

The Aquitaine Progression

THE

AQUITAINE
PROGRESSION
ROBERT LUDLUM

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PART ONE

The Aquitaine Progression

Geneva. City of sunlight and bright reflections. of billowing white sails on the lake sturdy, irregular buildings above, their rippling images on the water below. Of myriad flowers surrounding blue-green pools of fountains duets of exploding colors. Of small quaint bridges arching over the glassy surfaces of man-made ponds to tiny man-made islands, sanctuaries for lovers and friends and quiet negotiators. Reflections.

Geneva, the old and the new. City of high medieval walls and glistening tinted glass, of sacred cathedrals and less holy institutions. Of sidewalk cafes and lakeside concerts, of miniature piers and gaily painted boats that chug around the vast shoreline, the guides extolling the virtues and the estimated value of the lakefront estates that surely belong to another time.

Geneva. City of purpose, dedicated to the necessity of dedication, frivolity tolerated only when intrinsic to the agenda or the deal. Laughter is measured, controlled glances conveying approval of sufficiency or admonishing excess. The canton by the lake knows its soul. Its beauty coexists with industry, the balance not only accepted but jealously guarded.

Geneva. City also of the unexpected, of predictability in conflict with sudden unwanted revelation, the violence of the mind struck by bolts of personal lightning.

Cracks of thunder follow; the skies grow dark and the rains come. A deluge, pounding the angry waters taken by surprise, distorting vision, crashing down on the giant spray, Geneva's trademark on the lake, the jet d'eau, that geyser designed by man to dazzle man. When sudden revelations come, the gigantic fountain dies. All the fountains die and without the sunlight the flowers wither. The bright reflections are gone and the mind is frozen.

Geneva. City of inconstancy.

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* * *

Joel Converse, attorney-at-law, walked out of the hotel Richemond into the blinding morning sunlight on the Jardin Brunswick. Squinting, he turned left, shifting his attache case to his right hand, conscious of the value of its contents but thinking primarily about the man he was to meet for coffee and croissants at Le Chat Botte, a sidewalk cafe across from the waterfront. "Re-meet" was more accurate, thought Converse, if the man had not confused him with someone else.

A. Preston Halliday was Joel's American

The Aquitaine Progression adversary in the current negotiations, the finalising of last-minute details for a Swiss-American merger that had brought both men to Geneva. Although the remaining work was minimal formalities, really, research having established that the agreements were in accord with the laws of both countries and acceptable to the International Court in The Hague Halliday was an odd choice. He had not been part of the American legal team fielded by the Swiss to keep tabs on Joel's firm. That in itself would not have excluded him fresh observation was frequently an asset but to elevate him to the position of point, or chief spokesman, was, to say the least, unorthodox. It was also unsettling.

Halliday's reputation what little Converse knew of it was as a troubleshooter, a legal mechanic from San Francisco who could spot a loose wire, rip it out and short an engine. Negotiations covering months and costing hundreds of thousands had been aborted by his presence, that much Converse recalled about A. Preston Halliday. But that was all he recalled. Yet Halliday said they knew each other.

"It's Press Halliday," the voice had announced over the hotel phone. "I'm pointing for Rosen in the Comm Tech-gem merger."

"What happened?" Joel had asked, a muted electric razor in his left hand, his mind trying to locate the name; it had come to him by the time Halliday replied.

"The poor bastard had a stroke, so his partners called me in." The lawyer had paused. "You must have been mean, counselor."

"We rarely argued, counselor. Christ, I'm sorry, I like Aaron. How is he?"

"He'll make it. They've got him in bed and on a dozen versions of chicken soup. He told me to tell you he's going to check your finals for invisible ink."

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"Which means you're going to check because I don't have any and neither did Aaron. This marriage is based on pure greed, and if you've studied the papers you know that as well as I do."

"The larceny of investment write-offs," agreed Halliday, "combined with a large chunk of a technological market. No invisible ink. But since I'm the new boy on the block, I've got a couple of questions. Let's have breakfast."

"I was about to order room service."

"It's a nice morning, why not get some air? I'm at the President, so let's split the distance. Do you know the Chat Botte?"

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'American coffee and croissants. Quai du Mont Blanc.- "You know it. How about twenty minutes?"

"Make it a half hour, okay?"

"Sure." Halliday had paused again. "It'll be good to see you again, Joel."

"Oh? Again?"

"You may not remember. A lot's happened since those days . . . more to you than to me, I'm afraid."

"I'm not following you."

"Well, there was Vietnam and you were a prisoner for a pretty long time."

"That's not what I meant, and it was years ago. How do we know each other? What case?"

"No case, no business. We were classmates."

"Duke? It's a large law school."

"Further back. Maybe you'll remember when we see each other. If you don't, I'll remind you."

"You must like games.... Half an hour. Chat Botte."

As Converse walked toward the Quai du Mont Blanc, the vibrant boulevard fronting the lake, he tried to fit Halliday's name into a time frame, the years to a school, a forgotten face to match an unremembered classmate. None came, and Halliday was not a common name, the short form "Press" even less so . . . unique, actually. If he had known someone named Press Halliday, he could not imagine forgetting it. Yet the tone of voice had implied familiarity, even closeness.

It'll be good to see you again, Joel. He had spoken the words warmly, as he had the gratuitous reference to Joel's POW status. But then, those words were always spoken softly to imply sympathy if not to express it overtly. Too, Converse understood why under the circumstances Halliday felt he had

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to bring up the subject of Vietnam, even fleetingly. The uninitiated assumed that all men imprisoned in the North Vietnamese camps for any length of time had been mentally damaged, per se, that a part of their minds had been altered by the experience, their recollections muddled. To a degree, some of these assumptions were undeniable, but not with respect to memory. Memories were sharpened because they were searched compulsively, often mercilessly. The accumulated years, the layers of experience . . . faces with eyes and voices, bodies of all sizes and shapes; scenes flashing across the inner screen, the sights and sounds, images and smells touching and

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the desire to touch . . . nothing of the past was too inconsequential to peel away and explore. Frequently it was all they had, especially at night always at night, with the cold, penetrating dampness stiffening the body and the infinitely colder fear paralysing the mind memories were everything. They helped mute the sharp reports of small-arms fire, which were gratuitously explained in the mornings as necessary executions of the uncooperative and unrepentant. Or they blocked out the distant screams in the dark, of even more unfortunate prisoners forced to play games, too obscene to describe, demanded by their captors in search of amusement.

Like most men kept isolated for the greater part of their imprisonment, Converse had examined and reexamined every stage of his life, trying to understand . . . to like . . . the cohesive whole. There was much that he did not understand or like but he could live with the product of those intensive investigations. Die with it, if he had to; that was the peace he had to reach for himself. Without it the fear was intolerable.

And because these self-examinations went on night after night and required the discipline of accuracy, Converse found it easier than most men to remember whole segments of his life. Like a spinning disk attached to a computer that suddenly stops, his mind, given only basic information, could isolate a place or a person or a name. Repetition had simplified and accelerated the process, and that was what bewildered him now. Unless Halliday was referring to a time so far back as to have been only a brief, forgotten childhood acquaintance, no one of that name belonged to his past.

It'll tee good to see you again, Joel were the words a ruse, a lawyer's trick?

