls Alsop Walter Liplock.” He

knew he was quoting this only for the chance to hear Hawk’s voice in

his head.

“Would this friend be your friend Fuller?”

“You know Fuller?” asked Tim, trying to sound casual.

“I’ve met him once or twice. Most of what I know about him comes

from your other friend, McIntyre.”

Tim rolled a peanut between his fingers.

“Which reminds me,” said Woodforde, reaching into his pocket for

a note penciled in what Tim recognized as Tommy McIntyre’s hand:

You should write to your friend. 3423 Mt. Eagle Place, Alexandria.

He misses you.

Tim’s eyes welled with longing and rage. He knew that Tommy

was sending this not because of the extreme romantic nature they

supposedly shared—I told you because you’ll understand—but for

the cruel pleasure of control, even more satisfying when exercised

across a vast distance.

“He’s special to you, isn’t he?” asked Woodforde.

Did the soothing manner of this leading question approximate a

defense attorney’s direct examination of his client? Or, Tim

wondered, did it mirror the sympathy of the police detective putting

queries to a distraught victim? No, he decided: it was the tone of a

reporter trying to get a story.

“Why are you spending all this time with McIntyre?” he at last

responded. “Have you developed a sudden interest in Potter’s

position on overfishing the sea lamprey? Maybe you’re writing the

senator’s biography? Legless and Dangerous: The Citizen Canes

Story.”

“Easy, Laughlin,” cautioned Woodforde, still soothing, but hardly in

retreat. “I go to Potter’s office to see McIntyre himself. He knows a

lot, shall we say, though he does like to tantalize as much as to tell.”

He looked straight at Tim. “I don’t care about you and Fuller. That’s

your business.”

“What’s your business?”

“I want to know why Potter did what he did a year and a half ago,

at the end of the hearings.”

“Oh, please,” said Tim, tossing the peanut to the floor. “No one

cares anymore about those procedural votes.”

Woodforde replied in a good imitation of Tommy’s Irish voice: “You

boys all think you’re so clever. So worldly wise, believin’ Cohn had

somethin’ on McCarthy. You never ask yourselves if Schine had

somethin’ on Joe.”

At this remove Tim had to ask himself if he could even remember

who had had what on whom. He had tried for a year and a half to

wipe from his mind the sordid revelations Tommy McIntyre had

cackled into the phone line between D.C. and Madison Square

Garden: how the drunk McCarthy had been tempted with Potter’s

bastard son. Boys, girls, your old-maid auntie. When he’s hammered

he’ll grope anything. How the photo of McCarthy succumbing had

wound up in the hands of David Schine instead of Tommy. And how

it had brought McCarthy low nonetheless. Dave let Joe know he had

it, and from that moment on, if Royboy insisted Dave get an ice

cream sundae every morning at reveille, Joe was ready to initial the

request.

Tim finished his beer as Woodforde opened a second one for him,

which he began drinking fast, remembering how Hawk used to say

that “by the third one you could get Skippy to vote for Norman

Thomas.” And that was without thirty-plus hours of fasting, which,

except for a glass of milk, he’d undergone since yesterday afternoon.

He’d go until midnight tonight, when he’d take a vision-seeking walk

around the base perimeter.

Lightheaded, he looked at Tommy’s note—a whisper from Iago.

He hated him, he decided, just as he hated being here in the army

as the only way to escape his love for Hawk. He decided he would

hate Woodforde, too.

“So that’s all you know?” he finally asked the writer.

“Does any of it involve Fuller?” Woodforde persisted.

Relishing a sense of power, the feeling that at last he had

something to give or withhold, Tim answered: “See if you can find an

eighteen-year-old punk named Michael Larchwood in Cheboygan,

Michigan.”

Woodforde wrote down the name.

“See if you’re smart enough to find out what his real last name is,

or ought to be.”

“Why don’t you tell it to me?”

“I’ve got to go,” said Tim, getting up, none too steadily, and starting

for the door. “I’m craving the opium of the people.”

“So,” asked Fuller, “was this de Staël a White Russian with a Blue

Period or a Blue Russian with a White Period?”

Mary pulled from her purse a Phillips Collection brochure about

Nicolas de Staël, the exiled Russian painter who had last year

committed suicide in Paris. She offered the gallery’s booklet as

proof, answering the real question on Fuller’s mind, which was

whether she’d in fact had a lunchtime tryst with “the Estonian.”

“I’m disappointed,” said Fuller.

“Are you living vicariously through me these days?”

He laughed and disappeared into his office, but both of them knew

there was an element of truth in what she was suggesting. Since his

wedding, his hours at the department had become more regular, and

his phone rang far less often with calls from young men not doing

government business.

A new boss had also affected his routine and behavior. Mr. Morton

had left at the end of February to run for the Senate from Kentucky,

and he’d been replaced by Robert C. Hill, a serious New Englander,

not yet forty, who probably wouldn’t be around for long. Mr. Hill had

already had the ambassadorships to Costa Rica and El Salvador

and was said to be after the big prize in his region of expertise, the

embassy in Mexico City. In the meantime, he was proving a tougher

nut than his predecessor. Apropos of Sobolev and the sailors who’d

defected, he was asking hard, almost Nixonian questions of the

department’s UN liaisons, but he had also been pushing back

against the department’s Senate critics, telling them they were illinformed whenever that was the case, as it frequently was.

Hill and Fuller were not each other’s cup of tea, but the acquisition

of a wife had made the latter even more socially deployable than

he’d been before. On Sunday afternoon, Fuller had glamorously

represented the bureau at the Afghans’ independence-week party

over on Wyoming Avenue, where the top-drawer little crowd had

included Justice Douglas and Senator Saltonstall, whom everyone at

State was aware of as a distant relative of Fuller’s bride.

Putting away the museum brochure, Mary opened an envelope

sent over by Congressman Yates’s office: from Beverly, it turned out,

a sketch of the wedding dress—a sly, knee-length knockoff of Grace

Kelly’s—in which she would be married next month.

Mary had begun to think of herself—without much regret, she tried

to believe—as an old maid, even if her affair continued with

intermittent ardor. Fred would never offer to leave his wife, and she

would never ask him to. She would never have his undivided

attention, and he could no longer have hers when he talked of the

latest atrocity or opportunity for Estonia, as he did on the phone

several times a week.

Indeed, here he was now:

“Hello, baby.”

“Hello, Fred.”

“I’d love to see you Monday, but I’ll be picketing you instead.”

She had heard about the anti-Sobolev demonstration being

planned for the sidewalks outside the department. “Maybe we could

manage a quick kiss behind the police van?” she offered.

“Maybe.”

“Fred, I was joking.”

“Oh,” he said. “You know, there is a way we can combine the two

activities, baby.”

“Really? Tell me.”

“Late September, outside the General Assembly in New York. All

the exile groups are getting together for something pretty gigantic.

On a weekend. I can book us into the San Carlos Hotel; it’ll feel like

a honeymoon.”

Or a farewell, she thought.

“That didn’t come out right,” he apologized. “I just meant we’d be

in a different place altogether, not your city, not mine.”

She tried to imagine herself shopping for shoes on Madison

Avenue while Fred carried a placard through Turtle Bay. Maybe she

would feel like a wife who’d accompanied her husband to a

convention of druggists or petroleum engineers.

“I’ll take you to My Fair Lady,” he added.

“Estonia will be free before you can get tickets. But I accept the

invitation to New York.”

She could not shake the feeling that this proposed weekend, still

months away, would be the end of it. But she would rather they had

their goodbye scene there than here, so she wouldn’t keep running

into the memory.

A moment after the two of them hung up, a delivery boy from the

cleaners on Virginia Avenue entered the office. Through the

cellophane bag she could see it was a tuxedo he was carrying.

“Mr. Fuller?” he asked, looking at the ticket.

Mary pointed to the right doorway, but having heard his name,

Fuller was already emerging. He paid for the garment and asked the

boy to hang it in his office.

“And where are you off to tonight?” asked Mary.

“White House Correspondents’ dinner. At the table of a UPI man,

whom I’ll no doubt convince we’ve handled Sobolev and the sailors

exactly right. Let me show you what you’ll be missing.” He opened

Mary’s Washington Post to a photo of Patti Page and Jimmy Cagney,

the evening’s entertainment, rehearsing at the Sheraton Park.

“Well, aren’t you a Yankee Doodle Dandy.”

Fuller pointed to Patti Page. “That doggie in the window was her

reflection.”

Mary laughed hard, even while wondering whether this wasn’t a

line he’d heard from the comic piano player at the Chicken Hut, one

of the bars Jerry Baumeister unblushingly mentioned from time to

time, the way a regular man about to forsake bachelorhood might

bring up bygone nights with his buddies at the corner gin mill.

As Fuller read her the story about the evening’s dinner, she

realized why she detested Lucy. It was because she herself believed

in nature, in Fuller’s fulfilling what she now accepted as his own. She

also had begun to feel, perhaps contradictorily, that Jerry and

Beverly were fulfilling some aspect of their natures; marriage for

them would be the cementing of something childlike and fraternal

and curiously authentic. But Fuller’s union with Lucy was no civilized

companionship, or even some piece of sophisticated realism; it was

a corrupt bargain that the two of them had struck. Fuller thought he

was on top of it, but Lucy’s needle was in him deeper than McLeod’s

had ever been.

“Is Lucy coming here before the dinner?”

“No.”

“What about the tuxedo?”

“That’s for Monday night. Something with the Joint Chiefs. Tonight

is business suits, but I will be heading back to home and hearth

between here and the Sheraton Park.”

“Well, the sight of you and Lucy getting ready for a party must look

like a ‘Diamond Is Forever’ ad.” She was being very polite.

“Actually, we’ll be undressing. I’ve committed to making a baby,

and the calendar has been calibrated like an atomic clock. The

fertility gods are supposed to be in full cry between now and seven.”

He checked his watch. “I’ll be leaving early.”

“Would you like a boy or a girl?”

“I’d like a reprieve.”

He could see a look on her face that said tell me: tell me that you

know it’s a mistake; tell me why you really did this; and tell me

whether you aren’t really going off to meet a boy instead. But Fuller

was thinking that the only mistake he’d made had been with the

Italian boy. As Andy Sorrell had predicted, Tony Bianco could be had

—but, as it turned out, only inconveniently. The kid had been back to

Alexandria twice, without an invitation, the first time parking a block

away, waiting for Fuller to pass by so that he could ask him for the

price of a new set of tires. The second time he’d reappeared by mail,

requesting help for his mother’s operation—for which Mrs. Hawkins

Fuller charitably let her husband write a check on the joint account

while she suppressed her common sense and they both silently

hoped this would be the last such communication.

No, this was not the big feared slip-up that had motivated him into

marriage, but it was a slip-up nonetheless, and from it Lucy had

tacitly extracted the agreement to make a baby, another tie that

would bind, and earlier than he’d expected.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

October 31–November 7, 1956

“Major Conroy’s looking for you.”

“Let him look,” said Tim, shooting Private Meyers a joyful look. He

was hunched over one of the radios, picking up English-language

transmissions out of Hungary. For the past week, these broadcasts

had been more thrilling than any long-ago episode of Inner Sanctum.

His mind and spirit had been sparking and overloading, as if the

radio console were the source of his own electricity. It was now 9:30

a.m., and he’d been helping the operators with transcription since

five o’clock.

Beginning Sunday, after fruitlessly gunning down hundreds of

Hungarians who’d risen up in revolt, the Russians had been slowly

withdrawing to their bases all over the country. Soviet tanks still sat

in front of the parliament building in Budapest, but according to

Radio Free Kossuth, a new Hungarian flag—red and white and

green—was flying from the dome. The country’s Olympic team, on

its way to Melbourne, had already redesigned their uniforms.

Major Conroy entered the radio room. “You’re still at it,” he told

Tim, his tone somewhere between indulgence and exasperation.

“Who could leave?” was Tim’s exuberant reply.

In spite of himself, Conroy came closer to the radio and listened,

while Private Meyers handed Tim a piece of transcript someone had

made off a station transmitting in French from one of the southern

provinces: during the night Soviet troops had sent a confusing signal

by making some circular movements between Záhony and

Nyíregyháza. But the new premier, Imre Nagy, whom the Soviets

had been forced to accept last week, was declaring that everything

remained on track. In fact, Hungary would even be leaving the

Warsaw Pact!

Major Conroy begged to remind everyone that at this very minute

the British and French were bombing Egypt in order to maintain

control of the Suez Canal. “Don’t lose your heads.” No one had even

mentioned the presidential election, six days away.

“O ye of little faith!” declared Tim, reaching for a piece of transcript

he’d made while the sun was still coming up: “‘After two years of

enforced silence, in the last few revolutionary days, we have formed

the first Christian organization, the Christian Youth League. We have

to contend with indescribable difficulties and therefore we ask you,

our sister organizations abroad, to come to our assistance morally

and materially.’ Major, you can send a check, or a parcel, to number

6, V. Nagy Sandor Street in Budapest.”

“Laughlin, you have an assignment today for the Cadence.”

“Yes, covering trick-or-treating by dependents under twelve at the

Toul base. Major, come on!”

“We drive down there in half an hour. Not one minute beyond that.”

Tim shrugged with a kind of joyful hopelessness. He was not going

to let anything put a crimp in the moment of deliverance.

“Half an hour,” repeated Major Conroy, as he exited.

About twenty minutes later, Private Meyers came over and tapped

Tim on the shoulder: “I think you’ll want to see this.”

It was something copied off Radio Free Kossuth: “Cardinal József

Mindszenty, Prince Primate, was liberated on Tuesday by our

victorious revolution and arrived at his residence in Buda at 0755 this

morning. Because the road seemed unsafe, the Primate was brought

to Budapest in an armored car guarded by four tanks. In all the

villages they passed, the people threw flowers to the Primate and the

soldiers. The cardinal told the correspondent of Magyar Honvéd: ‘I

want to be better informed of the situation before I do or say more.’”

Meyers caught Tim murmuring, prayerfully.

“I guess this is a big deal for you, huh?” He shrugged. “What do I

know? I’m just a Jew from Secaucus.”

Tim felt a moment’s shame: How did one put a single man’s

suffering against the extermination of the Jews? But the thought, he

reasoned, was an absurdity. One put Mindszenty’s persecution with

the Jews’ sufferings, just as one day the as-yet-untallied dead within

the Soviet Union would be added to the century’s mass grave.

Nazism and communism were the same thing; every man in the

street knew it. The difference between them was a semantical matter

for the fancier poli-sci professors at Fordham.

“Corporal Laughlin,” called Major Conroy. “Now.”

“Yes, sir,” said Tim, double-timing it to the jeep. He carried the

Mindszenty transcript like a relic.

Half a mile into their trip to Toul, he tried speaking his mind to the

major: “Eisenhower’s offering ten million dollars in aid to the new

government. That’s pretty paltry, don’t you think?”

“No politics, corporal.”

“Okay. I promise to concentrate on finding vivid descriptive terms

for all the Davy Crockett and Princess Summerfallwinterspring

costumes I’ll be seeing.”

He closed his eyes as the jeep drove over the chalk plains still

soaked with blood and salted with the bone fragments of two world

wars. They continued on past the living, the wars’ survivors who

were now oxidizing toward normal deaths and perhaps salvation. He

believed that he was being carried at last toward transcendence and

freedom, toward a solution.

“You’re muttering, Laughlin. Speak up.”

“Sir. Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto, sicut erat in principio—”

Major Conroy shook his head. “At ease, Corporal.”

“Amen, sir.”

“Tranquillity is just around the corner.”

Fuller waited for her to respond and after a moment gave up.

“You’re not laughing.”

“I get it, I get it,” said Mary. The reference was to Undersecretary

of State Herbert Hoover, Jr., now acting chief of the department while

the aging John Foster Dulles underwent an emergency

appendectomy at Walter Reed. Dulles had collapsed at home early

this morning, a day after returning from New York, where he’d

convinced the United Nations to adopt a resolution calling for the end

of hostilities in the Middle East. With Hungary still unsettled and the

election now only three days away, Mr. Hoover wanted all hands on

deck, with no excuses made about its being a Saturday.

The president’s own calming statement about Suez—conceding

that the British, French, and Israelis had made an “error” in attacking

Egypt—seemed to be helping him at home, if not abroad. The

Democratic ticket appeared to be sinking fast, swamped not only by

the electorate’s instinctive rallying toward the incumbent during a

crisis, but also by the Soviet premier’s kiss-of-death endorsement of

Stevenson’s desire to stop testing the hydrogen bomb. By now Ike

had not only Hoover’s son in his corner but one of FDR’s, too: the

youngest Roosevelt, John, had come out for him. And Joe McCarthy,

rising from alcoholic slumber, had announced that he would seek his

old committee chairmanship if the Republicans took Congress next

week along with the White House.

In truth, there wasn’t much to be done here in the bureau this

afternoon. Most congressmen were out of town campaigning for their

seats, and the amalgam of tension and idleness was working on

Mary’s nerves. As soon as she heard Fuller getting off the phone

with the secretary’s people upstairs, she went into his office.

“Any more news from the doctors?”

“Yes,” he replied. “They told us yesterday afternoon that ‘we’re’

pregnant. What started them using that pronoun? Dr. Spock?”

Mary looked at his blotter for a moment—it held the latest poll

numbers on whether the U.S. should get out of the UN—before

leaning down to kiss him on the cheek.

“Congratulations. To you and Lucy. How far along is she?”

“Two months. Maybe two and a half. And a nervous wreck. The

doctor recommends she take up smoking.”

“What are you going to do for nerves, Papa?”