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Converse rounded the corner, the brass railing of Le Chat Botte glistening, hurling back tiny explosions of sunlight. The boulevard was alive with gleaming small cars and spotless buses; the pavements were washed clean, the strollers in various stages of hurried but orderly progress. Morning was a time for benign energy in Geneva. Even the newspapers above the tables in the sidewalk cafes were snapped with precision, not crushed or mutilated into legible position. And vehicles and pedestrians were not at war; combat was supplanted by looks and nods, stops and gestures of acknowledgment. As Joel walked through the open brass gate of Le Chat Botte he wondered briefly if Geneva could export its mornings to New York. But then the City Council would vote the import down, he concluded the citizens of New York could not stand the civility.

A newspaper was snapped directly below him on his left, and when it was lowered Converse saw a

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face he knew. It was a coordinated face, not unlike his own, the features compatible and in place. The hair was straight and dark, neatly parted and brushed, the nose sharp, above well-defined lips. The face belonged to his past, thought Joel, but the name he remembered did not belong to the face.

The familiar-looking man raised his head; their eyes met and A. Preston Halliday rose, his short compact body obviously muscular under the expensive suit.

"Joel, how are you?" said the now familiar voice, a hand outstretched above the table.

"Hello . . . Avery," replied Converse, staring, awkwardly shifting his attache case to grip the hand. "It is Avery, isn't it? Avery Fowler. Taft, early sixties.. You never came back For the senior year, and no one knew why; we all talked about it. You were a wrestler."

"Twice All New England," said the attorney, laughing, gesturing at the chair across from his own. "Sit down and we'll catch up. I guess it's sort of a surprise for you. That's why I wanted us to meet before the conference this morning. ~ mean, it'd be a hell of a note for you to get up and scream 'Impostort' when I walked in, wouldn't it?"

"I'm still not sure I won't." Converse sat down, attache case at his feet, studying his legal opponent. "What's this Halliday routine? Why didn't you say something on the phone?"

"Oh, come on, what was I going to say? 'By the way, old

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sport, you used to know me as Tinkerbelle Jones.' You never would have showed up."

"Is Fowler in jail somewhere?"

"He would have been if he hadn't blown his head off," answered Halliday, not laughing.

"You're full of surprises. Are you a clone?"

"No, the son."

Converse paused. ' Maybe I should apologize."

"No need to, you couldn't have known. It's why I never came back for the senior year . . . and, goddamn it, I wanted that trophy. I would have been the only mat jock to win it three years in a row."

"I'm sorry. What happened . . . or is it privileged information, counselor? I'll accept that."

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"Not for you, counselor. Remember when you and I broke out to New Haven and picked up those pigs at the bus station?"

'We said we were Yalies "

"And only got taken, never got laid."

"Our eyebrows were working overtime."

"Preppies," said Halliday. "They wrote a book about us. Are we really that emasculated?"

"Reduced in stature, but we'll come back. We're the last minority, so we'll end up getting sympathy.... What happened, Avery?"

A waiter approached; the moment was broken. Both men ordered American coffee and croissants, no deviation from the accepted norm. The waiter folded two red napkins into cones and placed one in front of each.

"What happened?" said Halliday quietly, rhetorically, after the waiter left. "The beautiful son of a bitch who was my father embezzled four hundred thousand from the Chase Manhattan while he was a trust officer, and when he was caught, went bang. Who was to know a respected, if transplanted, commuter from Greenwich, Connecticut, had two women in the city, one on the Upper East Side, the other on Bank Street? He was beautiful."

"He was busy. I still don't understand the Halliday."

After it happened the suicide was covered up. Mother raced back to San Francisco with a vengeance. We were from California, you know . . . but then, why would you? With even more vengeance she married my stepfather, John

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Halliday, and all traces of Fowler were assiduously removed during the next few months."

'Even to your first name?"

'No, I was always 'Press' back in San Francisco. We Californians come up with catchy names. Tab, Troy, Crotch the 1950's Beverly Hills syndrome. At Taft, my student ID read 'Avery Preston Fowler,' so you all just started calling me Avery or that awful 'Ave.' Being a transfer student, I never bothered to say anything. When in Connecticut, follow the gospel according to Holden Caulfield."

"That's all well and good," said Converse, "but what happens when you run into someone like me? It's bound to happen."

"You'd be surprised how rarely. After all it was a long time ago, and the people I grew up with in

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California understood. Kids out there have their names changed according to matrimonial whim, and I was in the East for only a couple of years, just long enough for the fourth and fifth forms at school. I didn't know anyone in Greenwich to speak of, and I was hardly part of the old Taft crowd."

"You had friends there. We were friends."

"I didn't have many. Let's face it, I was an outsider and you weren't particular. I kept a pretty low profile."

"Not on the mats, you didn't."

Halliday laughed. "Not very many wrestlers become lawyers, something about mat burns on the brain. Anyway, to answer your question, only maybe five or six times over the past ten years has anyone said to me, 'Hey, aren't you so-and-so and not whatever you said your name was?' when somebody did, I told them the truth. 'My mother remarried when I was sixteen.' "

The coffee and croissants arrived. Joel broke his pastry in half. "And you thought I'd ask the question at the wrong time, specifically when I saw you at the conference. Is that it?"

"Professional courtesy. I didn't want you dwelling on it or me when you should be thinking about your client. After all, we tried to lose our virginity together that night in New Haven."

"Speak for yourself." Joel smiled.

Halliday grinned. "We got pissed and both admitted it don't you remember? Incidentally, we swore each other to secrecy while throwing up in the can."

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"Just testing you, counselor. I remember. So you left the gray-flannel crowd for orange shirts and gold medallions?"

"All the way. Berkeley, then across the street to Stanford."

"Good school.... How come the international field?"

"I liked traveling and figured it was the best way of paying for it. That's how it started, really. How about you? I'd think you would have had all the traveling you ever wanted."

"I had delusions about the foreign service, diplomatic corps, legal section. That's how it started."

"After all that traveling you did?"

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Converse levered his pale blue eyes at Halliday, conscious of the coldness in his look. It was unavoidable, if misplaced as it usually was. "Yes, after all that traveling. There were too many lies and no one told us about them until it was too late. We were conned and it shouldn't have happened."

Halliday leaned forward, his elbows on the table, hands clasped, his gaze returning Joel's. "I couldn't figure it," he began softly. "When I read your name in the papers, then saw you paraded on television, I felt awful. I didn't really know you that well, but I liked you."

"It was a natural reaction. I'd have felt the same way if it had been you."

"I'm not sure you would. You see, I was one of the honchos of the protest movement."

"You burned your draft card while flaunting the Yippie label," said Converse gently, the ice gone from his eyes. "I wasn't that brave."

"Neither was I. It was an out-of-state library card."

"I'm disappointed."

"So was I in myself. But I was visible." Halliday leaned back in his chair and reached for his coffee. "How did you get so visible, Joel? I didn't think you were the type."

"I wasn't. I was squeezed."

"I thought you said 'conned.'"

"That came later." Converse raised his cup and sipped his black coffee, uncomfortable with the direction the conversation had taken. He did not like discussing those years, and all too frequently he was called upon to do so. They had made him out to be someone he was not. "I was a sophomore at Amherst and not much of a student.... Not much, hell, I was borderline-negative, and whatever deferment I had was

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about to go down the tube. But I'd been Hying since I was fourteen."

"I didn't know that," interrupted Halliday.

'My father wasn't beautiful and he didn't have the benefit of concubines, but he was an airline pilot, later an executive for Pan Am. It was standard in the Converse household to By before you got your driver's license."

"Brothers and sisters?'

"A younger sister. She soloed before I did and

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she's never let me forget it."

"I remember. She was interviewed on television."

"Only twice," Joel broke in, smiling. "She was on your turf and didn't give a damn who knew it. The White House bunker put the word out to stay away from her. 'Don't tarnish the cause, and check her mail while you're at it.'"

"That's why I remember her," said Halliday. "So a lousy student left college and the Navy gained a hot pilot."

"Not very hot, none of us was. There wasn't that much to be hot against. Mostly we burned."

"Still, you must have hated people like me back in the States. Not your sister, of course."

'Her, too," corrected Converse. "Hated, loathed, despised furious. But only when someone was killed, or went crazy in the camps. Not for what you were saying we all knew Saigon but because you said it without any real fear. You were safe, and you made us feel like assholes. Dumb, frightened assholes."

"I can understand that."

"So nice of you."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean it the way it sounded."

"How did it sound, counselor?"

Halliday frowned. "Condescending, I guess."

"No guess," said Joel. "Right on."

"You're still angry."

"Not at you, only the dredging. I hate the subject and it keeps coming back up."

"Blame the Pentagon PR. For a while you were a bona fide hero on the nightly news. What was it, three escapes? On the first two you got caught and put on the racks, but on the last one you made it all by yourself, didn't you? You crawled through a couple of hundred miles of enemy jungle before you reached the lines."

"It was barely a hundred and I was goddamned lucky."

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With the first two tries I was responsible for killing eight men. I'm not very proud of that. Can we get to the Comm Tech-Bern business?"

"Give me a few minutes," said Halliday, shoving

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the croissant aside. "Please. I'm not trying to dredge.
There's a point in the back of my mind, if you'll
grant I've got a mind."

"Preston Halliday has one, his rep confirms it.
You're a shark, if my colleagues are accurate. But
I knew someone named Avery, not Press."

"Then it's Fowler talking, you're more
comfortable with him."

"What's the point?"

"A couple of questions first. You see, I want to
be accurate because you've got a reputation too.
They say you're one of the best on the international
scene, but the people I've talked to can't understand
why Joel Converse stays with a relatively small if
entrenched firm when he's good enough to get
flashier. Or even go out on his own."

"Are you hiring?"

"Not me, I don't take partners. Courtesy of John
Halliday attorney-at-law, San Francisco."

Converse looked at the second half of the
croissant and decided against it. "What was the
question, counselor?"

"Why are you where you're at?"

"I'm paid well and literally run the department;
no one sits on my shoulder. Also I don't care to
take chances. There's a little matter of alimony,
amiable but demanding."

"Child support, too?"

"None, thank heavens."

"What happened when you got out of the Navy?
How did you feel?" Halliday again leaned forward,
his elbow on the table, chin cupped in his hand the
inquisitive student. Or something else.

"Who are the people you've talked to?" asked
Converse.

"Privileged information, for the moment,
counselor. Will you accept that?"

Joel smiled. "You are a shark.... Okay, the gospel
according to Converse. I came back from that
disruption of my life wanting it all. Angry, to be
sure, but wanting everything. The nonstudent
became a scholar of sorts, and I'd be a liar if I
didn't admit to a fair amount of preferential
treatment. I went back to Amherst and raced
through two and a half years in three semesters and
a summer. Then Duke offered me an ac

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celerated program and I went there, followed by some specializations at Georgetown while I interned."

"You interned in Washington?"

Converse nodded. "Yes."

"For whom?"

"Clifford's firm. '

Halliday whistled softly, sitting back. "That's golden territory, a passport to Blackstone's heaven as well as the multinationals."

'I told you I had preferential treatment."

"Was that when you thought about the foreign service? While you were at Georgetown? In Washington?"

Again Joel nodded, squinting as a passing flash of sunlight bounced off a grille somewhere on the lakefront boulevard. "Yes," he replied quietly.

"You could have had it," said Halliday.

'They wanted me for the wrong reasons, all the wrong reasons. When they realized I had a different set of rules in mind, I couldn't get a twenty-cent tour of the State Department. "

"What about the Clifford firm? You were a hell of an image, even for them." The Californian raised his hands above the table, palms forward. "I know, I know. The wrong reasons."

"Wrong numbers," insisted Converse. ' There were forty-plus lawyers on the masthead and another two hundred on the payroll. I'd have spent ten years trying to find the men's room and another ten getting the key. That wasn't what I was looking for.'

What were you looking for?"

"Pretty much what I've got. I told you, the money's good and I run the international division. The latter's just as important to me."

'You couldn't have known that when you joined," objected Halliday.

But I did. At least I had a fair indication. When Talbot, Brooks and Simon as you put it, that small but entrenched firm I'm with came to me, we reached understanding. If after four or five years I proved out, I'd take over for Brooks. He was the overseas man and was getting tired of adjusting to all those time zones." Again Converse paused. 'Apparently I proved out."

' And just as apparently somewhere along the line you got married.

Joel leaned back in the chair. 'Is this necessary?"

"It's not even pertinent, but I'm intensely interested."

"Why?"

"It's a natural reaction," said Halliday, his eyes amused. "I think you'd feel the same way if you were me and I were you, and I'd gone through what you went through."

"Shark dead ahead," mumbled Converse.

"You don't have to respond, of course, counselor."

"I know, but oddly enough I don't mind. She's taken her share of abuse because of that what-I've-been-through business." Joel broke the croissant but made no effort to remove it from the plate. "Comfort, convenience, and a vague image of stability," he said.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Her words," continued Joel. "She said that I got married so I'd have a place to go and someone to fix the meals-and do the laundry, and eliminate the irritating, time-consuming foolishness that goes with finding someone to sleep with. Also by legitimising her, I projected the proper image.... 'And, Christ, did I have to play the part' also her words."

"Were they true?"

"I told you, when I came back I wanted it all and she was part of it. Yes, they were true. Cook, maid, laundress, bedmate, and an acceptable, attractive appendage. She told me she could never figure out the pecking order."

"She sounds like quite a girl."

"She was. She is."

"Do I discern a note of possible reconciliation?"

"No way." Converse shook his head, a partial smile on his lips but only a trace of humor in his eyes. "She was also conned and it shouldn't have happened. Anyway, I like my current status, I really do. Some of us just weren't meant for a hearth and roast turkey, even if we sometimes wish we were."

"It's not a bad life."

"Are you into it?" asked Joel quickly so as to shift the emphasis.

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"Right up with orthodontists and SAT scores. Five kids and one wife. I wouldn't have it any other way."

"But you travel a lot, don't you?"

"We have great homecomings." Halliday again leaned

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forward, as if studying a witness. "So you have no real attachments now, no one to run back to."

"Talbot, Brooks and Simon might find that offensive. Also my father. Since Mother died we have dinner once a week when he's not flying all over the place, courtesy of a couple of lifetime passes."

"He still gets around a lot?"