Fuller sighed. “Maybe I’ll give it up.” He looked through the

doorway. “Is Hill still around?”

“Yes. You’re going to have to hang on a little longer.” She made

herself smile as she walked off.

They’d not had much to say to each other these past few months,

though the silence between them had itself been like a conversation,

an ongoing mutual acknowledgment that she knew—up to a point—

what things were like for him now, even if he was still determined to

see them through. In public, he and Lucy remained on their shiny

trajectory, attending the shah’s birthday bash at the Mayflower on the

same day last week that Mary had been added to a group of

wholesome-looking State employees chosen to accompany a Soviet

delegation on a tour of Ike’s and Stevenson’s respective campaign

headquarters. The Russian from the Academy of Sciences had

complained about the Washington humidity and explained that

having only one name on the ballot in Soviet elections was not a

problem: “You can strike it out and write in another.” He allowed that

this didn’t happen often.

Mary looked up at the sweeping second hand on the clock and felt

nearly as exasperated as Fuller to be here. Suez did, after all,

appear to be in the hands of the UN, and the Soviets did appear to

be continuing their withdrawal from Hungary, despite a few confusing

signs: troops and tanks were staying close to the airfields, but only, it

was said, to shield the Soviet dependents being evacuated from

Budapest.

The phone rang, promising a bit of relief from the tedium. She

wouldn’t care if it were only some eager-beaver young GOP

congressman, out on the hustings, asking for the exact answer to

give about the Middle East.

“Baby.”

It was the first she’d heard from him since they’d broken things off

up in New York—so amicably that, several minutes afterward, they

weren’t sure they’d really done it.

“Hi, Fred.”

“I knew you’d be in.”

She could hear the excitement. He sounded like a college student

who’d been up on No-Doz for a week.

“I hate to disappoint you, Fred, but from what I heard a half hour

ago, Mr. Dulles is likely to be fine. And even if he doesn’t make it,

Herbert Hoover, Jr., is not exactly Nixon.”

Fred didn’t seem to remember their small adventure on the night

of Ike’s heart attack.

“Are you voting for him?” Mary continued. “For Ike, I mean.”

“Yes, while respectfully holding my nose.”

“Beverly’s taking me to the Statler on Tuesday, with the Bethesda

Stevenson Club.”

“You’re going to have an early night.”

“I could use one.”

“How come?”

“No particular reason,” she replied.

“So are we still good-enough friends that you’ll call me with the

least little thing you hear about the Baltics?”

“It amazes me that you believe somebody is going to come down

the hall to tell me anything other than that the new file boxes I’ve

ordered have come in.”

Fred scoffed at her modesty. “There’s a lot to be said for being

near the action. Keep listening: your Mr. Hill might come down with a

case of loose lips.”

“Fred, what exactly do you expect to happen in Estonia?”

“Wildfire, Mary. Think about the way it spreads. Why did the

Hungarians rise up? Because five days before they did they heard

about some Poles in Wroclaw dragging the Soviet flag through the

gutter. Eisenhower should stop trying to calm things down. He

should be fanning the flames.”

“I’ll tell that to the next Young Republican who calls.”

“Get ready for a new birth of freedom,” said Fred, more sonorously

than usual.

“Fred, I need to go. Fuller wants something,” she fibbed.

She hung up the phone and put some lotion on her hands. Two

months. Maybe two and a half. Counting on her moistened fingers,

she calculated that Lucy’s baby would probably come in late May,

only a bit earlier than her own.

IKE IN LANDSLIDE; DEMS HOLD CONGRESS

At the LOC’s Orléans headquarters, Tim worked at fleshing out the

Cadence’s election edition. Even bannered as such, it would

maintain the paper’s resolutely light touch and confine the political

story to the front page’s left side. The three right-hand columns were

being held for “7,965th Chefs Get Tips from Paris’ Best.” News from

Hungary would go on page two.

“Can you stand some more?” asked Lieutenant Dillenberger, who

had noticed Tim’s grief-stricken demeanor when he’d arrived here

yesterday afternoon from Verdun.

“Sure. I like pain.”

Everything in the stack of dispatches and transcript was awful, as

it had been for the last three days, ever since the Soviets began

using bombers and tanks to crush the uprising. The rebels were now

mere resisters, trying to hold on with Molotov cocktails and paving

stones. Refugees were crossing the border into Austria, some of

them carrying pots of Hungarian soil. A Soviet puppet named Kadar

had replaced Nagy, and Sobolev, the Russians’ UN delegate, was

saying that the U.S.S.R. would just ignore any resolutions on

Hungary the General Assembly might finally decide to pass.

Meanwhile, Premier Bulganin had made the novel suggestion that

the U.S. and Soviet Union intervene together in the Middle East—

against the British and the French.

And here was the latest from Radio Budapest, which had resumed

toeing the Soviet line: “In these difficult hours let us remember the

great Socialist revolution of October 1917. Now, in the light of the

open excesses of the counterrevolutionaries, the tremendous

significance of October 1917 becomes even clearer to us. The

Soviet peoples have set the world an example.”

“Anything from Radio Free Rakoczi?” asked Tim, without much

hope.

Lieutenant Dillenberger sifted the most recent pile of transcript and

handed Tim an appeal from the holdout station: “We are fighting

against overwhelming odds! This is our message for President

Eisenhower: if during his new presidency, he stands by the

oppressed and those who are fighting for freedom, he shall be

blessed….”

“At least we know where we are,” said Dillenberger. “A couple of

reports say some of the Russian recruits think they’re in Berlin and

World War Two’s still going on. Christ, they must be dumber than the

guys we get from Oklahoma.”

Tim continued reading transcript and wire-service copy, which now

included the news that Mindszenty had gone to seek shelter at the

American embassy in Budapest. At three p.m. Major Conroy came in

to get him. The two of them were due to ride back to Verdun

together. With a small movement of his head, the officer ordered

Dillenberger out of the room.

“Get a grip, Corporal Laughlin.”

“Yes, sir,” said Tim, who only now realized he had tears on his

face.

Major Conroy put a hand on his shoulder. “I am not General

Patton. I am not about to smack you and say ‘Snap out of it.’ But

snap out of it.”

Tim saluted, went off to wash his face, and five minutes later

rejoined Conroy near the line of jeeps outside. It turned out—a small

mercy—that they would be returning to the base in an American

sedan, with the major allowing him to ride alone in the backseat. All

the way to Verdun, Conroy kept up with conversation offered by the

driver, a Pfc and rabid Red Sox fan; it was almost suppertime when

they arrived back on the grounds of the 7,965th.

As Tim started for the office, the major had one last message for

him: “You’d better eat your damn dinner, too. I don’t know what that’s

about, but if I see you settling for a glass of milk again, I’ll report

you.”

“Yes, sir.”

He went straight to his desk, piled with the Herald-Tribune and the

London papers, all of them full of Ike’s victory. Beneath them lay a

letter from Kenneth Woodforde, who must have used one of his

congressional connections to get it into the air pouch. It was dated

Monday afternoon, when the Soviet attack had been in full force:

Dear Laughlin,

I found Michael Larchwood (in jail for grand theft auto, by the

way), and I now have a pretty good idea of what went on back in

’53 and ’54. But given what’s now going on, I’ve lost interest in

my little historical exposé.

I never answered your question about what I was, Communist

or anti-anti-Communist. Maybe I’m going to be the first anti-antianti-Communist. After the last two days I realize that the C’s in

power are about as likely to change as your One True Church.

I’ve lost my appetite in more ways than one.

So I thought I’d let you know that your indiscretion about

young Larchwood is safe with me. Fact is, I couldn’t prove

anything without the photo Schine’s supposed to have, but (see

above) another fact is I don’t have the stomach now to pursue it.

One other thing: Fuller and his wife are expecting a child next

year. I tell you this only so that you don’t hear it from McIntyre,

who I suspect would derive some odd pleasure in imparting the

news. I apologize for playing that card when I saw you back in

May.

Woodforde

P.S. Do remember that this failed uprising was meant to be, in

its own way, a socialist revolution. They wanted to be neutral,

not “just like us.”

Tim got up and headed to the mail room, where the Frenchwoman

was getting ready to go off duty. He asked if he could still send a

telegram, to 3423 Mt. Eagle Place, Alexandria, Virginia, U.S.A.

7965TH AREA COMMAND—07 NOV 56

HAWK—

RUSZKIK HAZA!

WHEN YOU GO TO THE DEPARTMENT TOMORROW—PLEASE—IN

WHATEVER WAY YOU CAN—DO SOMETHING.

T.

The Frenchwoman asked if she correctly understood the spelling

of the exclamation. “And it means what?”

“Russians go home. My two words of Hungarian.”

She nodded, and made a last quick scan of the yellow piece of

paper on which he’d composed the message.

“C’est tout?” she asked. “Nothing to add?”

His stomach dropped; he felt himself struggle to keep from

inserting the three words he’d nearly written with the pencil: I love

you.

“Non,” he said. “Nothing to add.”

PART FOUR

DECEMBER 1956–MAY 1957

How should we like it were stars to burn

With a passion for us we could not return?

If equal affection cannot be,

Let the more loving one be me.

—W. H. AUDEN,

“THE MORE LOVING ONE” (1957)

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

December 1–3, 1956

Leaves were burning along three stretches of curb on Martha Custis

Drive. Raking his front yard, Fuller glanced down the adjacent street,

somehow half expecting to see Tony Bianco in his parked car. But

months had passed with no sign of the part-time moving man. Fuller

was free to concentrate on the smoky aroma riding the breeze. It

might be December, but the crisp air and sky belonged to the

October Saturdays he remembered from St. Paul’s. This was New

England weather, held up at the Mason-Dixon Line for a month and a

half.

The Army–Navy Game, near the end of its second quarter in

Philadelphia, was playing on his new English portable radio, an

anniversary present from Lucy. Knowing he’d be working outdoors

this afternoon, she had decided that her husband should have the

expensive gift, smart and snug in its leather case, two days early. It

sat on the front steps of the house, and its reception was excellent.

Lucy now waved to Fuller from the open upstairs window. Still in

her quilted yellow peignoir with its little bow at the neck, she had her

sketch pad balanced on the sill. She was drawing with the expensive

pens Fuller had gotten her from Fahrney’s and handed over this

morning after she made her own premature gift. To show that she

was indeed using them to create her tight, folksy drawings—what

Grandma Moses might have produced with ink instead of oils—she

raised one of the pens for her husband to see. Her other hand held a

filter-tipped Salem, the brand that was helping to soothe her through

a fourth month of pregnancy. She had still hardly begun to show, not

even when she wore something besides this billowing nightgown.

Fuller had begun sweating through his flannel shirt. He waved

back to his wife and then walked around to the side of the house to

get at whatever leaves might be resting under the carriage of their

new Plymouth. The car reminded him that he could, if he felt the

inclination, make a quick run before dinner to the keypunch operator

(dumb as a post, and with that little mustache) in the rented room off

Chinatown. Or even a quick stop at Andy Sorrell’s place just over the

bridge.

The radio announcer, vamping through halftime, genially

mentioned that Ike had violated the customary presidential neutrality

toward today’s game by telegraphing his good wishes to the Army

coach. The station then cut to a Red Cross appeal for donations to

ease the plight of those Hungarian refugees now reaching freedom’s

shores.

PLEASE—IN WHATEVER WAY YOU CAN—DO SOMETHING.

He had done nothing about Hungary, unless you counted

pocketing a phone number from the good-looking Budapest

university student who’d recently been paraded through the bureau

like some kind of war trophy. Everyone else was doing something

about Hungary; the department had been consumed by the refugee

operation. An eleventh planeload of exiles had arrived the other day

at Camp Kilmer up in Jersey, and before the cloyingly named

Operation Mercy was finished at least twenty thousand more would

be allowed in, thanks to some fancy interpretive footwork with the

immigration laws.

But a hundred thousand were still in camps along the Austrian

border. Nixon would be heading over to visit them in a week, and

after that, Congress would start hearings on the conduct of U.S.

policy (had there been one?) during the uprising. Fuller imagined

that at least one of his CIA buddies would have hell to pay for the

general failure to anticipate rebellion along the Danube.

RUSZKIK HAZA!

He was glad he had been the one—not Lucy—to open the door

when the telegram arrived. What exactly, he’d wondered, did Skippy

want done? Air strikes? Maybe just an airlift for all the priests the

embassy in Budapest couldn’t hold? He’d also wondered why this

frantic little cry—he could almost feel it being whispered into his ear,

between ardent kisses of his neck—was coming only now. It could

hardly have to do with just Hungary. Whatever it meant, it felt

helpless, like the furtive leafleting said to be going on even now in

the streets of Budapest.

Fuller lit a match and watched the leaves catch fire. He had no

compelling desire this afternoon for the keypunch operator, let alone

Andy Sorrell. He felt himself, unexpectedly, wanting someone and

something else. The radio, filling up the rest of halftime, had begun

to play some old Tommy Dorsey songs, Dorsey having choked to

death on a forkful of food earlier in the week.

I’m getting sentimental over you.

Things you say and do…

He looked over his shoulder and back toward the house. On the

breeze, smoke from Lucy’s cigarette joined the smoke from the

leaves.

It would be Monday before he actually wrote the letter, and only after

he got Mary to answer an important question.

“So,” Fuller asked, tapping her on the shoulder, “how much

longer?”

Irritated, she swiveled around in her typist’s chair: “How much

longer until what?”

She didn’t look well. Her face was puffy, and while it might be le

dernier cri, the sack dress she was wearing did nothing for her but

hide her figure.

“How much longer until Skippy gets home?”

She had long since stopped leaving Tim’s letters on her desk. In

fact, the last time Fuller had spoken of him was nearly a year and a

half ago, at the time of the engagement. Make it easy on him.

“He’s due back after the first of the year,” she answered. “With

plenty of reserve duty left to perform, since it was only a two-year

enlistment.”

“Will he be performing in New York or down here?”

“Down here.”

She saw pleasure in his expression. Was it a surge of sentiment?

Or appreciation of his power in having created this geographic

anomaly—causing Tim to enlist in New York, but as a Washingtonian

who even now would be returning to the District?

“I’m guessing,” Fuller said, “that you know what he wants to do

once he’s back. Rejoin Citizen Canes’ listing ship?”

“He doesn’t write me that often, Fuller. Not as much as he used

to.”

Fuller kept looking at her, no matter how unnerved and jumpy she

appeared, no matter how preoccupied—the way she so often was

these days. He knew that she knew.

“He wants to do something with the refugees,” she explained. “He

doesn’t know exactly what. He takes the whole Hungarian business

personally somehow. I don’t understand why.”

Why is what she wanted to know from Fuller: Why now? Why the

rekindling of interest in him? But she didn’t ask; she just broke away,

relieved to greet the girl bringing Mr. Dulles’s autopen downstairs to

the bureau.

It was the secretary’s first day back in the office after a long

recuperation in Key West: last month’s emergency surgery had

revealed a cancerous growth on his intestine. Today Mr. Hill had

prepared a letter that would go out to every congressman and all

ninety-six senators, in which Mr. Dulles cheerfully announced his

own return, thanked the lawmakers for their good wishes, and said

how pleased he was once more to be standing with them, shoulder

to shoulder, on the brink, against the Soviets.

Fuller helped Mary to set the writing machine on a countertop near

her desk.

“I hate that dress,” he said.

“So do I.” She’d copied the Dior pattern from one of the French

magazines Jerry bought for his new wife. “It’s an ‘H-line.’”

“It looks like an oil drum.”

“Thanks.”

“I’m trying to compliment you. Don’t hide your light under a bushel.

Or inside a sack.”

She tested the autopen on a blank sheet of paper and felt glad to

see Fuller disappear into his office. She was furious with herself for

having let the weekend come and go without deciding what she

would do. There was still not much to hide under the Dior, but in

another month that wouldn’t be the case.

There was a place way down on F Street where she could be rid

of the baby for a hundred and twenty-five dollars and be back here

the next day. She’d gotten the address and the price, just like the

magazine with the Dior, from Beverly, who had heard of it from a girl

in Senator Douglas’s office who’d been knocked up by the man who

each year wrote most of the air force budget.

Or she could go back to Louisiana and become the oldest resident

of the Ursuline Sisters’ home for unwed mothers. True, she already

had a high school diploma, but maybe she could at last master

algebra from one of the visiting tutors. More plausibly, she’d been

considering a small, discreet establishment in the Garden District,

run by a wealthy Catholic woman, where older young ladies tucked

themselves away during their last few months and then swiftly

surrendered their babies to an orphanage—had them whisked away

in a warming pan like the bastards and pretenders of historical

legend. All this would shield her father’s eyes from the

embarrassment, but she couldn’t shield Daddy from the whole truth.

She was determined to tell it to him, unless it finally involved F

Street.

And if she chose adoption? What afterward? Perhaps she’d go

teach English at Beauregard Junior High, disappearing in plain sight

for the rest of her days.

She fed the letters into the machine—Mr. Hubert B. Scudder, 1st

district, California; Mr. Clair Engle, 2nd district, California; Mr. John

E. Moss, Jr., 3rd district—and all at once knew that she had to get

out of the office, immediately, without even telling Fuller. She put a

note on the receptionist’s desk, saying she felt sick.

“Good!” Fuller told the girl several minutes later, once she

conveyed the news. “Maybe Miss Johnson will come back in one of

her old New Look skirts.”