"One week he's in Copenhagen, the next in Hong Kong. He enjoys himself; he keeps moving. He's sixty-eight and spoiled rotten."

"I think I'd like him."

Converse shrugged, again smiling. "You might not. He thinks all lawyers are piss ants, me included. He's the last of the white-scarved flyboys."

"I'm sure I'd like him.... But outside of your employers and your father, there are no shall we say priority entanglements in your life."

"If you mean women, there are several and we're good friends, and I think this conversation has gone about as far as it should go."

"I told you, I had a point," said Halliday.

"Then why not get to it, counselor? Interrogatories are over."

The Californian nodded. "All right, I will. The people I spoke with wanted to know how free you were to travel."

"The answer is that I'm not. I've got a job and a responsibility to the company I work for. Today's Wednesday, we'll have the merger tied up by Friday, I'll take the weekend off and be back on Monday when I'm expected."

"Suppose arrangements could be made that Talbot Brooks and Simon found acceptable?"

"That's presumptuous."

"And you found very difficult to reject."

"That's preposterous."

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"Try me," said Halliday. "Five hundred thousand for accepting on a best-efforts basis, one million if you pull it off."

"Now you're insane." A second flash of light blinded Converse, this one remaining stationary longer than the first. He raised his left hand to block it from his eyes as he stared at the man he had once known as Avery Fowler. "Also, ethics notwithstanding because you haven't a damn thing to win this morning, your timing smells. I don't like getting offers even

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crazy offers from attorneys I'm about to meet across a table."

"Two separate entities, and you're right, I don't have a damn thing to win or lose. You and Aaron did it all, and I'm so ethical, I'm billing the Swiss only for my time minimum basis because no expertise was called for. My recommendation this morning will be to accept the package as it stands, not even a comma changed. Where's the conflict?"

"Where's the sanity?" asked Joel. "To say nothing of those arrangements Talbot, Brooks and Simon will find acceptable. You're talking roughly about two and a half top years of salary and bonuses for nodding my head."

"Nod it," said Halliday. "We need you."

"We? That's a new wrinkle, isn't it? I thought it was they. They being the people you spoke with. Spell it out, Press."

A. Preston Halliday locked his eyes with Joules. "I'm part of them, and something is happening that shouldn't be happening. We want you to put a company out of business. It's bad news and it's dangerous. We'll give you all the tools we can."

"What company?"

"The name wouldn't mean anything, it's not registered. Let's call it a government-in-exile."

"A what?"

"A group of like-minded men who are in the process of building a portfolio of resources so extensive it'll guarantee them influence where they shouldn't have it authority where they shouldn't have it."

"Where is that?"

"In places this poor inept world can't afford. They can do it because no one expects them to."

"You're pretty cryptic."

"I'm frightened. I know them."

"But you have the tools to go after them," said Converse. "I presume that means they're vulnerable."

Halliday nodded. "We think they are. We have some leads, but it'll take digging, piecing things together. There's every reason to believe they've broken laws, engaged in activities and transactions prohibited by their respective governments."

Joel was silent for a moment, studying the Californian. "Governments?" he asked. "Plural?"

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"Yes." Halliday's voice dropped. "They're different nationalities."

"But one company?" said Converse. "One corporation?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes."

"How about a simple yes?"

"It's not that simple."

"I'll tell you what is," interrupted Joel. "You've got leads so you go after the big bad wolves. I'm currently and satisfactorily employed."

Halliday paused, then spoke. "No, you're not," he said softly.

Again there was silence, each man appraising the other. "What did you say?" asked Converse, his eyes blue ice.

"Your firm understands. You can have a leave of absence."

"You presumptuous son of a bitch! Who gave you the right even to approach "

"General George Marcus Delavane," Halliday broke in. He delivered the name in a monotone.

It was as if a bolt of lightning had streaked down through the blinding sunlight burning Joel's eyes, turning the ice into fire. Cracks of thunder followed, exploding in his head.

The pilots sat around the long rectangular table in the wardroom, sipping coffee and staring down into the brown liquid or up at the Bray no one caring to break the silence. An hour ago they had been sweeping over Pak Song, firing the earth, interdicting the advancing North Vietnamese battalions, giving vital time to the regrouping ARVN and American troops who soon would be under brutal siege. They had completed the

The Aquitaine Progression strike and returned to the carrier all but one. They had lost their commanding officer.. Lieutenant Senior Grade Gordon Ramsey had been hit by a fluke rocket that had winged out of its trajectory over the coastline and zeroed in on Ramsey's fuselage; the explosion had filled the jet streams, death at six hundred miles an hour in the air, life erased in the blinking of an eye. A severe weather front had followed hard upon the squadron; there would be no more strikes, perhaps for several days. There would be time to think and that was not a pleasant thought

"Lieutenant Converse. " said a sailor by the open wardroom door.

'Yes?"

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"The captain requests your presence in his quarters, sir. " The invitation was so nicely phrased, mused Joel, as he got out of his chair, acknowledging the comber looks of those around the table. The request was expected, but unwelcome. The promotion was an hotter he would willingly forgo. It was not that he held longevity or seniority or even age over his fellow pilots; it was simply that he had been in the air longer than anyone else and with that time came the experience necessary for the leader of a squadron.

As he climbed the narrow steps up toward the bridge he saw the outlines of an immense army Cobra helicopter in the distant sky stuttering its way toward the carrier. In five minutes or so it would be hovering over the threshold and lower itself to the pad; someone from land was paying the Navy a visit.

"It's a terrible loss, Converse, "said the captain, standing over his charts table, shaking his head sadly. "And a letter I hate like hell to write. God knows they're never easy, but this one's more painful than most."

"We all feel the same way, sir. "

"I'm sure you do. " The captain nodded. 'I'm also sure you know why you're here."

"Not specifically, sir. "

"Ramsey said you were the best, and that means you're taking over one of the Amok squadrons in the South China Sea. " The telephone rang, interrupting the carrier's senior officer. He picked it up. "Yes?"

What followed was nothing Joel expected. The captain at first frowned, then tensed the muscles of his face, his eyes both alarmed and angry. "What?" he exclaimed, raising his voice. "Was there any advance notice anything in the radio room?" There was a pause, after which the captain slammed down the phone, shouting, 'Jesus Christ!" He looked at Converse. "It seems we have the dubious honor of an unan-

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nounced visitation by Command-Saigon, and I do
mean visitation!"

"I'M return below, sir, " said Joel, starting to salute.

"Not just yet, Lieutenant, "shot back the captain quietly but firmly. "You are receiving your orders, and as they affect the air operations of this ship, you'll hear them through. At the least, we'll let Mad Marcus know he's interfering with Navy business."

The next thirty seconds were taken up with the ritual of

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command assignment, a senior officer investing a subordinate with new responsibilities. Suddenly there was a sharp two-rap knock the captain's door opened and the tall, broad-shouldered general of the Army George Marcus Delavane intruded, dominating the room with the sheer force of his presence.

"Captain?" said Delavane, saluting the ship's commander first despite the Navy man's lesser rank. The somewhat high-pitched voice was courteous, but not the eyes; they were intensely hostile.

"General, " replied the captain, saluting back along with Converse. "Is this an unannounced inspection by Command-Saigon?"

"No, it's an urgently demanded conference between you and me between Command-Saigon and one of its lesser forces. "

"I see, " said the four-striper, anger showing through his calm. "At the moment I'm delivering urgent orders to this man "

"You saw fit to countermand mine!" Delavane broke in vehemently.

"General, this has been a sad and trying day, " said the captain. "We lost one of our finest pilots barely an hour ago "

"Running away?" Again Delavane interrupted, the tastelessness of his remark compounded by the nasal pitch of his voice. "Was his goddamned tail shot off?"

"For the record, I resent that!" said Converse, unable to control himself "I'm replacing that man and I resent what you just said General!"

"You? Who the hell are you?"

"Easy, Lieutenant. You're dismissed. "

"I respectfully request to answer the general, sir!" shouted Joel, in his anger refusing to move.

"You what, prissy flyboy?"

"My name is "

"Forget it, I'm not interested!" Delavane whipped his head back toward the captain. "What I want to know is why you think you can disobey my orders the orders from Command-Saigon! I called a strike for fifteen hundred hours! You 'respectfully declined' to implement that order!"

"A weather front's moved in and you should know it as well as I do. "

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"My meteorologists say it's completely f gable!"

"I suspect if you asked for that finding during a Burma monsoon they'd deliver it"

"That's gross insubordination!"

"This is my ship and military regulations are quite clear as to who's in command here."

"Do you want to connect me to your radio room? I'll reach the Oval Office and we'll see just how long you've got this ship!"

"I'm sure you'll want to speak privately probably over a scrambler. I'll have you escorted there."

"Goddamn you, I've got four thousand troops maybe twenty percent seasoned moving up into Sector Five! We need a low-altitude combined strike from land and sea and we'll have it if I have to get your ass out of here within the hour! And I can do it, Captain! . . . We're over here to win, win, and win it all! We don't need sugarcoated Nellies hedging their goddamned bets! Maybe you never heard it before, but all war is a risk! You don't win if you don't risk, Captain!"

"I've been there, General. Common sense cuts losses, and if you cut enough losses you can win the next battle. "

"I'm going to win this one, with or without you, Blue Boy!"

"I respectfully advise you to temper your language, General. "

"You what?" Delavane's face was contorted in fury, his eyes the eyes of a savage wild animal. "You advise me? You advise Command-Saigon! Well, you do whatever you like Blue Boy in your satin pants but the incursion up into the Tho Valley is on."

"The Tho," interrupted Converse. "That's the first leg of the Pak Song route. We've hit it four times. I know the terrain. "

"You know it?" shouted Delavane.

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"I do, but I take my orders from the commander of this ship General. "

"You prissy shit-kicker, you take orders from the President of the United States! He's your commander in chief! And I'll get those orders!"

Delavane's face was inches from Joel's, the maniacal expression challenging every nerve ending in Joel's body: hatred matched by loathing Barely realising the words were

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his, Converse spoke. "I, too, would advise the General to be careful of his language."

"Why, shit-kicker? Has Blue Boy got this place wired?"

"Easy, Lieutenant! I said you were dismissed!"

"You want me to watch my language, big fellow with your little silver bar? No, sonny boy, you watch it, and you read it! If that squadron of yours isn't in the air at fifteen hundred hours, I'll label this carrier the biggest yellow streak in Southeast Asia! You got that, satin-pantsed Blue Boy, third class?"

Once more Joel replied, wondering as he spoke where he found the audacity. "I don't know where you come from, sir, but I sincerely hope we meet under different circumstances sometime. I think you're a pig."

"Insubordination! Also, I'd break your back."

"Dismissed, Lieutenant!"

"No, Captain, you're wrong!" shouted the general. "He may be the man to lead this strike, after all. Well, what'll it be, Blue Boys? Airborne, or the President of the United States or the label?"

At 1520 hours Converse led the squadron off the carrier deck. At 1538, as they headed at low altitude into the weather, the first two casualties occurred over the coastline; the wing planes were shot down for a few deaths at six hundred miles an hour in the air. At 1546 Joel's right engine exploded, his altitude made the direct hit easy. At 1546:30, unable to stabilise, Converse ejected into the downpour of the storm clouds, his parachute instantly swept into the vortex of the conflicting winds. As he swung violently down toward the earth, the straps digging into his flesh with each whipping buffet, one image kept repeating its presence within the darkness. The maniacal face of General George Marcus Delavane. He was about to begin an indeterminate stay in hell, courtesy of a madman. And as he later learned, the losses were infinitely greater on the ground.

Delavane! The Butcher of Danang and Pleiku.

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waster of thousands, throwing battalion after
battalion into the jungles and the hills with neither
adequate training nor sufficient firepower. Wounded,
frightened children had been marched into the
camps, bewildered, trying not to weep and, finally
understanding, weeping out of control. The stories
they told were a thousand variations on the same
sickening theme. Inexperi

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enced, untried troops had been sent into battle
within days after disembarkation; the weight of
sheer numbers was expected to vanquish the often
unseen enemy. And when the numbers did not
work, more numbers were sent. For three years
command headquarters listened to a maniac.
Delavane! The warlord of Saigon, fabricator of body
counts, with no acknowledgment of blown-apart
faces and severed limbs, liar and extoller of death
without a cause! A man who had proved, finally, to
be too lethal even for the Pentagon zealots a
zealot who had outdistanced his own, in the end
revolting his own. He had been recalled and
retired only to write diatribes read by fanatics who
fed their own personal furies.

Men like that can't be allowed anymore, don 't you
understand? He was the enemy, Otis enemy! Those
had been Converse's own words, shouted in a fever
of outrage before a panel of uniformed questioners
who had looked at each other avoiding him, not
wanting to respond to those words. They had
thanked him perfunctorily, told him that the nation
owed him and thousands like him a great debt, and
with regard to his final comments he should try to
understand that there were often many sides to an
issue, and that the complex execution of command
frequently was not what it appeared to be. In any
event, the President had called upon the nation to
bind its wounds; what good was served by fueling
old controversies? And then the final kicker, the
threat.

"You yourself briefly assumed the terrible
responsibility of leadership, Lieutenant," said a
pale-faced Navy lawyer, barely glancing at Joel, his
eyes scanning the pages of a file folder. "Before you
made your final and successful escape by yourself,
from a pit in the ground away from the main
camp you led two previous attempts involving a
total of seventeen prisoners of war. Fortunately you
survived, but eight men did not. I'm sure that you,
as their leader, their tactician, never anticipated a
casualty risk of nearly fifty percent. It's been said
often, but perhaps not often enough: command is
awesome, Lieutenant."

Translation: Don't join the freaks, soldier. You
survived, but eight were killed. Were there
circumstances the military is not aware of, tactics that
protected some more than others, one more than
others: One man who managed to break out by

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himself eluding guards that shot on sight prisoners on
the loose at night? Merely to raise the question by
opening a specific file will produce a stigma that
will follow you

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for the rest of your life. Back off; soldier. We've got you
by simply raising a question we all know should not be
raised, but we'll do it because we've taken enough }yak.
We'll cut it off wherever we can. Be happy you
survived and got out. Now, get out.