He returned to the two documents he’d been composing—a halffinished thank-you letter to Congressman Fulton of Pennsylvania,

who had taken it upon himself to defend Eisenhower’s Hungarian

actions as the only prudent course, and a letter to what Fuller

guessed was the administration’s leading critic among corporals of

the 7,965th Area Command:

They’ll be processing them at Camp Kilmer (I think that I shall

never see…) until May. The Austrian desk, which really was just a

desk until a month ago, is now two large rooms more tightly stuffed

than Fibber McGee’s closet….

Letting Skippy know that he remembered his chatter about the

radio: a more shameless seduction than the one he’d carried out

some weeks ago on a Catholic University junior.

There’s all sorts of interviewing, plus clerical and “liaison” work

going on in half a dozen buildings around town. If you want to do

something like that, it should be easy enough for me to set it up.

You said please do something. Well, I am—I’m passing the buck

to you.

He sealed the letter, still surprised at the ripple of unease he’d

experienced writing it—an unstable mixture of desire and hesitation,

with even a sense of personal fault blended in. He couldn’t quite

credit the last, since the exact nature of his desire was once more to

grant the protectiveness that came with ravishment, something he’d

not done, or felt himself doing, since the departure of Cpl. Timothy P.

Laughlin, to whom he now addressed the envelope, the ink of his

fountain pen bleeding through to the onionskin inside.

Protection: what Skippy craved; what one paid and loved the

gangster for.

Fuller put this last thought to the side of his mind, like a

department memo stamped FFA, For Future Analysis. He rose from

his desk and breezed past the receptionist. “Going to mail a letter,”

he explained, as if there weren’t two Outgoing trays less than three

feet away.

He exited on Twenty-first Street, thinking of how the building would

before long extend itself all the way to Twenty-third. Next month, if

their aging hearts and bowels held out, Ike and Dulles would stand

here in their homburgs slathering mortar onto the cornerstone of the

addition. Fuller was pleased to anticipate the building as a labyrinth

twice its already huge size. It was even now, he decided, big enough

for Timothy to stay discreetly lost in, though it still might be

preferable to have him beavering away in one of the department’s

satellite offices somewhere else in the city.

Fuller walked down H Street toward the Potomac, past the

university’s buildings and the boys in their letter jackets. Maybe he’d

keep going all the way to the river, or drop into the Foggy Bottom

Wax Museum and stand with the handful of visitors fitting themselves

into the goofball tableau of the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre.

Valentine’s Day: Lucy, he now recalled, wanted to go to Bermuda

for it. He slid this thought, too, to the edge of his mental blotter, as

the university’s terrain gave way to Foggy Bottom’s crumbling little

brick houses, toy cottages attached to one another for dear life. The

Negroes had made this shaky spot their own for decades, until the

whites started coming back when the department relocated itself to

the neighborhood after the war. What the bulldozers hadn’t gotten

was now falling into the hands of renovators. Eleanor Dulles, the

secretary’s sister, had herself bought and fixed up one little row of

the miniature dwellings; she’d made them what the real estate ads

called “darling,” and sold one or two to the sort of boys in the

department who had something to fear from Scott McLeod.

Yes, the mephitic old neighborhood, having sagged for a century

with its poor drainage, ammonia factory, and tinderbox warehouses,

was slowly recuperating toward a placid modernity. Where the

gasworks had stood when Fuller first arrived at State, foundations

were now being laid for the kind of white-brick apartment building

that back home was turning stretches of Park Avenue into sets of

high-rise dentures.

He reached the corner of Twenty-fifth and H, still not having put

the letter into a mailbox, when he spotted, lo and behold, the brewer,

poking around the weeds and tin cans in a yard belonging to a redbrick house, just as narrow as the others, but a little taller, with a

comical turret at the top.

Paul Hildebrand caught his eye and they waved to each other.

Mary’s old suitor stepped out of the yard and onto the broken

sidewalk, leaving his survey of the premises to the two employees

he had with him.

“Well,” said Fuller, looking up at the turret while he shook

Hildebrand’s hand, “this one is pretty baronial for the Bottom.”

“A regular Taj Mahal. I’m not sure what we’re going to do with it.”

Hildebrand pointed in the direction of his nearby small brewery,

visible from this corner, though dwarfed by the much larger Heurich’s

plant beside it. “We still own two or three of these little dumps,” he

explained, pointing to the row of houses running up Twenty-fifth.

“Heurich used to have most of them. They got built in the nineties,

mostly for the Germans and the Irish, who all took off once the

streetcar came in. No reason to actually live here when for a couple

of pennies a day they could get in and out to make their living

making beer. The colored have been in the houses ever since. This

one’s so far gone it’s been abandoned for a year. Our accountant

only realized the other day that the pittance of rent had stopped

coming in. We’re here trying to decide whether to fix it up or knock it

down.” He paused to take a look at some missing cornices. “I’m a

little taken aback. I didn’t realize I was a slumlord.”

Fuller watched one of the other men pulling at some branches to

see whether the window behind them was whole or broken.

“It’s a haunted house inside,” Hildebrand continued. “Cobwebs. A

couple of old couches, some busted cupboards with jelly-jar glasses.

Christ, a colored woman who passed by five minutes ago told me

there were still privies in the alley during the war. Mrs. Roosevelt

came poking around one day, shaking her head. How’s Mary?”

He seemed to hope the fast elision would keep Fuller from

realizing he’d mentioned her name.

“Not herself, I’d say,” Fuller answered. “This afternoon she lacked

the energy to stay on my back about something annoying I’d said.”

Hildebrand tested a piece of wrought-iron fence that looked as if it

might give way in his hand. “I wish she’d get out of there. Find

something that made her happier. How’s married life?” he asked,

hoping for a cordial, dishonest answer. He knew more than enough

of Fuller’s story from Mary.

“The berries. In fact, today’s my anniversary.”

“Already?”

“There’s a baby coming in May.”

“Congratulations.” Hildebrand smiled and extended his hand.

“And yourself?” asked Fuller. He couldn’t remember the name of

the girl the brewer had married.

“Things are fine. I wish business were a little better. No heir yet.”

“Well,” said Fuller, laughing gently, “I’ve been truant long enough.

I’d best be getting back to the office.”

Hildebrand shook his hand for a third time and prepared to resume

inspecting the house.

“So what do you think you’ll decide?” asked Fuller. “About this

place.”

“I think we’ll probably knock it down. But not until summertime at

the earliest. In this town it takes more permits to demolish something

than it does to build.”

“So you’ll just leave her locked up until then?”

Hildebrand laughed at the place’s worthlessness. “What lock?”

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

January 22, 1957

Tim thought Woodforde’s foot must have crunched another peanut

flashbulb—there were loads of them amidst the detritus of

yesterday’s inaugural parade—but a backward glance through the

fog on F Street left him uncertain.

“A Nixon poster,” Tim’s companion at last explained.

The winds were picking up, sharpening the contrast between this

morning’s weather and the sunny calm of yesterday afternoon, when

Tim had watched the parade from the corner of Thirteenth and

Pennsylvania. His vantage point, the pedestal of Pulaski’s statue,

had been so good he was able to pick out even the types of flowers

in the Nixon girls’ corsages.

Now, less than twenty-four hours later, as he and Woodforde

plodded eastward, it was hard to concentrate on anything but the

thick gray mist.

“Think of all those poor private planes,” said the writer, in mock

horror. “Unable to get back to Greenwich or River Oaks before

dinner.”

“I thought you’d converted,” said Tim. “At least sort of.”

“I am a man without an ideology. Which in our century is worse

than being a man without a country.” Woodforde had sat out the

inaugural parade at a one-o’clock showing of The Girl Can’t Help It.

“You need a church,” said Tim.

“You need an exorcism.”

In the aftermath of the Hungarian catastrophe, the two young men

had conducted a prolific and forgiving correspondence. A peculiar

understanding and sexless affection had grown up between them all

through November and December as their airmail envelopes

traveled back and forth over the Atlantic. Before Christmas came,

Woodforde was suggesting that Tim, once he got back stateside,

move into a portion of the big, shabby commercial loft where the

writer and his girlfriend were residing.

He’d been living there for two weeks. His drywalled-off room took

up only a small fraction of what felt like a spacious version of the

7,965th’s barracks. Five other painters besides Gloria Rostwald had

their own pieces of the vast premises one block from Woodward &

Lothrop’s. Not only was his landlord living in sin, Tim had written

Francy; he himself and all the rest were residing illegally, against the

District’s zoning regulations.

Each of the artists, Gloria had explained, worked with acrylic

paints on canvases that hadn’t been primed. They were trying to

constitute an innovative “color school,” acting as if Washington were

a creative destination on the order of New York or Paris (as that city

had once been, Tim was careful to remember). The group’s paintings

were pretty, but also gauzy and faint, he thought. Whenever he

looked at them, he wished they’d come into clearer focus, the way

he wished the city now would, as he and Woodforde continued

marching east.

The writer was on his way to the Hill, and Tim would accompany

him as far at Fifth Street, where he’d veer off to St. Mary of God, the

Hungarian church. He’d been working there on behalf of the

refugees now streaming into town, taking his meals in the rectory

basement and coming home with pin money for his efforts. He paid

his rent to Woodforde and Gloria with what he’d saved from his army

pay, which was most of it.

“Those poor Hungarian souls,” said Woodforde, looking down Fifth

Street toward Tim’s destination.

“You wouldn’t believe what some of them have been through.”

“Exactly. Ten days of Kate Smith records and apple pie at Camp

Kilmer. Makes you shudder.”

“See you later,” said Tim, clapping Woodforde’s shoulder and

dashing off into the fog, his heart almost light with purpose.

Since arriving back in the U.S., he had still not seen his family.

Francy and Tom were threatening to come down from Staten Island

if he didn’t get up to them soon, but the lack so far of any reunion

didn’t seem strange—not when he hadn’t seen Hawkins, either.

Why, he’d asked himself a hundred times, had he ever sent the

telegram? Had he succumbed to a simple moment of weakness

while he was angry at God over Hungary? Had a loss of faith in Him

prompted a return to that other object of worship, Hawk?

The letter of reply from Alexandria had arrived when he was

packing up his things inside the barracks. He had not responded to it

in turn, since, strictly speaking, he didn’t have to. I’m passing the

buck, Hawk had admitted, allowing any suggestion of a job to remain

nonspecific. Even so, Tim could now feel Hawk’s presence across

town, like the golden chalice behind the tabernacle’s curtain.

He had told himself—was telling himself even now—that he could

not go through all that again, not after having made himself right with

God, who was allowing him to feel useful in a small way with the

refugees. The country had already turned its attention away from the

exiles, but there had been no slackening of zeal inside the rectory at

St. Mary, Mother of God, where a few minutes after leaving

Woodforde Tim was busy with money orders, cans of cling peaches,

and pediatrican referrals.

It was the middle of the afternoon before Father Molnar’s secretary

came to tell him he had a visitor.

In a wrinkled suit and stained tie, Tommy McIntyre looked as if

he’d barely managed to pull himself together for someone’s funeral.

Tim wondered for a moment how he kept himself from being fired,

but of course there was no mystery to that: Tommy could still, at any

time, use his knowledge of Potter’s son against the senator. With the

approach of next year’s election, the boy’s existence would be an

even more potent fact than it had been in ’53. Michael Larchwood’s

being in jail was a bonus cartridge in Tommy’s ammunition belt.

“Sir,” said Tim.

“Sir,” replied Tommy, with the comic courtliness each had

sometimes displayed toward the other in better days.

Tim abruptly stumbled into sympathy: “I heard that Mrs.

Larchwood died. I should have written you.”

“Ah, yes,” said Tommy. “I suppose you heard all about it from the

left-wing scribe. He doesn’t come by much anymore.”

Tommy looked around at all the sorting and packing, seeming to

admire its efficiency, before he added: “I suppose he told you about

the scion.”

“He mentioned that he stole a car and went to jail.”

“Yes,” said Tommy, affecting a sentimental sigh. “Impetuous youth.

I had a visit from the lad shortly before his little scrape.”

“Woodforde didn’t tell me.”

“Woodforde didn’t know. Master Larchwood’s a somewhat rougher

character than the one we saw in ’53. A faintly threatening presence

this time ’round. It seems he labors under the delusion that those of

us in the employ of America’s lawmakers are rather wealthier than

we are. I disappointed him with the news that I had no more cash to

give him than I did three years ago, back at that excellent Schinefamily hotel.”

Tim knew that Tommy would any minute be bringing up Hawk,

seeking the peculiar pleasure of watching Timothy Laughlin squirm

at the suggestion that he and Tommy McIntyre had hopeless love in

common. To forestall this, he made a nervous joke: “Have you come

to offer a donation?”

“No,” said Tommy, straight-faced. “I’ve come on a mission of

mercy.”

He asked Tim to accompany him to the house of an old friend on

the Hill—a worse drunk than himself, he swore. “I’ve been

encouraging the fellow to quit. Friendly advice from the pot to the

kettle.” He paused for a second or two while Tim scrutinized his face.

“I did go myself, a couple of times, to the father confessor you

recommended at St. Pete’s, but it didn’t quite take. So I’m wondering

if you’d give the pitch to my pal. My own skepticism would be a little

too evident, I’m afraid, but he might be susceptible to an angel of

charity like yourself.” Tommy gestured toward the wooden crate that

Tim was packing with boxes of powdered milk and Nestlé’s Quik. “Or

at least to a more sober voice than my own,” the Irishman added.

Tim guessed that Tommy had found him through Miss Cook. He’d

called the old office last week in connection with paperwork that his

reserve unit required about his last salaried civilian employment.

Wary of both Tommy and the clock, he now looked up and saw that it

was only three, too soon to leave.

“They’re hardly in a position to dock you,” Tommy argued. “Why

don’t you take a stroll with me? The weather’s improved

considerably.”

Out on the street, walking toward the Hill, Tim felt his thoughts

turning to the possibility of reconciliation. Was what he’d

accomplished with Woodforde unthinkable with Tommy? Or even

Hawk? Of course he and Hawk had never really quarreled, but

maybe there was some subtle formula, like Father LeTour’s in New

Orleans, that would bring them back into a sort of relationship, some

platonic fealty he could practice without violating the worship of God.

Perhaps he could exist as a neutral state, like India, between two

great powers.

At number 335 on C Street, a vaguely familiar young man, on his

way out, opened the door. None of it added up. The house was not

the least disordered inside, and a female voice, in quiet conversation

with a man’s, could be heard coming from the second story.

“Heading back to the office,” the young man said to Tommy. “Go in

and sit down.”

“I don’t understand,” Tim said.

Tommy showed him a seat in the living room as if this were his

own house, and then nodded toward the staircase. A male figure

was descending, each step making several more inches of him

visible. A belly protruded, and the gait was less than steady. Finally,

the emerging head above its shoulders proved to be covered with

the mottled face of Joe McCarthy. The senator was combed and

freshly shaven, but for all that, like Tommy, barely pasted together.

The female upstairs, presumably Jeannie, could probably claim

credit for whatever physical cohesion he managed to display.

McCarthy came forward to shake Tommy’s hand. “McIntyre.”

“Senator, let me introduce you to another son of Ireland.”

“We met in your office, early in ’54,” said Tim.

McCarthy responded with a cry of comic agony: “Fifty-four!

Ohhhhh!”

Tommy and the senator warily entered into conversation about the

new Congress, whose alignments Tommy was demonstrably better

informed of than McCarthy. There was, Tim thought, an odd

cordiality between the two men, each of whom, he had to remind

himself, had something on the other and took him for an enemy.

Together here they seemed comrades: each of them pained and

defeated, both of them Irish and drunk.

McCarthy made a crack about Mrs. Luce’s final departure from the

embassy in Rome: “Now the only ring she’ll have to kiss is Harry’s.”

“If not the one he’s bought for his girlfriend” came Tommy’s fast

reply. Both men laughed and McCarthy got up to make drinks. Tim

said he’d have a Coca-Cola.

“So Alcorn’s now heading up the National Committee,” observed

Tommy.

“Fuck

Massachusetts,”

‘Eisenhower Republicans.’”

Even Tim knew

Massachusetts.

that

McCarthy

Alcorn

was

replied.

from

“Goddamned

Connecticut,

not

“Right you are, sir,” said Tommy. “One day a man will come from

out of the west and put an end to all this. Maybe Goldwater, maybe

somebody we don’t even know yet.”

McCarthy nodded at his own sagacity and finished pouring drinks.

Once they were distributed and he’d settled himself in a club chair,

he let Tommy take the conversation to its next topic: “Looks like my

man’s going to have a tough race next year. Against this fellow Hart.”

Unaware of Potter’s likely opponent, McCarthy asked: “Is he a

Jew? ‘Hart’ and ‘Harris’ and ‘Cooper’ always are.”

Tommy left McCarthy uninformed that Hart was a Catholic and the

lieutenant governor of Michigan, adding only: “At the very least he’s

going to scare the hell out of Charlie.”

“Good!” shouted McCarthy. “But that doesn’t take much, does it?”

He gulped his drink and warmed to the subject: “God, I’d love to see

him get his legless ass kicked out of Congress. At least he’s off the

committee.” He referred to the latter body as if it still belonged to

him.

Tim could see where this was going: Tommy had decided it was at

last time to bring down Senator Potter. His simmering rage over

Annie Larchwood’s death had blazed up into something like his old

fury toward McCarthy himself. This time he would reverse field and

make McCarthy the instrument of Potter’s undoing. Tommy would

alert the senator to the existence of the illegitimate son; then, rather

than tip the press himself, he would keep his part anonymous by

letting Joe spoon them the news. With a friendly wink he’d tell

McCarthy it was best to make reporters believe the story had come

from some loyal old gumshoe on the committee staff.