At that moment, Converse had been as close to
consciously throwing away his life as he would ever
have thought possible. Physically assaulting that
panel of sanctimonious hypocrites had not been out
of the question, until he studied the face of each
man, his peripheral gaze taking in rows of tunic
ribbons, battle stars on most. Then a strange thing
had happened: disgust, revulsion and
compassion swept over him. These were panicked
men, a number having committed their lives to their
country's practice of war . . . only to have been
conned, as he had been conned. If to protect what
was decent meant protecting the worst, who was to
say they were wrong? Where were the saints? Or the
sinners? Could there be any of either when all were
victims?

Disgust, however, won out. Lieutenant Joel
Converse, USNR, could not bring himself to give a
final salute to that council of his superiors. In
silence, he had turned, with no military bearing
whatsoever, and walked out of the room as if he had
pointedly spat on the floor.

A flash of light again from the boulevard, a
blinding echo of the sun from the Quai du Mont
Blanc. He was in Geneva, not in a North Vietnamese
camp holding children who vomited while telling
their stories, or in San Diego being separated from
the United States Navy. He was in Geneva, and the
man sitting across the table knew everything he was
thinking and feeling.

"Why me?" whispered Joel.

"Because, as they say," said Halliday, "you could
be motivated. That's the simple answer. A story was
told. The captain of your aircraft carrier refused to
put his planes in the air for the strike that Delavane
demanded. Several storms had moved in; he called
it suicidal. But Delavane forced him to, threatened
to call the macho White House and have the captain
stripped of his command. You led that strike. It's
where you got it."

"I'm alive," said Converse flatly. "Twelve hundred
kids never saw the next day and maybe a thousand
more wished they never had."

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"And you were in the captain's quarters when Mad Marcus Delavane made his threats and called the shots."

"I was there," agreed Converse, no comment in his voice. Then he shook his head in bewilderment. "Everything I told you about myself you've heard it before."

"Read it before," corrected the lawyer from California. "Like you and I think we're the best in the business under fifty I don't put a hell of a lot of stock in the written word. I have to hear a voice, or see a face."

"I didn't answer you."

"You didn't have to."

"But you have to answer me now. You're not here for Comm Tech-Bern, are you?"

"Yes, that part's true," said Halliday. "Only the Swiss didn't come to me, I went to them. I've been watching you, waiting for the moment. It had to be the right one, perfectly natural, geographically logical."

"Why? What do you mean?"

"Because I'm being watched.... Rosen did have a stroke. I heard about it, contacted Bern, and made a plausible case for myself."

"Your reputation was enough."

"It helped, but I needed more. I said we knew each other, that we went way back which God knows was true and as much as I respected you, I implied that you were extremely astute with finals, and that I was familiar with your methods. I also put my price high enough."

"An irresistible combination for the Swiss," said Converse.

"I'm glad you approve."

"But I don't," contradicted Joel. "I don't approve of you at all, least of all your methods. You haven't told me anything, just made cryptic remarks about an unidentified group of people you say are dangerous, and brought up the name of a man you knew would provoke a response. Maybe you're just a freak, after all, still pushing that safe Yippee label."

"Calling someone a 'freak' is subjectively prejudicial in the extreme, counselor, and would be stricken from the record."

"Still, the point's been made with the jury,

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lawyer-man," said Converse quietly but with anger.
"And I'm making it now."

"Don't prejudge the safety," continued Halliday in a

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voice that was equally quiet. "I'm not safe, and outside of a proclivity for cowardice, there's a wife and five children back in San Francisco I care deeply about."

"So you come to me because I have no such what was it? priority entanglements?"

"I came to you because you're invisible, you're not involved, and because you're the best, and I can't do ill legally can't do it, and it's got to be done legally."

' why don't you say what you mean?" demanded Converse. "Because if you don't I'm getting up and we'll see each other later across a table."

"I represented Delavane," said Halliday quickly. "God help me I didn't know what I was doing, and very few people approved, but I made a point we used to make all the time. Unpopular causes and people also deserve representation."

"I can't argue with that."

"You don't know the cause. I do. I found out."

'What cause?"

Halliday leaned forward. "The generals," he said, his voice barely audible. "They're coming back."

Joel looked closely at the Californian. "From where? I didn't know they'd been away."

"From the past," said Halliday. "From years ago."

Converse sat back in the chair, now amused. "Good Lord, I thought your kind were extinct. Are you talking about the Pentagon menace, Press it is 'Press,' isn't it? The San Francisco short-form, or was it from Haight-Ashbury, or the Beverly Hills something or other? You're a little behind the times; you already stormed the Presidio."

"Please, don't make jokes. I'm not joking."

"Of course not. It's Seven Days in May, or is it Five Days in August? It's August now, so let's call it The Old-Time Guns of August. Nice ring, I think."

"Stop ill There's nothing remotely funny, and if there were, I'd find it before you did."

"That's a comment, I suppose," said Joel.

"You're goddamned right it is, because I didn't go through what you went through. I stayed out of it, I wasn't conned, and that means I can laugh at fanatics because they never hurt me, and I still think it's the best ammunition against them. But not now. There's nothing to laugh at now!"

"Permit me a small chuckle," said Converse without smiling. "Even in my most paranoid moments I never subscribed

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to the conspiracy theory that has the military running Washington. It couldn't happen."

"It might be less apparent than in other countries, but that's all I'll grant you."

"What does that mean?"

"It would undoubtedly be much more obvious in Israel, certainly in Johannesburg, quite possibly in France and Bonn, even the UK none of them takes its pretences that seriously. But I suppose you've got a point. Washington will drape the constitutional robes around itself until they become threadbare and fall away revealing a uniform, incidentally."

Joel stared at the face in front of him. You're not joking, are you? And you're too bright to try to snow me."

"Or can you," added Halliday. "Not after that label I wore while watching you in pajamas halfway across the world. I couldn't do it."

"I think I believe you.... You mentioned several countries, specific countries. Some aren't speaking, others barely; a few have bad blood and worse memories. On purpose?"

"Yes," nodded the Californian. "It doesn't make any difference because the group I'm talking about thinks it has a cause that will ultimately unite them all. And run them all their way."

"The generals?"

"And admirals, and brigadiers, and field marshals old soldiers who pitched their tents in the right camp. So far right there's been no label since the Reichstag."

"Come on, Avery!" Converse shook his head in exasperation. "A bunch of tired old warhorses "

"Recruiting and indoctrinating young, hard, capable new commanders," interrupted Halliday.

" coughing their last bellows." Joel stopped. "Have you proof of that?" he asked, each word

spoken slowly.

"Not enough . . . but with some digging . . . maybe enough."

"Goddamn it, stop being elliptical."

"Among the possible recruits, twenty or so names at the State Department and the Pentagon," said Halliday. "Men who clear export licenses and who spend millions upon millions because they're allowed to spend it, all of which, naturally, widens any circle of friends."

"And influence," stated Converse. "What about London, Paris, and Bonn Johannesburg and Tel Aviv?"

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"Again names."

"How firm?"

They were there, I saw them myself. It was an accident. How many have taken an oath I don't know, but they were there, and their stripes fit the philosophical pattern."

' The Reichstag?"

More encompassing. A global Third Reich. All they need is a Hitler."

Where does Delavane fit in?"

He may anoint one. He may designate the Fuhrer."

That's ridiculous. Who'd take him seriously?"

He was taken seriously before. You saw the results."

That was then, not now. You're not answering the question."

- Men who thought he was right before, and don't fool yourself, they're out there by the thousands. What's mind-blowing is that there are a few dozen with enough seed money to finance his and their delusions which, of course, they don't see as delusions at all, only as the proper evolution of current history, all other ideologies having failed miserably."

Joel started to speak, then stopped, his thoughts suddenly altered. 'Why haven't you gone to someone who can stop them? Stop him."

Who?"

"I shouldn't have to tell you that. Any number of people in the government elected and appointed and more than a dozen departments. For

starters, there's Justice." The Aquitaine Progression

"I'd be laughed out of Washington," said Halliday. "Beyond the fact that we have no proof as I told you, just names, suppositions don't forget that Yippie label I once wore. They'd pin it on me again and tell me to get lost."

"But you represented Delavane."

"Which only compounds the problem by introducing the legal aspects. I shouldn't have to tell you that."

"The lawyer-client relationship." Converse nodded. "You're in a morass before you can make a charge. Unless you've got hard evidence against your client, proof that he's going to commit further crimes and that you're aiding the commission of those crimes by keeping silent."

' which proof I don't have," interrupted the Californian.

"Then no one will touch you," added Joel. "Especially ambitious lawyers at Justice; they don't want their postgov

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ernment avenues cut off. As you say, the Delavanes of this world have their constituencies."

"Exactly," agreed Halliday. "And when I began asking questions and tried to reach Delavane, he wouldn't see me or talk to me. Instead, I got a letter telling me I was fired, that if he had known what I was he never would have retained me. 'Smoking dope and screaming curses while brave young men answered their country's call.'"

Converse whistled softly. "And you think you weren't conned? You provide legal services for him, a structure he can use for all intents and purposes within the law, and if anything smells, you're the last person who can blow the whistle. He drapes the old soldier's flag around himself and calls you a vindictive freak."

Halliday nodded. "There was a lot more in that letter nothing that could damage me except where he was concerned, but it was brutal."

"I'm certain of it." Converse took out a pack of cigarettes; he held it forward as Halliday shook his head. "How did you represent him?" asked Joel.

"I set up a corporation, a small consulting firm in Palo Alto specialising in imports and exports. What's allowed, what isn't, what the quotas are, and how to legitimately reach the people in D.C. who will listen to your case. Essentially it was a lobbying effort, trading in on a name, if anyone remembered."

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At the time, it struck me as kind of pathetic."

"I thought you said it wasn't registered," remarked Converse, lighting a cigarette.

"It's not the one we're after. It'd be a waste of time."

"But it's where you first got your information, isn't it? Your leads?"

"That was the accident, and it won't happen again. It's so legitimate it's legal Clorox."

"Still it's a front," -insisted Joel. "It has to be if everything or anything you've said is true."

"It's true, and it is. But nothing's written down. It's an instrument for travel, an excuse for Delavane and the men around him to go from one place to another, carrying on legitimate business. But while they're in a given area, they do their real thing."

"The gathering of the generals and the field marshals?" said Converse.

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"We think it's a spreading missionary operation. Very quiet and very intense."

"What's the name of Delavane's firm?"

"Palo Alto International."

Joel suddenly crushed out his cigarette. "Who's we, Avery? Who's putting up this kind of money when amounts like that mean they're people who can reach anyone they want to in Washington?"

"Are you interested?"

"Not in working for someone I don't know or approve of. No, I'm not."

"Do you approve of the objectives as I've outlined them to you?"

"If what you've told me is true, and I can't think of any reason why you'd lie about it, of course I do. You knew I would. That still doesn't answer my question."

"Suppose," went on Halliday rapidly, "I were to give you a letter stating that the sum of five hundred thousand dollars to be allocated to you from a blind account on the island of Nfykonos was provided by a client of mine whose character and reputation are of the highest order. That his "

"Wait a minute, Press," Converse broke in harshly.

"Please don't interrupt me, Please!" Halliday's

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eyes were riveted on Joel, a manic intensity in his stare. "There's no other way, not now. I'll put my name my professional life on the line. You've been hired to do confidential work within your specialisation by a man known to me to be an outstanding citizen who insists on anonymity. I endorse both the man and the work he's asked you to do, and swear not only to the legality of the objectives but to the extraordinary benefits that would be derived by any success you might have. You're covered, you've got five hundred thousand dollars, and I expect just as important to you, perhaps more so, you have the chance to stop a maniac maniacs from carrying out an unthinkable plan. At the least, they'd create widespread unrest, political crises everywhere, enormous suffering. At the worst, they might change the course of history to the point where there wouldn't be any history."

Converse sat rigid in his chair, his gaze unbroken. "That's quite a speech. Practice it long?"

"No, you son of a bitch! It wasn't necessary to practice. Any more than you rehearsed that little explosion of yours twelve years ago in San Diego. 'Men like that can't be allowed

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anymore, don't you understand? He was the enemy, our enemy?' . . . Those were the words, weren't they?"

' You did your homework, counselor," said Joel, his anger controlled. "Why does your client insist on being anonymous? Why doesn't he take his money, make a political contribution, and talk to the director of the CIA, or the National Security Council, or the White House, any of which he could do easily? A half-million dollars isn't chopped chicken liver even today."

"Because he can't be involved officially in any way whatsoever." Halliday frowned as he expelled his breath. "I know it sounds crazy, but that's the way it is. He is an outstanding man and I went to him because I was cornered. Frankly, I thought he'd pick up the phone and do what you just said. Call the White House, if it came to it, but he wanted to go this route."

"With me?"

"Sorry, he didn't know you. He said a strange thing to me. He told me to find someone to shoot down the bastards without giving them the dignity of the government's concern, even its recognition. At first I couldn't understand, but then I did. It fit in with my own theory that laughing at the Delavanes of this world renders them impotent more thoroughly than any other way."

"It also eliminates the specter of martyrdom,"

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added Converse. "Why would this outstanding citizen do what he's doing? Why is it worth the money to him?"

"If I told you, I'd be breaking the confidence."

"I didn't ask you his name. I want to know why."

"By telling you," said the Californian, "you'd know who he is. I can't do that. Take my word for it, you'd approve of him."

"Next question," said Joel, a sharp edge to his voice. "Just what the hell did you say to Talbot, Brooks that they found so acceptable?"

"Resigned to finding it acceptable," corrected Halliday. "I had help. Do you know Judge Lucas Anstett?"

"Second Circuit Court," said Converse, nodding. "He should have been tapped for the Supreme Court years ago."

"That seems to be the consensus. He's also a friend of my client, and as I understand it, he met with John Talbot and Nathan Simon Brooks was out of town and without revealing my client's name, told them there was a problem that might well erupt into a national crisis if immediate legal action

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tion wasn't taken. Several U.S. firms were involved, he explained, but the problem basically lay in Europe and required the talents of an experienced international lawyer. If their junior partner, Joel Converse, was selected and he accepted, would they consent to a leave of absence so he could pursue the matter on a confidential basis? Naturally, the judge strongly endorsed the project."

"And naturally Talbot and Simon went along," said Joel. "You don't refuse Anstett. He's too damned reasonable, to say nothing of the power of his court."