Tim also knew why Tommy wanted him here while McCarthy

learned the secret. His presence would provide the senator with a

kind of confirmation, since Timothy Laughlin’s face, never able to

mask anything, would testify to the story’s truth. And of course his

being here would also give Tommy the pleasure of seeing “young

Timothy” harrowed yet again.

Tommy watched in silence as McCarthy took a further few sips of

his drink. There was no danger the senator would ask why Tommy

wanted his boss undone. There was always a reason in the world of

who had what on whom, and it would be more convenient for

McCarthy not to know, for him just to marinate and savor the

suddenly fulfillable fantasy of seeing Potter get his comeuppance.

When Tommy spoke again, it was to tell McCarthy, casually, that

with a little help this fellow Hart might pull things off. But before

McCarthy could respond to the suggestion, the sharp cry of an infant

came from the second floor. “My baby!” yelled the senator, grinning

broadly before bounding upstairs to the child he and Jeannie had

just adopted from the New York Foundling Hospital. Cardinal

Spellman, who’d seen no need to ask too many questions about the

acquisition, had helped things along.

Tim decided that this was the moment to escape the house. But

McCarthy was almost immediately back in the living room, somehow

managing to keep a firm, tender grip on the blanketed baby. “Jeannie

says Princess Grace just had a girl of her own! The palace in Monte

Carlo put it out over the radio. Ain’t that swell? Well, that little girl

can’t be any prettier than this one!”

They might all be at some post-christening shindig inside

McConnell’s beer hall on Ninth Avenue. Tim wouldn’t be surprised if

he were asked to favor everyone with a song.

“Ain’t she grand?” asked McCarthy, looking more like the baby’s

uncle or grandfather as he thrust it into Tommy’s arms for closer

inspection. Overtaken by his own sentiments, Tommy appeared

unable to resume the mission that had brought him here, and in the

commotion of the baby’s transfer Tim at last managed to slip away.

He got as far as the vestibule before he felt McCarthy’s hand on

his shoulder.

It should have been frightening, but it wasn’t. McCarthy himself

looked innocently wounded, wanting to know what the hurry was.

“You do look familiar,” he said.

“We met just before the hearings, the day after Senator Potter got

a copy of ‘the Adams chronology.’”

“When Charlie was trying to get me to fire Roy!” McCarthy

laughed, as if remembering some comically bad season with the

company baseball team.

“Yes,” replied Tim, at a loss for more to say as he looked for

another escape route from Tommy’s vengeful world. He could feel

himself being lashed to it by the telephone line that had once

reached into Madison Square Garden. Boys, girls, your old-maid

auntie. When he’s hammered he’ll grope anything…

He moved for the door, but McCarthy kept coming toward him,

with an enormous, devouring smile. Reaching for the handle, Tim

heard himself saying, inanely, to keep the man calm: “I was also at

your wedding. Helping out Miss Beale for the Star.”

“No kidding!”

McCarthy proceeded to smother him with a hug, to give his neck a

boozy kiss and his crotch a hard locker-room squeeze.

“We’re going to christen her Tierney!” he called out as Tim raced

toward the street. “Come to the church!”

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

February 21, 1957

Two days ago, Lyndon Johnson had complained on the Senate floor

about Secretary Dulles’s lack of response to his letter protesting the

administration’s apparent willingness to impose sanctions on Israel

over the continued presence of her troops in Egypt.

So now the CR Bureau had a sizable fire to put out. How odd to

find all these congressional crackers and cornpones suddenly so

enamored of the Jews, thought Mr. Hill, the bureau’s director, who

didn’t know whether Dulles’s delay in replying reflected a deliberate

stall, or a desire to insult the majority leader, or just the secretary’s

protracted convalescence. The old boy was still looking awfully frail.

Several feet from Hill’s office, Hawkins Fuller sat in his own,

having just finished up with Mr. Jerome Duggan, chairman of the

American Legion’s legislative commission. The Legion was ending a

three-day conference that had included a big dinner at the Statler

last night. Speaker Rayburn and Nixon had both shown, and Fuller

had been there with Lucy.

The evening’s other big affair had been staged by the International

Rescue Commission for Hungarian Relief, at the Mayflower, and the

Fullers had stopped off there, too. After introducing Lucy to the

Goldwaters, Fuller had listened to an ex–Budapest State Opera

singer perform the Hungarians’ national anthem in a moment that

seemed designed to evoke the “Marseillaise” scene from

Casablanca. The crowd had contained the usual charity-ball

locksteppers, most of the women looking like Margaret Dumont, but

there had also been many fervent, unfamiliar faces, so eager to help

that they would have settled for bread and water for their twenty-five

dollars.

Fuller had listened gravely while József Kövágó—six and a half

years a prisoner of the Russians, six and a half days the mayor of

free Budapest—told his stirring tale to the audience, among whose

nonhabitués, Fuller had suddenly noticed, sat Skippy, an honest-toGod guest at an event Betty Beale was chronicling for “Exclusively

Yours.”

Catching his eye, Fuller had nodded, as if the two of them had last

seen each other five minutes before at the coat check instead of two

years ago inside the New York Avenue bus depot.

Tim had just stared back, as startled as Kovajo must have been

when the door to his cell was flung open—or slammed shut.

“Mr. Fuller, I have a Mr. Laughlin out front.”

Yes, here he was, a day later, at four o’clock in the afternoon.

Fuller had known it would happen since last night; no, since he’d

gotten the telegram three months ago. Actually, he’d known it all

along, since the empty milk bottle had dropped from the tower.

He waited a minute, looking in his middle drawer for the blank job

application he’d put there three weeks ago, certain even then that

Skippy would come along to claim it. He set the manila envelope on

the blotter and walked to the receptionist’s desk.

Tim was reading the front page of today’s Star.

“Hawk.”

“Mister Laughlin?” asked Fuller, quoting the receptionist. “Not

Corporal?”

“Only on weekends.” He was flashing his fast, nervous smile.

Fuller tousled his hair. The receptionist, new, looked at them

quizzically.

They walked back to Fuller’s office, Tim on noticeably unsteady

legs.

“Well,” said Fuller, pointing to one of the New York papers piled on

a chair. “Roy Cohn is thirty years old. He gave himself a big birthday

party the other night.”

“Was Private Schine there?”

“Home with his fiancée, according to Miss Kilgallen. She doesn’t

note Roy’s feelings about the girl—only that he seems to be unhappy

over Zwicker’s being promoted to major general. You can’t say he

forgives and forgets.”

The cat still had a part of Tim’s tongue.

“Imagine,” Fuller continued, “if Zwicker were still commanding

Camp Kilmer. All those poor Hungarian refugees having to get their

teeth drilled by a Communist dentist.” He cleared the papers from

the chair. “Here, sit down.”

Tim had never been inside Fuller’s actual office, and he was

reminded of its owner’s old apartment by the negligence of the

arrangements—the tennis racket lying atop some out-of-order

encyclopedia volumes, the cardboard coffee cup next to the broken

thermometer on the windowsill. He felt the old desire to hoard and

decode the objects in evidence. He was relieved to see no

photograph of Lucy Fuller, and his heart leapt at the sight of the

Lodge biography.

“Here,” he said, handing Fuller the book he’d brought with him

today, a copy of The Last Hurrah. “A birthday present. Belated.”

Three weeks ago, on the first of the month, Fuller had turned thirtytwo.

For Hawk—

This time you get the book in advance.

I want the job.

It would be wonderful.

S.

“You missed thirty and thirty-one,” said Fuller.

I have to get over you.

Tim tried to ask himself why he was actually here. Because

Tommy had dipped him back into the world of who had what on

whom? Forced his head beneath its compromising sewage and tried

to hold him there? But if that was the reason, had he come here

seeking the poison’s antidote or its best dispenser, the beautiful

Lucifer who had, after all, given him his first trip through the

underworld?

“You’re going to be a father,” he said.

“A careless one. In May, I’ve heard.”

Are you my brave boy?

Tim stared at the familiar tweed overcoat lying on a table strewn

with file folders, and he thought he was starting to cry. “Is there really

something for me to do?” he asked, as briskly as he could.

Fuller picked the manila envelope up from the blotter. “Come with

me,” he said.

Outside, in the aisle leading through the rest of the bureau, Tim

asked: “Where is she?”

“Miss Johnson? She took early retirement.” Fuller noted Tim’s look

of surprise. “You honestly haven’t seen her?”

“No.”

“Or Grandma Gaffney, either, I’ll bet.”

“No, not her, either.”

Fuller understood how completely he governed Skippy’s world,

even now, two years after the self-imposed exile. But he discarded

the thought, telling himself that if he weren’t in command, then

someone else would be.

“Where is she?” asked Tim. “What happened?”

“You’ll have to call her and find out.” And when you know, Fuller

thought, maybe you can tell me; she walked out—more than two

months ago—and never came back.

Moving along the corridor outside the bureau, they passed photoportraits of Eisenhower, Nixon, and Dulles. Tim pointed to the latter.

“His son is a priest, you know. Avery. A convert.”

“Maybe the Reformation can ransom him back with an offer of my

mother, who’s still straddling the fence between Rome and Geneva.

With a bank balance that these days could fulfill a vow of poverty.”

An elevator took them down two flights and past the Miscellaneous

M Unit.

“I’m pretty sure I can get a good recommendation from Senator

Potter’s office,” Tim said hopefully. “I’m not sure he’d have much to

say himself, but Miss Cook will write something nice, and he’ll sign

it.”

“No florid encomium from McIntyre?”

“I don’t ever want to speak to him again.”

“You once said as much about me.”

He started to stammer out a reply, but Fuller relieved him of the

need for one by picking up the pace and administering a cheerful

poke in the ribs. The gesture depressed Tim; it lacked the intimacy of

the hair-tousling a few moments before and seemed to suggest that

they were just joshing old friends. He suddenly feared that’s all they

might in fact become, a fate more disrespectful to their former

romance than impassioned estrangement would be.

Entering the office that seemed to be their destination, Tim heard

Fuller ask the receptionist if they could see Mr. Osborne. The girl

buzzed him while Tim regarded a recently framed Time cover on the

wall behind her desk. The magazine’s Man of the Year was the

Hungarian Freedom Fighter, an artist’s handsome conception of

those who’d made the doomed revolution.

Once Mr. Osborne emerged, Tim judged him to be about thirtyfive. He looked athletic and a bit severe, but he greeted Fuller with a

hearty clap on the shoulder. It turned out the two of them were

handball partners at GWU.

“Osborne, this is Timothy Laughlin, a veteran of the United States

Army, a staunch defender of the Second Line of Communication in

France, and a proud member of our underfunded reserves. You’re

going to schedule an appointment with him to discuss one of those

positions being set up to administer the Refugee Relief Act. He has

excellent writing skills, passable French, congressional staff

experience, a charming disposition, and a terrifying grandmother.”

Apparently used to Fuller’s palaver, Leonard Osborne said only,

“Sure.” Turning to Tim, he added, “If you like, you can come back

right now and fill out the first of the forms.”

“Nope,” said Fuller. “No time.”

“Okay, then. Tommorow morning at ten o’clock. Bring a résumé,”

Osborne instructed Tim. “When you get here I’ll take you three doors

down the hall to the man who’s really in charge. You’ll find, I’m afraid,

that nothing happens very fast around here, even when it’s an

emergency.” He explained that the Refugee Relief Act, once it

actually passed, would entitle anyone fleeing a Communist state to

asylum.

“Thank you, sir.”

Tim’s ingratiating smile gave way to perplexity as Fuller nudged

him back into the corridor.

“Hawk, this is great, but I could have seen him now.” He waved the

manila envelope with the application he’d gotten from Fuller himself.

“It’s not as if I can’t take the rest of the day off from St. Mary’s.”

“You’ll be better off having your résumé with you.”

They’d reached the end of the corridor. Fuller guided Tim down

two flights of stairs and then opened the door to Twenty-first Street.

“Put on your gloves. It’s cold out.”

“You don’t even have a coat.”

“We’re not going far. Only a few blocks up and over.”

They walked fast to H Street and then turned west. In just his blue

suit, Fuller attracted even more stares than usual.

Brightening, Tim asked: “We’re not going to see Mary, are we?

You can’t walk all the way to Georgetown like that!”

“No, you can see Mary on your own. Christ, it is cold.”

Tim removed his scarf and looped it over Hawkins’ neck, as if

garlanding a Christmas tree. Fuller responded by putting an arm

around his shoulder, in such a way that would have left anyone

thinking this was his kid brother.

They reached a red-brick house that was in total disrepair at the

corner of Twenty-fifth Street.

“There’s no lock,” said Fuller. “Go inside and wait for me. I’ll be

back in five minutes.”

Tim had found army life easy because all his life he had more or

less done what he was told. And it was of course the same now; in a

moment he was inside the house and trying the nearest light switch.

It didn’t work; nor did any of the others. The only available

illumination, a fading late-afternoon azure, came through gaps

between the mostly broken window sashes and the brown paper

covering the panes of glass. There was dust everywhere, but also

evidence of recent visitation: pillows plumped and straightened on

the couch; a newspaper from last week beside a jelly-jar glass on the

counter by the sink.

The house was so narrow that Tim had the sensation of being

inside a locker at school. But it was tall, too, dominated by a

staircase running up the eastern wall. Everything suggested

verticality and ascent. Even a little cut-glass chandelier, unlit, drew

one’s eyes to the ceiling above a bay-windowed alcove that might

once have held a small dining room table. The space’s bare little

octagonal floor looked like the abandoned ballroom in a doll’s house.

Tim climbed to the second floor, past a bedroom with some rags

on the floor and a small WC that, however filthy, seemed newer than

the rest of the house’s interior. Seeking the turret he’d glimpsed

outside, he continued up to the third story—a half-finished attic,

really—where he found it, a little cone whose walls leaned in above a

pile of clean blankets that had been spread upon the floor. Next to

them stood a space heater that, in the absence of any other

electricity, had been hooked up to two fat dry cells. The darkness

outside was growing, and soon the only possible light would have to

be coaxed from the glow of this contraption’s coils.

Where had Hawk gone? And what could he accomplish in a matter

of five minutes? Would he be bringing someone back with him?

Maybe Mary, after all? Or some other third party? Maybe the two of

us can become the three of us.

Or maybe Hawk had left him for a few minutes in this dark space

above the littered street to reacclimate himself to the fact that he

would always have to wait for Hawkins Fuller, for each brief chance

to be alone with him, separate from the rest of the world.

He removed the brown paper from one of the turret’s two tiny

windows and let in the last now-inky light of day. He looked out

across the street to the empty space where the neighborhood’s

gasworks had once been, before he sat down on the blankets and

tried to be patient. He told himself that later tonight he would borrow

Gloria’s typewriter and construct a new résumé. He would get to bed

early—it was easy with no more radio of his own—and tomorrow,

once the interview was through, he’d get back to St. Mary’s in time

for lunch. If he got the job, he would offer up the work to God,

confident he was helping those who’d arrived from Hungary to

worship Him once again.

He prayed for Hawk to hurry, to get here while he could still

pretend these were really the thoughts in the front of his mind.

Last night, when he’d seen Hawk’s face, he’d thought his heart

would collapse into itself. He’d forced himself to keep talking to

Father Molnar, pouring forth chatter about how much the work at St.

Mary’s meant to him, and Father Molnar, who’d depleted his life

savings by half in order to come up with the twenty-five dollars for his

own dinner ticket, had expressed delight.

He’d lain awake most of the night thinking what a delusion it had

been to believe that two years away could do anything, that he could

be strong enough to come back to D.C., or that he had come back

for any other reason than Hawk. This morning he’d gotten up for

early Mass at St. Mary’s, dragging himself from the artists’ loft as if

God were a boyfriend he was seeing on the rebound; and then this

afternoon, only an hour ago, he’d raced from the church to the

streetcar to the glass doors of State as if it were October of ’53 and

his heart had not yet been flooded and battered in all the ways it had

been since then.

The last man whose breath he’d smelled was Joseph McCarthy.

Now, as his surviving heart pounded louder and louder, mimicking

the volume of the footsteps coming up the stairs, he wanted only to

feel and taste the air coming from Hawkins Fuller’s mouth.

And there he was at last, in the room, Hawk, the silhouette of his

figure visible in the dark.

Fuller lit a match and held it under his face, which blazed up like

one of the La Tour paintings Tim had seen in Paris. He walked

forward. “Take your scarf.”

Tim rose from the blanket and slid the muffler, knitted by his

mother, from Hawkins’ neck, while with the hand not holding the

match, Fuller reached into his pocket for a candle. Lighting it, he

looked for a place to prop it up and, unable to find one, he let it drip a

wax base onto one of the turret’s windowsills.

Tim’s spirit leapt with a deduction: He hasn’t been up here with

anyone else; he would already have figured out the problem with the

candle if he had. He made this place for us.

Fuller reached into the other pocket of his suit, which in the

candle’s new light, Tim could see, bulged with a paper bag. From it

Fuller extracted a pint bottle of milk. He pulled off its small cap and

tossed the little circle of cardboard onto the blanket, like a poker

chip.

“Drink.”

Tim took two swallows and then Hawkins tilted the bottle further

back, until more milk was coming out than Tim could swallow. It ran

down his cheek and chin, and Hawk began to lick it off, and twice,

once gently and once not, to bite him. He took off Tim’s shirt and

then he removed his own.

In the rush to speed both of them toward nakedness, Tim spilled

the rest of the small bottle onto the bare, warped floor near the

blanket.

“Don’t cry over—you know,” said Hawk.

But he was crying anyway. “I love you, Hawk.” He pressed himself

against Fuller’s body, which was still tanned from the trip to Bermuda

with his wife.

Holding Tim’s shoulders from behind, bringing his lips to the boy’s

ear, Fuller felt how much he had missed him—the smoothness, the

frailty, the chatter and the tender heart. And so, to reclaim the

protective thrill that would come with ravishment, he felt himself

starting to say the words he knew he shouldn’t, words that were

actually a bit more true than he would have expected them to be, but

sufficiently porous and no doubt strategic that, if he believed in

Skippy’s loving god, or even in his own austere one, he would be

asking for forgiveness as soon as he said them.

But he said them anyway: “I love you, too.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

March 11–25, 1957

“How do you stand it? This is awful,” said Mary, sipping the glass of

milk. “But Dr. Sullivan insists it’s a good idea.”

Tim smiled at her from the same chair he’d occupied when she

first had him to dinner here three years ago.

“So,” she said, pointing to the pregnancy that was now quite

visible, even under her navy-blue maternity blouse. “You were

embarrassed to come see me?”

He laughed. As soon as he arrived, he had confessed—in the

high-pitched tones of wild happiness—the resumption of his

romance with Fuller.

“I hesitated to call you when I first got back,” he now explained,

“because I knew that if I came here we’d talk about him.”

“And you didn’t want to tempt yourself with even the sound of his

name.”

“Something like that. And then, once things did happen, I felt I

shouldn’t come around because of, you know, her.” It was the one

part that shamed and frightened him. As if things hadn’t been bad

enough before, Hawkins Fuller now had a wife.

“I actually read up on it,” he continued. “I wasn’t sure whether I

was committing adultery by being with someone married. It turns out

that I am, whereas I’d hoped my guilt in that department might be

limited to leading Fuller astray.”

They both laughed.

“Thanks again for these,” said Mary, pointing to the handkerchiefs

brocaded with shamrocks that Tim had bought at Garfinckel’s.

“They’re pretty.”

In fact he’d gone shopping for a St. Patrick’s Day present for

Hawk, but realized that there was now a problem of detection—what

if Lucy found it?

“Still,” he said. “It’s awful. I’ve had to shut her out of my mind. And

despite everything I’m still taking Communion. Just making up my

own rules! It’s all different from the last time. With him, I mean.”

What he wanted to tell her and couldn’t was the reason the whole

cosmos and catechism had rewritten themselves. Everything was

different because Hawk had said “I love you, too,” a showering of

grace more powerful than any papal dispensation. He couldn’t tell

Mary because he believed that unless he guarded this secret,

Hawk’s words and their meaning might evaporate. It didn’t matter

that Hawk had said them only once. He had said them—and unlike,

it seemed, the catechism, they would remain in effect forever.

“What I can’t understand,” he did say, “is why you don’t

disapprove. I know you always liked me, but you never liked the idea

of it, and now it’s worse because of her.” He couldn’t bring himself to

say Lucy’s name.

“Maybe my own experience has broadened me,” she said, patting

her stomach. “In more ways than one.”

And yet, some part of her was absurdly distressed to think that she

—if Tim’s reading was correct—had committed adultery, too. She

had described to him the pregnancy and her plans: to leave next

month for the pious lady’s establishment in the Garden District, as if

she were awaiting a virgin birth.

For all his own revelations, Tim had been too much a gentleman to

ask who the father was.

“You think it’s Paul’s,” she said, all at once unable to have him go

on believing “the brewer” had been guilty of some sentimental slip-up

a year after marrying Marjorie. “It’s not.”

She proceeded to tell the whole story of Fred Bell, who just the

other day had testified as one of several “free world volunteers”

before Representative Kelly’s committee investigating the

government’s hobbled response to Hungary. “He got the Estonia

spot on the witness list,” she explained.

“That would be a pretty name for a girl,” Tim suggested.

“Estonia?”

They considered it for a moment and started to laugh. Tim came

over to sit on her side of the table. With his arm around her, he found

Mary to be unfamiliarly plump. Still, in most respects she was

herself. He knew there would be no crying; the shamrock

handkerchiefs remained dry and unreached for. He drew her head to

his shoulder.

“Does he know?” asked Tim. “The father, I mean.”

“No, though he will if I stay in Washington much longer.”

“Does Fuller know?”

“Same answer. The fiction I supplied to the department was

‘complications

from

appendicitis,’

necessitating

a

brief

hospitalization, immediate resignation, and a long convalescence out

of town. I’ve been lying low. And just lying. I had somebody tell the

bureau that the real attack and surgery happened in New Orleans a

few days after I left the office feeling poorly. I imagine Fuller suspects

more strongly than Fred does. A couple of times the phone has rung

and I’ve felt strangely sure that’s who it was: Fuller. It’s hard to be

certain, but Beverly knows, which means Jerry knows, and Jerry has

a big mouth, I’m afraid.”

Tim thought of how, in his own position here tonight, Jerry or one

of the “femme” friends Hawk sometimes spoke of would be making

jokes about having become, just like Mary, the Other Woman. But it

wasn’t the sort of joke he could crack himself. He apologized

instead: “I’m sorry I came over here so jazzed up and joyful, and

then went on talking and talking about myself—even after I could

see!” He placed a hand on the pleated rayon covering her belly.

“It’s all right,” she said, taking her head off his shoulder and putting

his on hers. “You’re happy, baby.” She sounded very Southern, as if

she were already halfway home. “Try to stay that way.”

Two weeks later, as Fuller lit a cigarette, Tim said: “You haven’t

noticed. I’ve given those up for Lent.”

“If you really loved God, you’d give up milk.”

Or you, Tim thought.

“The American Communist Party has given up violence and

spying,” he replied instead.

“For forty days?”

“Forever, they say. There are ‘various roads to socialism,’ and

democracy now seems to be one of them. Maybe all this will be

encouraging to Woodforde.”

Fuller thought of the conversations the two of them had had about

the Nation writer, whose new inner conflict was so different from

Skippy’s enduring fervor. Timothy’s blazing political belief matched,

of course, the religious zeal, but to Fuller’s mind neither had ever

seemed to go with the simple freckled rest of him. He was like that

Iowa schoolgirl Preminger had just picked to play Joan of Arc: no

matter how hard she tried, once they released the picture you’d still

be seeing a cornstalk instead of a burning stake.

“Hawk, one or two of the Hungarians I’ve met are hearing rumors

the government’s going to shut down the refugee program—that the

U.S. is going to return to normal quotas or let in only the applicants

whose relatives are already here. A couple of people waiting to get

out of the camps in Austria may have committed suicide. I mean, we

won’t do this, will we? We’d be betraying them twice.”

“Your elected officials just haven’t gotten around to passing the bill

that will keep the spigot open. I get to make phone calls on its behalf

every day.”

“Okay,” said Tim, not fully reassured. “I had another note from Mr.

Osborne, very nice. They have to do all these checks and so forth.

That’s what’s slowing things down. You guys are worse than the

army! Speaking of which: Major Conroy sent Mr. Osborne a ‘superb

recommendation.’ So at least says Mr. Osborne. If it’s true, it was

awfully nice of Conroy: I’m pretty sure he thought I was a pain in the

neck, especially at the end. Anyway, I just wish they’d speed things

up and hire me.”

He leaned in and kissed Fuller’s bare chest. They had climaxed

once already, but as they lay on the blankets together Tim was once

more hard against Hawk’s stomach, experiencing, he thought, a kind

of unified happiness: God and politics and love were for once aligned

in peaceful coexistence.

The other day he’d bought a portable radio and brought

Set to Twilight Tunes on WRC, it was now playing “These

Things.” Hawk, who had greeted the radio’s arrival

questioning look, casually reached over and moved the dial

it here.

Foolish

with a

until he

landed on Bob and Ray. Wally Ballou was running for mayor, and

after a moment or two Tim was enjoying the comic routine even

more than the romantic music. “They used to do ‘Mr. Trace, Keener

Than Most Persons,’” he explained to Fuller.

But at the first commercial he clicked off the little box, the better to

concentrate on kissing Hawk, who soon flipped him over and entered

him. Their rhythms and avidity matched; familiarity—their own history

—now allowed them to merge with a completeness they hadn’t been

able to manage, even during the good moments, three years before.

Hawk pulled on his hair a precise moment before they both came.

The days had grown a bit longer, but even so, by the time the two

of them were finished the streetlamps had come on. Realizing it was

time to go find his Plymouth and drive home to Alexandria for dinner,

Fuller retrieved his car keys from under one of the blankets.

“Are you eating much these days?” he asked, brushing his hand

over Tim’s rib cage.

“I’ll buy myself a sandwich on the way home,” Tim explained

through a dreamy yawn. “On nights when Woodforde’s girlfriend tries

to cook, everybody flees. You know, Mr. Osborne says the job will be

in the main State Department building, so if it comes through I

thought I’d try to get a little place not far from where you used to be

on I Street. I can cook for myself then.”

Fuller found himself suddenly wary. Inside Skippy a future little life

was rising, as surely as the white-brick apartment house beginning

to grow from the ruins of the gasworks across the street.

“Where exactly are my jockey shorts, Timothy?”

“I was hoping to steal them.” He laughed. “Try under the plaid

blanket, near the radio.”

Fuller dressed in the gathering darkness, but with only a sandwich

awaiting him, Tim lingered in the makeshift bed. Fuller glimpsed his

face in the orange glow of the space heater; it looked like some

small ornament lit by a Christmas bulb. Its cheer and serenity

prompted him to remember the expression’s opposite, a face Tim

had shown during an especially tormented moment back in the early

days, while he’d been explaining yet another spiritual infraction he

was afraid of committing.

“Tell me, Skippy. Why give up anything for Lent when you’re not

even taking Communion?”

“I am taking Communion.” Tim’s eyes remained closed and he was

smiling. He seemed to be falling asleep, pleasantly exhausted.

It was becoming clear to Fuller that Skippy now believed

everything between them to have been somehow miraculously

sanctified; he seemed to have reached the conclusion that he, too,

could live as a bigamist. Just as Hawkins Fuller could go home to

Lucy, Timothy Laughlin could go home to God—until it was again

time to meet here, which the two of them would keep doing until the

house was torn down, at which point they would presumably start

going to the “place not far from where you used to be on I Street.”

From the moment he had allowed things to resume, Fuller had

feared that Tim would end up making trouble, would become a

hysterical version of Tony Bianco, threatening a scene—not for

money but assurance, for some further allotment of affection. One

morning he would show up on the Fullers’ suburban doorstep,

wracked with anger and some fresh twist of biblical shame.

But here he was: happy, calm, wanting not so much as a second “I

love you.” He had taken, it seemed, some vow of emotional poverty

that he was willing to keep six days a week, if only on the seventh, or

close enough, he could be released from it here. He would grow old

in this city, become like all the other skinny, obedient clerks and

bookshelvers keeping their heads down at the Library of Congress,

the ones who’d come to town years before to escape the fists and

cruelties of their fathers and the village hearties. He’d learn to cook,

to go to Sunday-afternoon concerts at the Coolidge Auditorium with

his chums. He’d save his money to go see the occasional musical in

tryouts on its way to New York. He’d lose the political zealotry, once

he finally realized politics to be no more than the widgets turned out

by this particular company town. The religious quaverings would

subside, too, displaced into solemn, furtive acknowledgment of “Mr.

Fuller” when they passed in the corridor, and into more flamboyant

weekly worship of the same in the little place off I Street, where a

picture of the beloved would be kept out in a frame near the record

player, except when Fuller himself or anyone other than Skippy’s

fellow nelly clerks came to visit.

Timothy Laughlin would not be the big trouble that Hawkins Fuller

feared, the trouble against which Lucy’s money would shield him.

No, Skippy would be a grim safe harbor, one that would trap him in a

domesticity even danker than the one across the river in Alexandria.

The thrill of protectiveness and ravishment would be long gone,

replaced with a cup of coffee and a slice of cake and an ongoing

obligation to fuck the good little aging boy who had “given up

everything”—the nelly clerks would start to tell him—for Hawkins

Fuller.

Dressed now, Fuller lay back down on the blankets and took Tim

in his arms. The two of them wriggled around until they were

spooning, with Tim holding Hawk from behind, momentarily falling

asleep against his back, while Fuller faced the turret’s circular wall.

Unheard by Tim, he whispered: “I’m sorry.”

And he was, he thought; maybe even more than he knew.

As he started down H Street toward the office and his Plymouth,

Fuller passed the worst of the neighborhood’s gingerbread shanties

and wondered just how impressed the Negroes of Foggy Bottom

were by the knowledge that one of their own, the State Department’s

Dr. Ralph Bunche, had been dispatched to sort things out in the

Middle East. Fuller imagined that the feds would eventually name a

park for Bunche somewhere along here, probably once the last of

the Negroes had been priced out of the area.

He entered State on Twenty-first Street and found a couple of

people still in the bureau. He half hoped that Mr. Hill might be there

to see him returning to his desk at such a late hour. Inside his office

he hung up his tweed overcoat and then his suit jacket, both of them

smelling faintly of the brewer’s condemned love nest.

The news clippings that filled his In box showed Dulles and Ike

talking to Macmillan in Bermuda, where last month, lying on a chaise

longue in her swimsuit, Lucy had at last begun to look pregnant.

Someone had also dropped on his desk a memo announcing that

Llewellyn Thompson would now move from the Austrian embassy to

the Russian. No cookie pusher he, everyone agreed, though Fuller

and Mr. Hill would still have to make a few mollifying visits to the

SOB before he could be confirmed. Styles Bridges, for one, would

almost certainly be among those claiming that Thompson had been

a little too sympathetic to “our so-called Soviet allies” back when he’d

been the second secretary in Moscow during the war. Someone

might also note that the nominee hadn’t married until he was fortyfour.

Fuller made his shirtsleeved way back out of the office and into the

corridor; he then took the stairs down to Osborne’s office in Eastern

European Affairs. Alas, his handball partner and everyone else in

EEA had gone for the day, just as Hungary had gone from being an

emergency to an ordinary geopolitical given.

Starting back for his own office, Fuller decided—all at once and

instead—to travel the most direct route toward accomplishing the

task he had in mind.

The door to the Miscellaneous M Unit stood open, surely a first

and no doubt because of an ambassadorial appointment that would

be even more widely discussed than Thompson’s: Scott McLeod’s

rumored, imminent dispatch to the Dublin embassy, a reward for the

years of scrubbing he’d done here and a quiet way of saying that

that job might at last be done. Even so, McLeod would have his

Senate enemies as surely as Thompson had his. Hence the open

door: no harm showing off the friendly informality with which his

operation had done its business at State.

Fred Traband was putting on his coat. “May I help you?” he asked.

“Fuller. Congressional Relations.”

“Oh, right.” Traband’s look of friendly recognition was replaced by

disdain. He tried to recall any word he’d had about Fuller’s being

summoned once again. Perhaps this time the Harvard man had

done something so flagrant he wouldn’t be able to fool the machine.

“It’s about a fellow who’s getting close to a refugee-relief job.”

“What about him?” Traband asked.

“He’s got a few problems in the area you once questioned me

about. For his sake and the department’s I think the appointment

ought to be blocked right now, before some Hungarian begins

blackmailing him to get asylum.”

Make it easy on him.

Traband’s expression softened. Maybe he’d been wrong about

Fuller all along. Or maybe the guy had experienced the sort of

behavioral conversion that the Miscellaneous M Unit always insisted

was possible. He looked at his watch. “I’m running late,” he said.

“But the boss is still here. Why don’t you go in and give him a word

to the wise?”

How to Be a Man, thought Fuller, in the last seconds before he

shook hands with Scott McLeod.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

April 21–22, 1957

The Laughlins’ Easter dinner was taking place in Stuyvesant Town,

Grandma Gaffney having at last ceded her holiday territory with the

proviso that this was her absolute limit: she would never get on a

ferry to Staten Island.

“Those damned priests take advantage of you every whichaway,”

she was now telling her grandson. She did not like the idea that Tim

was working for sandwiches and pocket money.

“It’s charity,” Francy explained for her brother. “It’s something

good.” In fact she did think it strange that Tim had been doing unpaid

church work for three solid months.

“Don’t think of it as charity, Grandma,” said Tim in his own

defense. “Think of it as a good investment, like those two shares of

AT&T stock that Grandpa used to have, the ones that kept splitting.”

He was the only one allowed to tease her, but while the others all

laughed, she just stared at him, a vision of the prodigal, and wished

through her tight-set lips that Francy’s horrible little daughter would

stop romping around the room.

For everyone at the table, Tim’s return had been more the focus of

the day than their new outfits from Gimbel’s or even the turkey.

Finally moist, now that its preparation had shifted to Mrs. Laughlin, it

still owed its presence on the table to Grandma Gaffney, who

insisted that ham was something the Protestants served on Easter.

“Does she know she’s aligning herself with the Jews?” Francy had

whispered to her brother when the porkless platter emerged from the

kitchen.

“I wish you were still working for Joe!” declared Uncle Frank,

who’d never fully conceded the fact that his nephew had actually

worked for Senator Potter. “He’ll be back yet, you wait and see! They

say he’s going to be leading the charge for this fellow McLeod. The

English papers are supposed to be up in arms because we’re

sending the Irish a ‘cop’ for an ambassador. They seem to think his

methods are a little too tough—that he’s been spreadin’ all that fear

through the precious State Department. For them to complain about

anyone being unworthy of Ireland! Let’s talk about the methods

they’ve used over there for three hundred years. You don’t, by the

way, hear the Irish themselves complaining about McLeod, now do

you?”

Rosemary Laughlin touched Tim’s hand and remarked, feelingly,

upon the “perfect weather for a perfect Easter.” Still shy with her son

after such a long separation, she asked him about the Egg Roll on

the White House lawn. “You’d like to be there, wouldn’t you?” she

said to little Maria Loretta.

Tim explained that the Eisenhowers were actually spending the

weekend in Georgia.

“Speaking of eggs,” declared Uncle Frank. “He needs to be a little

more hard-boiled.”

The men at the table, even Uncle Alan, had grown more and more

impatient with the chief executive. They seemed to be waiting for

Nixon the way Fred Bell was, according to Mary; the prospect of an

Irish alternative held no interest for them. “For Christ’s sake,” Uncle

Frank had said a little earlier of John Kennedy, “his father went to

Harvard.” Nixon, Protestant though he might be, suggested the solid

strivers who’d sat beside Paul Laughlin on all those nights and

Saturdays he’d studied for his accounting certificate from LaSalle.

Tim scooped up Maria Loretta on one of her passes through the

room. “You don’t need the White House lawn,” he said, “but I’ll bet

you would like all the cherry and dogwood blossoms that are out.”

He stroked the girl’s shiny brown hair and agreed with her that

dogwood was a funny name for a tree.

And as he looked at her he thought of Hawkins Fuller’s daughter.

On Tuesday, he and Hawk had had plans to meet in the Foggy

Bottom house at four-thirty, after Hawk got through on the Hill trying

to shame a House committee into giving the Voice of America the full

hundred and forty million dollars Ike had requested for it. But when

Tim got to the turret, he found a note that Hawk had left atop the

blankets only minutes before: “Catching cab to Georgetown U

Hospital following premature birth of Susan Lydia Boardman Fuller.

Barely five pounds. Say your beads for her.”

Tim had spent part of this morning’s Mass praying for the baby,

whose sudden existence fascinated and repelled him. He felt glad

that this extension of Hawkins Fuller into the world was a girl: a boy

would have somehow made for a dilution of Hawk himself. Susan’s

being female allowed Tim to think that the baby belonged really to

her, to Lucy, in the way a child’s Jewishness was said to be passed

to it through the mother. And yet, truth required him to admit that

Hawk had helped to put this life into the world; its creation was

something the two of them, he and Hawk, could never achieve

together.

As he worried his way through all this once more, Francy tried to

keep her eyes off her brother. But she thought she saw his mood

taking one of the several dips it had in the hours since her arrival

here this morning. She got up to clear the dishes.

Tim meanwhile tried to cheer himself with the thought that Hawk

had also brought life back to him. The adultery they were committing

was their creation, a sin the two of them were building together, and

from which Lucy was forever excluded. This morning in church he’d

prayed not just that Hawk’s daughter be healthy, but that the lurid

new light burning within himself not be scuppered like the last candle

after the last Mass.

They had met only once since the afternoon when “These Foolish

Things” had played on the radio. It had been a rushed encounter,

Hawk acting the way Tim could remember from some mornings three

years before—studiously brisk; lustful and withdrawn all at once. He

had ascribed the behavior to worry over Lucy’s increasingly difficult

pregnancy. The premature birth had convinced him of it. The

remoteness was inevitable, and nothing much to worry about. Think,

too, of the note Hawk had left in the turret: for him to have been

mindful of their afternoon rendezvous even at a time like that!

As he retold himself all this, his spirits came back up. “I’m going to

do the dishes with Francy,” he announced. “See, Grandma?

Everything’s exactly the same. Even here in Stuyvesant Town.”

It was Tim’s father who replied to this observation. Though he was

the family striver, the agent of its transformative ascent, Paul

Laughlin now declared, with a sudden wistfulness, “Nothing stays the

same. Did you hear the pope this morning? Talking about atomic

energy?”

He had been relieved to see his son, though he suspected that

Tim was traveling on thin ice, carrying secrets that looked even now,

while the boy walked to the kitchen, as if they might make the floor

give way beneath him.

At the sink Tim washed and Francy dried, and the ventilating fan

blew the last of the kitchen’s cooking smells into the Stuyvesant

Oval.

“You wouldn’t let me do this a few Christmases back,” Francy

recalled. “I was pregnant with Maria. You may even have mentioned

my ‘condition.’”

“Did I?” Tim asked, laughing. “Well, it was a productive worry. See

how healthy she turned out?”

“I hope the next one will, too.” She rapped the wooden board

beneath the dish drainer.

“Are you?”

“Yes, and believe me, in our neighborhood, you go three years

without dropping another, people think something’s very wrong.”

“Do you want to sit down?” He pointed to a stool by the broom

closet.

“Don’t be ridiculous. But let’s sit down together.” She turned the

faucets off.

“Lent’s over,” she said, handing him a cigarette as they settled

themselves at the small table. “Talk to me.”

“Bless me, Sister, for I have…”

“That’s not a bad beginning. Keep going.”

“I’m fine.”

“You’ve been telling me that for three years now.”

She reached back to the counter and picked up the cuff links he’d

removed from his shirt when he started on the dishes. She pressed

them into his hand. “I still don’t know who ‘Hawkins Fuller’ is, but one

of these Christmases or Easters that old lady will finally be dead”—

she pointed back to the living room and Grandma Gaffney—“and

while she’s down there complaining about too few Jews being in Hell

—”

Tim began to laugh, evasively. Francy pressed the cuff links

harder against the palm of his hand.

“—I’ll finally be cooking the dinner on Staten Island, where there’ll

be two children, no more, and my sullen son of a bitch of a

husband.” Over her brother’s nervous, lighthearted protest, she

continued: “And I want you to know that whoever this person is”—

she pressed the cuff links even harder into Tim’s hand—“he’s always

welcome in my house.”

Tim spent the next morning in the city, shopping with his mother at

Gristede’s and then having an early lunch in midtown with his father.

He talked to each of them about the job he still expected to come

through before long. They asked him no questions that could be

deemed personal, though he suspected Francy had urged them to.

As it was, he took their reticence to be a manifestation of love, not

self-protection.

He had, God forgive him, deflected Francy’s own proffering of

love. Forcing the cuff links into his palm had been a kind of secret

handshake, and it had spooked him. Ending their conversation with a

joke about the stigmata, he’d given her a peck on the cheek and

turned the faucets back on.

His money had started running low, but after lunch with his father

he went into Brentano’s and bought James Michener’s The Bridge at

Andau. Amazed that a book about Hungary could be brought out so

fast, like a magazine, he carried it aboard his bus at the Port

Authority, where he looked north toward Forty-third Street and

wondered whether Hawk’s clarinet player could still be living there

five years after Ike’s rally at the Garden.

He was halfway through Michener’s book by the time the

Greyhound pulled into the District. Inside the doorway beneath Ken

and Gloria’s loft, he collected his mail and took it upstairs, his heart

hammering at the sight of the State Department envelope, and

pounding even harder once he tore it open and, above the signature

“Leonard F. Osborne,” saw the words “regret” and “due to security

considerations” and “unable to offer you.”

He stuffed the letter into his pocket and raced back downstairs, not

knowing where he was going. He wanted to call Hawk at the office,

but he couldn’t bother him while the baby might still be in jeopardy.

Besides, it was now past six; Hawk had probably left for home, and

even for something as bad as this, Tim would not break his vow

never to dial the number in Alexandria.

At the door to the street he found Woodforde, lighting a cigarette

on his way out. A queasy, dyspeptic look played across the writer’s

face. “If I marry this girl,” he said, “I’m going to wind up skinnier than

you.”

They started down F Street together.

“I didn’t get the job,” said Tim, thunderstruck all over again by

verbalizing the news.

He couldn’t tell Woodforde about the “security considerations,”

which, after all, had to be about that. True, Woodforde had

expressed his own belief in the inconsequence of such things—I

don’t care about you and Fuller, that’s your own business—but it was

still too shaming to admit to himself, let alone anyone else, that he

might be a security risk. He realized that he felt guilty, not angry, and

he wondered helplessly how Osborne’s people could have known.

“Sorry, kid,” said Woodforde, sincerely. “You know, there are a

hundred ways for you to help out the Hungarians and get paid for it

without having to be inside Dulles’s closed shop.”

Tim counterfeited some cheer. “You’re right. And I’d better find at

least one of them if I’m going to make my—I should say your—rent.”

“Don’t worry about that. Listen, you want to copyedit Armed and

Dangerous? The girl doing it in New York stinks, and I’ve got a little

bit left of the advance that I can pay you with. McIntyre once told me

your grammar is ‘cleaner than a nun’s shaved scalp.’”

“Thanks,” Tim replied, abstractedly. “I’ll think about it. But right now

I’ve got to go in the other direction. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Okay, take it easy, Laughlin. Everything’s going to be all right.”

Woodforde watched him walk away and then called out after him:

“Come Cohn or come Schine!”

Tim tramped across the city for nearly an hour, all the way up to

Georgetown. Passing two little French restaurants on M Street, he

proceeded farther north, making himself believe that he was headed

toward Mary’s, though in fact he had another destination, a

dangerous one, in mind. He wanted to see Hawkins’ daughter.

He would just glimpse her behind the incubator’s glass; no one

ever had to know he’d come and gone. Since visiting hours would

already be over when he arrived, this wouldn’t really be a visit; he’d

find some nurse who would let him take a peek, and while he stood

in front of the window, a little like Stella Dallas, he’d be able to figure

out what he’d been feeling about the child’s presence in the world.

The prayer he’d say for her would be made more potent by familiarity

with its object.

A receptionist scolded him for showing up so late, past eight

o’clock, and looked at him suspiciously before imparting the good

news that Mrs. Fuller, after six nights here, had been discharged this

afternoon. Moreover, the baby was thriving sufficiently to have gone

home with her.

He thanked the woman and asked for directions to the chapel. She

reminded him that it was late but allowed as how he could make a

quick stop.

He prayed not for Susan Fuller but for himself; for steadiness. He

told himself that he was just tired from the bus ride and weak from

missing supper. He’d been rattled by the kind of bad news everybody

has to put up with once in a while. Not getting the job might be a

disappointment, but Woodforde was right: there were other ways to

be useful. And while the mention of “security considerations” left him

fearful, all of that might still be a mistake, or part of some generalized

tightening-up that had nothing to do with him in particular.

Hawk loved him, and Hawk’s child was healthy.

He prayed that Mary’s would be healthy, too, and he promised, if

he could think of a way, that he would help it, even after it had been

adopted. He’d already told Mary he would take her to the airport on

Wednesday, but he should ask if she wanted him to go to New

Orleans, as company for the weeks ahead. He could stay at the

rooming house on Dauphine Street, or even with Mr. Shaw, Tristan’s

sword lying between them.

For now he would find his way to a streetcar. He would go back to

the loft, and tomorrow he would pack boxes at St. Mary’s.

He would ask for no more than he already had, and things would

yet be well.

CHAPTER FORTY

April 24, 1957

Mary dialed Eastern Airlines to confirm her late-afternoon nonstop to

New Orleans. Seven months and two weeks was awfully late to be

flying, but no one would notice anything under her boxy spring coat.

Beverly and Jerry Baumeister were in the other room. They’d come

to say goodbye and pick up a set of keys for the wealthy girl in

Senator Douglas’s office whom Beverly had found to sublet the

furnished apartment for six months. The outside date meant nothing;

Mary knew that she’d never be back.

“I’ll be right out,” she called.

“Take your time, we’re fighting,” answered Beverly.

Beverly and Jerry had treated Mary to a big late breakfast and,

having both taken the day off, were now deciding whether to see a

lunchtime showing of Funny Face or Moulin Rouge.

Jerry had been arguing for the latter, but Beverly conceded

nothing to her spouse: “It’s five years old and it’s got Zsa Zsa Gabor.

Why are they bringing it back to the MacArthur now?”

“To show solidarity with the Hungarians?”

Husband and wife laughed.

“Maybe to catch the overflow of Francophiles who can’t get into

Funny Face,” said Mary, entering the room.

“Come with us,” Jerry and Beverly urged in unison.

“I can’t. Really.”

Beverly saw that she meant it, and she nudged Jerry to get

moving. “Okay,” she said, tapping her purse. “I’ll give Kay the keys

tomorrow morning. I tell you, she’s right out of The Philadelphia

Story. God, Mary, I thought you were sort of blue-blooded when we

first met. And so beautiful. You, not her. I remember the first time you

walked into the bureau.” She burst into tears.

Mary put her arm around Beverly. Jerry looked on, as hopelessly

as any other male would have.

“Your baby’s going to be beautiful, too,” Beverly predicted.

“Probably fatter than Fred,” guessed Mary.

“Don’t stay down there,” Beverly insisted. “Don’t disappear as if

you’re doing penance. Promise you’ll come back.”

“Back to what?”

“Back to us. And back to whoever else is just around the corner.”

“You mean Mr. Right?”

“Yes. Or Mr. Second Right.” She pointed to Jerry.

“Second right!” he cried. “I’m not just around the corner. I am the

corner. Come on,” he said to his wife. “Time for Zsa Zsa, dahlink.”

He embraced Mary, and when he pulled away he, too, had tears in

his eyes. They were both remembering that night at the Occidental.

Do you know what they do with guys like me in Russia?

He took Beverly’s arm—all three of them were crying now—while

she handed Mary a small box. “It’s a bon voyage gift, not a farewell

present. And it’s for you, not for—you know.” She meant the baby,

but that suddenly seemed too painful to say; the infant wouldn’t be in

Mary’s possession long enough to prompt anyone’s gift-giving.

Mary nodded. “I’ll write,” she promised, kissing Beverly.

When the Baumeisters were gone, she sat down on one of the

freshly vacuumed couch cushions. She was wondering whether to

open the little box when the phone rang.

Fuller’s voice came through the receiver. “I never remembered to

disconnect mine, either. The missus had to remind me to.”

She supposed he knew everything after all. And why should she

be surprised by that? Or surprised by his having waited until the last

minute to be in touch?

“I’ve switched the service over to the Vassar girl who’s moving in

tomorrow,” she explained, as matter-of-factly as possible.

“Go downstairs in five minutes. A cab will be waiting to take you to

me.”

“Fuller, I’m not going to the department.”

“You’re going to Quigley’s drugstore. Near GWU. I’ll be at the soda

fountain.”

“Why don’t you just drive here in your Plymouth? My plane doesn’t

leave for hours.”

“I know. It leaves at five-forty-five. But there is no Plymouth this

week. It’s out in Alexandria at the disposal of the nurse taking care of

my little girl.”

“How is she?”

“Remarkable. Very small but very calm. Quite discriminating.

Standoffish, I’d say. We call her Garbo.”

I want to be alone. She almost said it, but it wasn’t true. She was

all at once nervous and again wanting company, even his. “If there’s

no Plymouth, why don’t you take a cab here?”

“I don’t want to be around if you have a surprise visitor, which is to

say, if Skippy gets there early. Come on, head downstairs. The

cabbie will be honking his horn any minute.”

She was soon at Quigley’s, on a stool, drinking the malted Fuller

had already ordered for her.

He sipped a glass of seltzer, and for a minute or two they said

nothing.

“So, he told you,” she finally said.

“He told me.”

“As of Friday, when I last talked to him, I’d have believed he

hadn’t.”

“And you’d have been right. He never said a word until yesterday

afternoon. When he called the office.”

She said nothing, just wondered why Tim had told him then and

not before.

“He called to ask after the baby,” Fuller explained. “And about

another matter. Also, of course, to set up a rendezvous.”

“In the turret.”

“His little castle in Spain.”

She pushed away the malted and swiveled the stool, as if it were

her typist’s chair, so that she could face him. “You condescending,

buck-passing bastard,” she declared, as evenly as she could. “It’s

your romance, too. You found the castle for it.”

“You’re right. It was my romance, too.”

Her hand went, involuntarily, to her stomach. It rested there,

protectively, for a moment. “‘Was’? Does he know that?”

“No. He’s dealing with a vocational setback right now.”

The answer’s coolness was, she realized, too much even for

Fuller. The display of sang-froid suggested the opposite, an agitation

that had prompted him to summon her here.

“Did he not get the job?” was all she asked.

“He did not get the job.”

“That was the ‘other matter’ he called you about.”

“Yes, but he wound up chattering mostly of you. In those little

grammatical torrents that issue from him when he’s nervous, as if

he’s reciting the Apostles’ Creed. He was sentimental. For some

reason he couldn’t bear the idea of your leaving without our saying

goodbye, you and me.”

“Tell me what happened with the job.”

“Osborne sent him a letter.”

“I thought it was more or less settled, a sure thing.”

“‘Security considerations’ arose.”

“About him?”

“Yes. I mean, they’re obvious enough, aren’t they?”

“How exactly were they obvious to Osborne? Or let’s say more

obvious than they would have been in February.”

Fuller didn’t answer. But when she looked at him, she knew. More

than that, she knew that he wanted her to know—just as surely as

Tim had once wanted to make a sincere confession to his priest, or

some of Jerry’s terrified friends had tried to tell McLeod’s lie detector

even more than they’d been asked to.

“You did this,” she at last whispered.

Fuller took a sip of seltzer and regarded the countertop.

“Did you decide, after all, that he was inconvenient?” she asked in

a furious whisper. “This is inconvenient, Fuller.” She placed his hand

on her stomach. “But it’s mine—mine at least to ease into the world.

Too bad there’s no one down on F Street that you could pay a

hundred and twenty-five dollars to to have Tim killed.”

For all her disgust, her sense that he had done the most

despicable thing possible, another part of her felt grateful to him,

because what made the act despicable also made it definitive, the

surest means of ending what had to end, now or later, with Tim’s

broken heart. And she knew, looking at Fuller, that his reasoning

matched her own.

“You think you did this for his sake, don’t you?” she asked. “You’ve

convinced yourself of that, haven’t you?”

“No, I did it for me. You’ll do the other part, the part that’s for his

sake.”

“And how will I do that, Fuller?”

“By putting me beyond the pale.”

“You want me to tell him the truth.”

“Make it hard on him.”

She got down from the stool and closed her coat. A coed who was

with her boyfriend smiled, enviously, in her direction. She wondered,

absurdly, whether she could get a cab outside Quigley’s or would

have to walk to the main entrance of the department to find one.

“What about you?” asked Fuller.

“Me?”

“Were you ever in love with me?”

He asked it with an absence of ego, just a kind of sympathetic

curiosity, taking the opportunity to tie up a loose end.

“No,” she answered.

“Well, that’s one small blessing.”

“I wish it had been otherwise,” she said.

“Why?”

“Because then I’d be able to forgive you.”

She brushed past the coed, and he called out to her, with

surprising gentleness: “You already have.”

The ticket agent handed Mary a complimentary flight bag for her

incidentals. Reaching for it with her left arm, she thought she saw the

agent noting the absence of a wedding ring on the hand of this

pregnant passenger. But maybe she was imagining things. She put

her small purse and Beverly’s gift inside the bag, which she left

unzippered, before heading back to the departures lounge. Tim was

still getting her luggage weighed—four suitcases full of separates

and shirtwaists and books—and preparing to pay the overcharges.

He looked comically gallant, and sitting here, sipping her glass of

sherry, she thought it ridiculous that she should need his help. She

had recently decided that the essential cause of her plight, what had

brought her here, was a fatal self-sufficiency, an inner chilliness that

had left her unable to settle for Paul or fight for Fred. She was an

engine that couldn’t turn over; the only state of mind she could fully

embrace was hesitation, a conviction that to accept one man or life

was to forfeit another. She couldn’t welcome or destroy even the

baby that was quickening within her.

Maybe she didn’t love Fuller because he was her emotional

kinsman; maybe a small part of him did love Tim, just not a large or

brave enough part to rout the others standing guard over the

inviolable self.

Tim returned with a glass of milk and piece of pie.

“You should be having this,” he said, offering the milk. “For

Estonia’s sake.”

They tried to grin.

“Here,” said Mary, giving him twenty dollars. “For the cabs and the

overcharges. You’ll need it to get home.”

“Not on your life. I’ll be working soon. Though not as soon as I’d

hoped, it seems.”

She said nothing.

“The job at State fell through,” he explained. “Osborne’s office sent

me a letter saying I couldn’t satisfy their ‘security considerations.’

Fuller says it’s just somebody’s bureaucratic reflex kicking in. That

it’s unfair but actually means nothing. He says the whole operation

will change before long, and it’s just my bad luck to be coming

through before McLeod can get over to Ireland.”

“No,” Mary said firmly. “That won’t change it.”

“Honest, Mary, I don’t understand it. I lived a perfectly clean life in

the army, and there isn’t a soul here besides you who knows about

the way things are now between me and Hawk. Not even

Woodforde. Not even Tommy McIntyre.” This last name, his own

unexpected utterance of it, made him go pale for a moment. “You

don’t suppose that, based just on the old days, ’53 and ’54, he could

have—”

“It wasn’t McIntyre.”

“Well, it wasn’t you. There’s nobody else.”

“It was Fuller.”

“That’s not so.”

Make it hard on him.

“I saw Fuller this morning,” she declared.

“No, you didn’t. You would have told me before now.”

“They call the baby ‘Garbo.’ I’ll bet he told you the same thing.”

He clenched his fist on top of the table. She pushed aside the milk

and the pie and put her hand over his.

“No” was all he said—not a denial, just a refusal of her attention.

He freed his hand but made no other protest. He looked at her like a

technician reading a faulty instrument, one that had reported a flat

scan when everybody knew there had to be a pulse. Once more he

said “No,” before getting up. He nodded at her, as if she were a

stranger he’d sat down with by mistake, and he turned to go.

A strong impulse made her reach inside the flight bag and extract

Beverly’s present. She handed it to him, quickly, as if it were an

illegal payoff she’d been assigned to pass along.

As she pressed it on him, she could feel a mutation of the gift’s

meaning. The box—she had looked inside before leaving the

apartment—contained a glass paperweight, a sprig of cherry

blossom suspended in colorless amber. It had been Beverly’s way of

telling her to come back to Washington. Now it was her way of

saying to Tim that he would never come back here, but that what had

happened between him and Fuller, however finished, remained alive

somewhere, as sad and frozen and perfect as the blossoms on the

branch.

So would her baby, forever ungrasped and unvisited by its mother,

remain somewhere alive, still remembered and still real.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

May 6, 1957

The doors of St. Matthew’s stood open, so Monsignor Cartwright’s

microphoned words about the dearly departed were able to travel not

only to the seated congregants but all the way to those on the steps

outside.

The deceased, everyone was assured, “had played a role which

will be more and more honored as history unfolds its record.” After

all, Monsignor Cartwright reminded those assembled, the “watchman

of the citadel” had had “the fortitude to stand alone.”

“Never ‘alone,’” whispered Cecil Holland, out on the steps, to Mary

McGrory. “Not as long as Roy was around.”

Miss McGrory flipped her pad back two or three pages. Its Greggshorthand squiggles had caught all the monsignor’s comfortings and

regrets, including his observation that “few public figures in our time

have done so much for the United States and received so many

heartaches for it” as the man now on his way to eternal rest.

Joe McCarthy had died Thursday night from a “liver ailment.”

Some said he’d gone peacefully, with Jean at his side, while others

had him tearing at the IV tubes and bedsheets in a fit of delirium

tremens. Whatever the truth, there would be three ceremonies to bid

him farewell: the Mass here this morning; an afternoon service in the

Senate chamber; a graveside rite in Wisconsin tomorrow.

When the first of these ended and the mourners were ready to

leave St. Matthew’s, the vice president was at the front of them,

descending the steps with his wife and Alice Roosevelt Longworth.

Spectators were hard pressed to see anyone else from the

administration emerge, and Nixon took care to speak to a wireservice reporter more in the manner of a political scientist than a

politician: “Years will pass before Senator McCarthy’s work can be

objectively evaluated.”

On Friday night at Gawler’s funeral home, Tim had stood in a long

line of the mournful, the curious, and the silently triumphant, waiting

to file past the open casket in which McCarthy reposed. Despite the

mortician’s art, the corpse had looked nearly as gray as his tie. Two

and a half hours ago, Tim had arrived at St. Matthew’s early enough

to have gotten a seat, but he had his suitcase with him, and it had

seemed somehow disrespectful, not just awkward, to take it inside.

So he’d stayed on the steps, watching the eight Marines bring

McCarthy’s closed coffin into the church.

Senator Kennedy was now exiting, his left hand in his suit pocket,

his right hand brushing back his hair. He moved fast, almost furtively,

as if departing from some questionable assignation. He breezed past

his colleague, Senator Saltonstall, who, a few feet from Tim, was

talking with Senator Martin about how the GOP was now down to

forty-six seats. Miss McGrory and Mr. Holland began moving down

the steps, the better to overhear this conversation, prompting Tim to

sidle into a nearby clutch of observers, lest he be spotted by his

former colleagues from the Star.

Even so, he was still able to hear them.

“Jack didn’t look as banged up about all this as his papa,”

observed Holland. Joseph P. Kennedy had released a statement to

the press that outdid even Monsignor Cartwright in paying tribute to

the deceased. But Miss McGrory and Holland agreed that for cryptic

brevity nothing could top Harry Truman’s reaction to news of the

senator’s death: “Too bad.”

Fred Bell, looking like a plump, boutonniered floorwalker at

Hecht’s, passed in front of Tim, who recognized him from an

armband with the colors of the Estonian flag, as well as from the

description, half comical and half longing, that he’d been given by

Mary. According to her, Fred still didn’t know he was the father of a

child ready to be born in New Orleans.

Joe Alsop now marched down the steps, nodding hello to Betty

Beale and looking satisfied that the unpleasant business of

McCarthy’s life, however abbreviated, was over at last. Close behind

him came Scott McLeod, obliging the reporter at his side with a

comment: “As I said in my Senate testimony on Friday, those

criticisms of my appointment that are coming from abroad represent

extreme minority elements.”

“Is your work at State really done?” the reporter asked.

“To my knowledge no subversive personnel remain in the

department.”

Tim had fervently wished to avoid Tommy McIntyre, yet here he

came, without Senator Potter, as happy as if he’d been to a

christening.

“Mr. Laughlin!” he cried. “Christ, what a send-off from all the boys

in their long skirts! I counted nineteen monsignors and seventy-three

priests. I am not kidding.” He showed Tim a small notebook in which

he’d written down the figures.

“A page back from that—go on, flip it—you’ll find the eulogy I’m

trying to put into Charlie’s mouth.”

Those who had the opportunity to be with the late senator on

social occasions or when chatting with him in his office knew that,

regardless of differences which might have existed on political

issues, Joe was never vindictive. He was a warm, human, and

exceptionally charming person.

“Didn’t you find that yourself, Timothy? Didn’t he strike you as

such? He’ll be the first solon since Borah to be laid out in the

chamber. A lovely touch—to follow the great Prohibitionist with a

drunkard. The final seal of repeal!”

Tommy’s failure to get a rise out of Tim, whose face remained

weary and blank, inspired the Irishman to more strenuous rhetorical

effort. Looking like the kind of gargoyle this plain American cathedral

lacked, he hardly moved his rictus as the words came forth in a

cackling spray: “Of course Charlie may be too much in demand to

render this paean just yet. You should have seen him Friday night at

the Mayflower! Receivin’ he was the annual award of the Goodwill

Industries people. ‘Outstanding Champion’ of the nation’s

handicapped. I must say, even the blinking canes couldn’t compete

with the other honoree, a crippled telephone operator from Florida

who dials with her feet and types with her mouth.” Ready to

demonstrate the latter action, Tommy stuck a pencil between his

yellow teeth. Revulsion at last gave Tim the energy to move, even if

the only escape route would take him past Miss McGrory.

But she was occupied fending off a fierce scolding from a woman

with a big red-white-and-blue cockade stuck to her hat. “Your paper

writes malicious nonsense!” the woman insisted. “There is no

possibility Mrs. McCarthy’s baby will be taken from her. One-year

‘probationary period’ or not.”

Miss McGrory nodded forbearingly and explained that she

harbored no desire to see Tierney McCarthy returned to the New

York Foundling Hospital.

The woman wheeled around to resume her march down the

cathedral’s steps, and Tim realized it was Miss Lightfoot, showing

the distress of a radiation victim. He tried to move away, not because

he expected to be recognized, but from pity at the garish sight of her,

unglimpsed since the anticensure rally at the Garden. But her own

baleful eye took him in and made the identification.

“You!” she cried, before lowering her voice to a sickening baby-talk

imitation of the inscription he’d once made in the Lodge biography.

“‘You’re wonderful.’ Well, your Mr. Wonderful was sitting right up near

the front of the church, did you know that? With his boss, Mr. Hill.

Offering their politic homage to Senator McCarthy, whom they

thwarted during every single minute he was alive. And how is it Mr.

Fuller even now has a boss and a job in that cesspool over there?”

She pointed toward Foggy Bottom. “Because there are still people

who protect his kind, McLeod or no McLeod.”

Attracted by Miss Lightfoot’s again-increasing volume, people

began to stare. Tim struggled to get past her, needing to flee before

Hawk, who he’d never imagined would be here, came down the

steps and saw him. Tightening his grip on his suitcase, he thought

he was managing to get to the other side of Miss Lightfoot when her

hand was able to reach out and detain him long enough so that she

could whisper, straight into his face: “Cocksucker.”

Finally at the bottom of the steps, he looked back up them like the

tourist who never again expects to see the Acropolis. It was at this

moment that he caught sight of Woodforde near the cathedral’s

doors.

The writer noticed him, too. Concerned by the suitcase, he made a

gesture that asked: “What gives?”

Tim responded with a reassuring wave, but Woodforde knew

better. He cupped his hands near his mouth and forcefully called out:

“Don’t.” He’d sensed that something had gone very wrong between

Laughlin and Fuller—and the single suitcase could hold just about

everything Tim had in his part of the loft.

“You look awful!” Woodforde called down the steps.

“Thanks!” answered Tim, hoping to sound humorous, before

making a getaway down Rhode Island Avenue. He had most of the

day ahead of him before his bus was scheduled to leave: he’d gotten

the cheapest fare, on a coach that wouldn’t get its passengers to

New York until after midnight. Even with Woodforde’s copyediting

money, four months at St. Mary, Mother of God had finished off his

savings; for the first time in his life he wasn’t sure where he’d be

sleeping tonight. He’d not told his parents or Francy he was coming,

and he couldn’t picture himself arriving on either doorstep in the

middle of the night. What he would do tomorrow, once he woke up,

seemed even harder to imagine.

He wished, God forgive him, that he wouldn’t wake up. Two weeks

had done nothing to lessen his black realization that this time he had

not renounced Hawk—oh, the noble ridiculousness of his two-year

enlistment!—but that Hawk had renounced him.

He went into the Peoples drugstore to get a half pint of milk before

taking his seat on the bench in Dupont Circle, where he knew he’d

been heading all along.

He understood that Mary had revealed what she had at the airport

—It was Fuller—to shock and toughen him, as if a bucket of the

coldest water might effect his Lazarene rise from the stupor of

unwise love. But he’d walked all the way home that afternoon feeling

strangely certain he’d become invisible.

Yesterday he’d sat on another bench, on the Mall, watching smoke

rise a thousand feet into the air: the Johnson & Wimsatt lumber yard,

down on Maine Avenue above the docks where Mary used to buy

fish, had burned to the ground, requiring every fire company in the

city. Remembering, as the catechism had long ago told him, that

despair is a particular affront to God—the rejection of every good He

might still have in store for one—he had wished he were rising on

the columns of smoke, incinerated but released, upward and gone.

He had decided to leave last night, while the radio was

broadcasting the arrangements for McCarthy’s funeral. He would go

to St. Matthew’s on the same commemorative impulse that had

taken him to Gawler’s and that had now brought him here. Before

going to the church, he had made up his mind that he would stand

where he’d stood after the wedding; he’d blend into the crowd and

then he would go, would begin to get lost—so thoroughly he’d be

untraceable even to Mr. Keen.

At the cathedral he had found half the cast of the old lightscamera-action Caucus Room. There had even been some

discussion on the steps about whether a glinting head in one of the

pews, visible only from the back, might belong to G. David Schine.

Tommy; Miss McGrory; the lunatic Miss Lightfoot; and, as he now

knew, Hawk. The two of them had been there together, each as

unaware of the other as they’d been at the Draft Ike rally back in ’52.

He put a straw into the milk and looked over toward the

Washington Club. Today was turning out to be as warm as the

wedding day had been. It was so lovely one could imagine Jean

McCarthy tossing a funeral wreath as if it were her bridal bouquet.

Closing his eyes, he realized that he’d not said so much as a

single Hail Mary for the repose of McCarthy’s soul. Silently, he

recited one now, and followed it with one for himself. He prayed not

for forgiveness or happiness or even strength, but only to make the

merest murmuring demonstration to himself that he was still alive.

He went on to say a third and fourth Hail Mary and decided he would

recite a whole decade, even though he lacked his beads.

As he prayed, he could see the orange light of the sun on the

backs of his eyelids, and then, just beyond this interior glow, he

could feel the tortoiseshell frames of his glasses being lifted from his

face.

“How many fingers?”

He opened his eyes and answered: “Three.”

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

“There. You’re healed.”

Hawkins sat down and pointed to the receding figure of his boss,

Mr. Hill, from whom he’d peeled away at the edge of Dupont Circle.

“Nice day for a funeral,” he continued. “McCarthy’s. We were there

together, Hill and I, and decided we’d walk to our next milestone in

legislative diplomacy.”

“Where’s that?”

“The Irish embassy, up near Twenty-third. I told him I’d catch up.

We’re early as it is.”

“And why would you be calling on my people?”

Even now—shocked by Hawk’s sudden presence, and still

smothered in despondency—he had fallen right into the old bright

febrile chatter, as if he were inside the turret or back on I Street,

trying to please his beloved.

“We’re going up to answer a few last questions that some

Hibernian-American legislators, Democrats all, have raised about Mr.

McLeod’s nomination. A small meeting at which the actual Irish will

be assuring the senators they have no real objections.”

“Ah.”

Fuller pointed to the suitcase. “Do the Hungarians no longer

require their cans of Reddi-Wip? Can St. Mary really afford to give

you a day off from dispatching them?”

“I thought I’d go to New York.”

“For how long?”

“I don’t know. Awhile.”

“Two visits to your sister in the space of three weeks? After no

more than three in two years? She’ll be a happy woman.”

They were talking as if he’d be back, when they both knew he

never would; talking as if he were unaware of what Hawk had done,

when they both knew that Mary had been made the instrument

through which he knew everything.

Make it hard on him.

It was Fuller.

“Here,” said Tim. “Take this.”

He withdrew a small object, covered in a handkerchief, from the

pocket of his suit jacket. Putting the thing into his own coat without

unwrapping it, Fuller was aware only that it had the shape of a

baseball sliced in half and was surprisingly heavy.

“I hear it was a short funeral for such a high Mass,” said Tim.

“There wasn’t much to eulogize. And the corpse had to get to the

Senate chamber. It’ll be getting there more punctually than it had

been showing up of late, from what I hear.”

Tim stared beyond Dupont Circle toward New Hampshire Avenue

and said nothing. After a moment, Fuller rose to his feet and then

pulled Tim up onto his. The taller man put his arms around the

shorter one and whispered, audibly this time, “I’m sorry.”

“For what?” asked Tim.

Everything, thought Fuller. But he couldn’t bring himself to say it.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

May 7, 1957

Tim bought the New York Mirror’s early-morning edition at the only

newsstand still open inside the Port Authority and discovered that, a

few hours after making his quick getaway from McCarthy’s funeral,

Senator Kennedy had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his book,

Profiles in Courage.

Just a few buses were still coming in at one a.m., and none were

going out. Tim sat on a bench near the terminal’s Eighth Avenue exit

and read the Mirror’s coverage of the funeral services. By the time

McCarthy’s body had reached the Senate chamber, Nixon was

sitting in the front row and the galleries were jammed, but only one

member of the president’s cabinet had shown up. Father Awalt, who

had married Joe and Jean in ’53, had today said the prayers from

the rostrum, while Senator Flanders bowed his head and Mrs.

McCarthy watched from the cloakroom doorway. A Senate page had

fainted from the drama and the heat. “You never get over your first,”

Tim could imagine Hawk or Woodforde whispering.

And then it was over. The body had been flown back to Wisconsin,

with Johnson and Knowland leading a delegation of twenty-nine

senators, by no means all of them true believers on the order of

Styles Bridges, who had declared that “Joe literally gave his life to

preserve freedom for all Americans.” One columnist was urging Jean

—now past thirty, after all—to run for Joe’s seat and return to

Washington as the colleague of all those liberal hypocrites who’d

taken up half the seats on the funeral plane.

Tim was bone tired and uncertain of where he’d be spending the

night, but his suitcase, fortunately, was much lighter than any Mary

had taken to the airport. He’d thrown away half his things and left

behind most of the rest in Ken and Gloria’s loft. So he was now still

able to get out and walk, first to Ninth Avenue and then a dozen

blocks north, past the Laughlins’ old apartment, as well as Grandma

Gaffney’s, where the lights had been out, he calculated, for at least

four hours. A glow from the building’s basement window revealed Mr.

Mancuso, the super, to be up late, probably reading the sports pages

beside the coal furnace there was no need to tend on a warm night

like this.

Reversing direction and walking south, he reached the corner of

Eighth and Fiftieth, where he spotted a fortune-teller, a crazy, gypsylooking woman who had placed an old television tube—apparently

her crystal ball—atop an upside-down wooden vegetable crate. He

wondered at his own inability to stop and consult with her, as if, after

all his transgressions, that one might still be too great a sacrilege.

Back on Forty-second Street, he climbed the steps of Holy Cross

Church, just as he’d climbed them on the day of his First

Communion and on every other day for morning Mass before

classes at the school next door. The church was unlocked, and he

took a seat in a pew at the back. Close to the altar sat two derelicts

whose snores seemed to issue from the empty pulpit that had once

vibrated with the homilies of Father Duffy himself.

He recalled being here on V-E day, at thirteen years old, a few

months before transferring across town to St. Agnes’ Boys’ High.

He’d sat in his blue-and-gold school tie, listening to a priest describe

the new world that was surely aborning—while somewhere far

across it, in the Pacific, Hawkins Fuller must have been asleep on

his boat, wondering when he’d be asked to help invade Japan. The

distance that had lain between them then seemed no greater than

the two hundred miles of tonight’s bus ride. If Hawk were this minute

in the pew across the aisle, the distance would still measure out to

the same vastness, any separation of their flesh being the distance

in life that was now, forever, unbridgeable.

Tim decided that he would not pray tonight, not so much as a

single “Gloria Patri”—not because he was angry at God, or too guilty

to face Him, or too exhausted; only because he felt himself floating,

like a dust mote in the vacuum of space, where there was no

airwave to carry his cry. He looked up to the cross and the wellmuscled figure of Jesus—a body that looked too strong to perish

from even the suffocation that was the real cause of death by

crucifixion. He remembered the Lenten seasons he’d spent in this

church, all the long weeks when purple cloth wrappings turned the

statues into mummies, denying their plaster beauty to the faithful. At

those times he would crave the sight of Christ’s bloodied face and,

even more, His arched and gleaming torso. This is my body. Every

Sunday, even during Lent, he would take the Communion wafer onto

his tongue and into his mouth, Christ’s actual flesh, not the mere

symbolic commemoration of the Protestants. It was Christ’s body

that kept him alive, kept him from Hell and darkness. Only Hawk’s

flesh, which he could taste even now, could have made him abjure

Christ’s during that first year together. And even then he had

hungered for both. Now, with the collapse of the convenient folly he’d

lived these last few months—I’m still taking Communion. Just

making up my own rules!—he would be without either.

He had no idea whether the ferry sailed for Staten Island at this

late hour. Francy would be sure to take him in with less alarm than

his parents might display, but it might be dawn by the time he

reached her. At this hour he doubted that his grandmother would

open her door, not even if she recognized his voice, though maybe

Mr. Mancuso would let him sleep on the cot by the furnace.

Or he could just keep himself awake in an all-night diner, until it

was light.

He took his suitcase and left the church, walking west to Ninth

Avenue, where he once more rounded the corner and went north,

just for a block, before aimlessly starting down Forty-third Street,

back in the direction of Times Square. Halfway toward Eighth, he

heard the notes of a clarinet, quite soft, coming from the top floor of

an old brownstone across the street. The man playing had the

instrument sticking out the open window, as if the neighbors would

have no grounds for complaint so long as the sound didn’t travel

from his apartment to theirs through the interior walls.

Tim recognized the tune being played as “No Love, No Nothin’,” a

funny song from the war about self-imposed chastity on the homefront. But the man was playing it in such a slow and bluesy and

beautiful way that it had become another song entirely. Tim put his

suitcase down on the sidewalk and stood to listen, realizing now who

the clarinet player was.

I had an assignation that night with a musician. Who does things

you haven’t even dreamed of.

He wasn’t especially good-looking. Crew-cut and stringy, maybe

somewhere between Tim’s own age and Hawk’s, he wore thick

glasses and a T-shirt and probably nothing else below the line made

by the windowsill.

And that’s a promise I’ll keep.

No fun with no one,

I’m gettin’ plenty of sleep.

Sleep was what Tim wanted now, to sleep beside this man, to feel

inside himself the body of someone Hawk himself had been inside;

to connect with his beloved, his lost, by way of a conductor, if only

until morning.

Maybe the two of us can become the three of us.

He waited until the song was done before he nodded upward,

appreciatively, as if to indicate that he’d be applauding if it weren’t so

late and he weren’t standing so close to someone else’s curtained

window. The musician nodded back and signaled with his fingers,

making first a “five” and then the letter “A.”

He crossed the street, pressed the buzzer, and as he climbed the

stairs he crossed himself.

EPILOGUE

OCTOBER 16, 1991

U. S. Embassy, Tallinn, Estonia

So what will happen with the black man with the problems with the

sex?

The polymath minister-filmmaker had asked Fuller, when he

returned to the party from his walk, about Clarence Thomas’s

chances of being confirmed for the Supreme Court. And here, just

past midnight, was the answer, left on Fuller’s desk by Ms. Boyle.

She’d figured he might come back up to the office, late, by himself; it

had become something of a habit.

The piece of teletype said that Thomas had gotten through the

Senate, 52–48, about an hour ago in Washington.

“Let’s celebrate,” he might have said had Ms. Boyle still been here.

“Shall we break out a can of Coke?”

No, he would not have said that. Even he didn’t make such jokes

anymore.

He eyed the telephone and Mary Russell’s letter. Its stationery

listed her number.

He hesitated, beginning instead to write a letter of his own, to Mrs.

Susan Fuller Simonson, his daughter, telling her he bet no man had

ever received Halloween cards from his grandchildren so early,

surely a sign of her organizational capacities as a mother. Puzzling

over what to say next, he tapped his pen on the desktop—what ever

had happened to blotters?—and allowed his gaze to travel back to

Mary’s letter.

He knew he was going to do it, so he might as well do it now.

He buzzed the security officer on duty and asked him to make the

call; if he tried it himself, he would bollix up the long string of access

and country and area codes.

“Yes, Mr. Fuller.” Like the rest of the small staff, the security man

was getting accustomed to the odd hours of the number two. A

moment later he was buzzing him back: “Mrs. Russell is on the line.”

“Fuller?”

The connection was astonishing. Ms. Boyle had not been

exaggerating about the phones.

“Yes. Mrs. Russell?”

“Yes.”

“Russell. Where did that come from?”

The telephone transmitted her laughter from Scottsdale after a

moment’s delay that, he understood, had less to do with fiber optics

than the fact that even now, thirty-five years later, she was only

laughing against her better judgment.

“Before you tell me,” he added, “let me give you the number on

this end. It’s past midnight here, and if I lose you after the security

man at the desk goes home, whoever comes on will never be able to

patch me back through.”

He read off a long string of numbers from his business card, and

she repeated them. “Wait,” he said. “That’s the fax. Sorry.” He then

read the proper string, the one for the telephone, and she copied that

down, too.

“There,” said Fuller. “So what time is it where you are?”

“Two-thirty in the afternoon. Ten hours earlier.”

“Not fourteen hours later?”

“No.”

“Well, at least you’re giving me the time of day.”

No laughter.

“You got my letter,” she said.

“Yes. So who is Russell?”

“My husband, Harry. I married him a year ago. I’m talking from his

office in the house. He’s out playing golf.”

“Why did you wait so long to marry? Someone tell you the first

forty years are the hardest?”

“I was married for twenty-five years, from ’64 to ’89, to Paul

Hildebrand.”

“The name’s familiar.”

“The brewer.”

“Ah, yes! The lovesick brewer. How did that finally happen?”

“He came to New Orleans and found me, two years after he

divorced his very nice wife and was still covered with guilt.”

“Guilt. Is that going to be the theme of this conversation?”

“I don’t know. You made the call.”

“You wrote the letter.”

During the pause that followed, he fingered the envelope it had

come in. “What ever happened to the baby?”

“She grew up to be a wonderful young woman. This morning I’m

designing the leaflets for her campaign for the school board in

Amarillo. Desktop publishing. I’m a whiz at computers. She was

raised by fine people in Miami and five years ago, just as Paul was

getting sick, she managed to find me.”

“What’s her name?”

“Barbara. But I call her Toni. Long story. How is your own

daughter?”

“Raising three children back in Maryland. Making Halloween cards

three weeks early. I’ve never known a girl of her generation with less

ambition.”

“She got it from you.”

“I’m taking that as a compliment. There’s too much hard charging

all around. Especially from the girls.”

“Is that going to be the theme of this conversation? The social

decline of the world we knew when we were young?”

The brief pause Fuller took was extended, for less than a second,

by the satellite carrying his words to Mary. “I assume that he died of

AIDS.”

“He died of bone cancer. With considerable pain and a great deal

of cheer. When he was diagnosed he sent me a note saying ‘So

much for all the milk!’ I can’t imagine that he was ever infected with

AIDS, Fuller.”

He lit a cigarette. Amidst all the multivitamins and bran, Lucy had

never gotten him to stop smoking altogether.

“Providence, Rhode Island?”

“He never really lived anywhere else. For a little while, just after

Washington, he went home to New York—in a bad way. Never

finished his reserve duty. He admitted what he was and got

dishonorably discharged. He more or less fell apart at his sister’s

house until her parish priest found him a spot with some order in

Rhode Island. He only described it to me years later—half retreat,

half sanitarium. He was enough glued back together to leave in six

months.”

Fuller had spent most of his life parrying questions, not asking

them. The neediness of now having to do the latter bothered him,

and he was certain, even without her face before him, that Mary

knew it did. The dynamics of their old friendship, across eight

thousand miles and thirty-five years, had flung themselves together

in an instant, like the film of a building’s demolition running on fast

rewind.

“Why did he stay in Rhode Island?”

“There was no reason to be anywhere else. For fifteen or twenty

years he worked in the books department of the Outlet Company, the

last of the Providence department stores. When it went out of

business he took a job with an antique books dealer in an old arcade

just down the street. I visited him there about a dozen years ago.”

“I’m doing the math. I’m guessing he took you to a Reagan rally.

Unless it was bingo at St. Aloysius’.”

She wouldn’t answer.

“What was he like?”

“He bought me a nice Italian dinner. After drinks at his small, tidy

apartment. He was very nervous—not about seeing me; he was just

a fragile, nervous person. And yet curiously peaceful. He would have

been nearing fifty then, but for all his gray hair he looked much

younger. Thin. It was easy enough to still see the boy who first

walked into the bureau.”

I got the job. You’re wonderful.

“‘Peaceful’?”

“Yes, you get off easy.” She paused, letting it sink in, hoping it

would wound him even as it brought relief. “I don’t think he’d given a

thought to politics in twenty years, and he wasn’t the least bit

religious in any ordinary way. He told me he went to Mass once in a

while and never bothered with confession. But the peacefulness had

come from God, I’m certain.”

“And how are you certain of that?”

“Because he told me. He told me that one day twenty years

before, he’d realized, all of a sudden, while walking down a street in

the city some Saturday afternoon, that he’d spent his whole life trying

to make God love him—and that this didn’t matter in the slightest. All

that mattered was that he loved God. He told me that once he knew

this he was home free.”

“Well, then, besides the milk, so much for Bishop Sheen, too. ‘God

love you’—the words that threw open my mother’s checkbook.”

“He said it was the same with you.”

“What was the same with me?”

“That all that mattered was his loving you. That was enough, once

he realized it.”

“And you think that was true?”

“I think there was more to it than that. I think he was too nervous to

try loving anyone else. But it was true enough. And I think it’s more

than you deserved.”

She could hear him putting out a cigarette, the tiny hammering on

an ashtray bouncing up through space and down again.

“The fellow who’s your daughter’s father,” Fuller said. “Was he

Estonian or Lithuanian? I can’t recall.”

“Estonian. They’d borrowed the Lithuanians’ embassy the night we

met him.”

“I met him? I don’t remember.” He thought back to the morning’s

mental calisthenics and wondered if he’d done as well as he thought.

“Fred died in ’79,” explained Mary. “He would not have believed

anything that’s happened over there in the past two years, though he

always claimed he could see it coming.”

“I’m going home for good in a few months.”

“Are you still with your wife?”

“Yes.”

“Right,” she said, having expected as much.

She could feel—he could feel it himself—that whatever emotions

had prompted him to make the call had already subsided, that he

was about to succeed one last time at doing what he had always

done where Timothy Laughlin and that whole portion of his life were

concerned. He had come back from it, dispensed with it; he’d closed

and locked the cellar door and was climbing back up to the living

room of his existence.

“He was buried wearing your cuff links,” Mary told him. “His sister

found them on his night table, back at his apartment, the afternoon

he died in the hospital.”

After a longer pause than the others he had taken, Fuller said: “He

was a very nice boy.”

I’m pleased to meet you, Timothy Laughlin.

“Goodbye, Fuller.” She said it tenderly and hung up the phone.

He sat there for several minutes, attempting to think about the

young man he’d eyed on his walk near the walled Old City tonight.

He tried once more to figure out the best route to the Carnegie

Endowment from this house in Chevy Chase that Lucy was still

determined to buy. And he wondered if he might yet persuade her to

have one couple, no more, over for the White Nights.

All at once he heard a whistling sound, like an electronic teakettle.

The fax machine, he realized; it disgorged things only infrequently

and usually when Ms. Boyle was here. But a paper was now coming

out of it, insidiously, as if from an intruder who’d scurried away

before he could be detected slipping it under the door.

Fuller got up to take it from the machine’s tray. The small type at

the top rim of the page said HARRY RUSSELL and showed the area

code 602. Beneath that, he saw Mary’s handwriting: “He sent me this

sketch two weeks before he died. The house is still there. Paul never

tore it down. It survived the brewery and is all fixed up.”

The drawing was in Skippy’s style, as recognizable as Mary’s

penmanship. He had done it, it seemed, from memory: the narrow,

three-story brick house topped by its turret with two windows. Inside

one of them a candle burned; behind the other, on the sill, stood a

milk bottle. Below the sketch was a note from Tim to Mary:

Let him know that I was happy enough. Make it easy on him.

T.

Fuller returned to his desk with the paper, which he brushed once

with his hand, before putting it on a small stack of State Department

forms held down by a glass paperweight, inside of which a sprig of

cherry blossom floated. It had traveled with him for many years, from

one country to another, throughout a world grown unexpectedly, and

increasingly, free.

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I cannot imagine life in Washington without John McConnell, the

gold standard for public service and devoted friendship.

And I cannot imagine life anywhere without Bill Bodenschatz.

THOMAS MALLON

Washington, D.C.

November 13, 2006

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas Mallon is the author of seven novels, including Bandbox,

Henry and Clara, and Dewey Defeats Truman. Among his nonfiction

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Garage). A frequent contributor to The New Yorker, The Atlantic

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BOOKS BY THOMAS MALLON

FICTION

Arts and Sciences

Aurora 7

Henry and Clara

Dewey Defeats Truman

Two Moons

Bandbox

Fellow Travelers

NONFICTION

Edmund Blunden

A Book of One’s Own

Stolen Words

Rockets and Rodeos

In Fact

Mrs. Paine’s Garage

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents

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