"I don't think he'd use that lever."

"It's there."

Halliday reached into his jacket pocket and took out a long white business envelope. "Here's the letter. It spells out everything I said. There's also a separate page defining the schedule in Mykonos. Once you make arrangements at the bank how you want the money paid or where you want it transferred you'll be given the name of a man who lives on the island; he's retired. Phone him; he'll tell you when and where to meet. He has all the tools we can give you. The names, the connections as we think they are, and the activities they're most likely

The Aquitaine Progression engaged in that violate the laws of their respective governments sending arms, equipment, and technological information where it shouldn't be sent. Build just two or three cases that are tied to Delavanc -even circumstantially and it'll be enough. We'll turn it all into ridicule. It will be enough."

"Where the hey do you get your nerve?" said Converse angrily. "I haven't agreed to anything! You don't make decisions for me, and neither does Talbot or Simon, nor the holy Judge Anstett, nor your goddamned client! What did you think you were doing? Appraising me like a piece of horse-flesh, making arrangements about me behind my back! Who do you people think you are?"

"Concerned people who think we've found the right man for the right job at the right time," said Halliday, dropping the envelope in front of Joel. "Only there's not that much time left. You've been where they want to take us and you know what it's like." Suddenly the Californian got up. "Think about it. We'll talk later. By the way, the Swiss know we were meeting this morning. If anyone asks what we talked about, tell them I agreed to the final disposition of the Class A stock. It's in our favor even though you may think otherwise. Thanks

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for the coffee. I'll be across the table in an hour. It's good to see you again, Joel."

The Californian walked swiftly into the aisle and out through the brass gate of the Chat Botte into the sunlight of the Quai du Mont Blanc.

The telephone console was built into the far end of a long dark conference table. Its muted hum was in keeping with the dignified surroundings. The Swiss arbitre, the legal representative of the canton of Geneva, picked it up and spoke softly, nodding his head twice, then replaced the phone in its cradle. He looked around the table; seven of the eight attorneys were in their chairs talking quietly with one another. The eighth, Joel Converse, stood in front of an enormous window flanked by drapes and overlooking the Quai Gustave Ador. The giant jet d'eau erupted beyond, its pulsating spray cascading to the left under the force of a north wind. The sky was growing dark; a summer storm was on its way from the Alps.

"Messieurs, " said the arbiter Conversations trailed off as faces were turned to the Swiss. "That was Monsieur Halliday. He has been detained, but urges you to proceed. His associate, Monsieur Rogeteau, has his recommendations, and it is understood that he met with Monsieur Converse earlier this morning to resolve one of the last details. Is that not so, Monsieur Converse?"

Heads turned again, now in the opposite

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direction toward the figure by the window. There was no response. Converse continued to stare down at the lake.

"Monsieur Converse?"

"I beg your pardon?" Joel turned, a frown creasing his brow, his thoughts far away, nowhere near Geneva.

"It is so, monsieur?"

"What was the question?"

"You met earlier with Monsieur Halliday?"

Converse paused. "It is so," he replied.

"And 9"

"And he agreed to the final disposition of the Class A stock."

There was an audible expression of relief on the part of the Americans and a silent acceptance from the Bern contingent, their eyes noncommittal. Neither reaction was lost on Joel, and under different circumstances he might have tabled

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the item for additional consideration. Halliday's judgment of Bern's advantage notwithstanding, the acceptance was too easily achieved; he would have postponed it anyway, at least for an hour's worth of analysis. Somehow it did not matter. Goddamn him! thought Converse.

"Then let us proceed as Monsieur Halliday suggested," said the arbitre, glancing at his watch.

An hour stretched into two, then three, the hum of voices mingling in counterpoint as pages were passed back and forth, points clarified, paragraphs initiated. And still Halliday did not appear. Lamps were turned on as darkness filled the midday sky outside the huge windows; there was talk of the approaching storm.

Then, suddenly, screams came from beyond the thick oak door of the conference room, swelling in volume until images of horror filled the minds of all who heard the prolonged terrible sounds. Some around the enormous table lunged under it, others got out of their chairs and stood in shock, and a few rushed to the door, among them Converse. The arbiter twisted the knob and yanked it back with such force that the door crashed into the wall. What they saw was a sight none of them would ever forget. Joel lashed out, gripping, pulling, pushing away those in front of him as he raced into the anteroom.

He saw Avery Fowler, his white shirt covered

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with blood, his chest a mass of tiny, bleeding holes. As the wounded man fell, his upturned collar separated to reveal more blood on his throat. The expulsions of breath were too well known to Joel; he had held the heads of children in the camps as they had wept in anger and the ultimate fear. He held Avery Fowler's head now, lowering him to the floor.

"My God, what ha Opened ?" cried Converse, cradling the dying man in his arms.

"They're . . . back," coughed the classmate from long ago. "The elevator. They trapped me in the elevator! . . . They said it was for Aquitaine, that was the name they used . . . Aquitaine. Oh, Christ! Meg . . . the kids!" Avery Fowler's head twisted spastically into his right shoulder, then the final expulsion of air came from his bloodied throat.

Converse stood in the rain, his clothes drenched, staring at the unseen place on the water where only an hour ago the

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fountain had shot up to the sky proclaiming this was Geneva. The lake was angry, an infinity of whitecaps had replaced the graceful white sails. There were no reflections anywhere. But there was distant thunder from the north. From the Alps.

And Joel's mind was frozen.

He walked past the long marble counter of the hotel Richemond's front desk and headed for the winding staircase on the left. It was habit; his suite was on the second floor and the brass-grilled elevators with their wine-colored velvet interiors were things of beauty, but not of swiftness. Too, he enjoyed passing the casement displays of outrageously priced brilliantly lit jewels that lined the walls of the elegant staircase shimmering diamonds, blood-red rubies, webbed necklaces of spun gold. Somehow they reminded him of change, of extraordinary change. For him. For a life he had thought would end violently, thousands of miles away in a dozen different yet always the same rat-infested cells, with muted gunfire and the screams of children in the dark distance. Diamonds, rubies, and spun gold were symbols of the unattainable and unrealistic, but they were there, and he passed them, observed them, smiling at their existence . . . and they seemed to acknowledge him, large shining eyes of infinite depth staring back, telling him they were there, he was there. Change.

But he did not see them now, nor did they acknowledge him. He saw nothing, felt nothing; every tentacle of his mind and body was numbed, suspended in airless space. A man he had known as a boy under one name had died in his arms years later under another, and the words he had whispered at the brutal moment of death were as

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incomprehensible as they were paralysing. Aquitaine.
They said it was for Aquitaine.... Where was sanity,
where was reason? What did the words mean and
why had he been drawn into that elusive meaning?
He had been drawn in, he knew, and there was
rea

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son in that terrible manipulation. The magnet was a
name, a man. George Marcus Delavane, warlord of
Saigon.

"Monsieur!" The suppressed shout came from
below; he turned on the stairs and saw the formally
attired concierge rushing across the lobby and up the
steps. The man's name was Henri, and they had
known each other for nearly five years. Their
friendship went beyond that of hotel executive and
hotel guest; they had gambled together frequently at
Divonne-les-bains, across the French border.

"Hello, Henri."

"Mon Dieu, are you all right, Joel? Your office in
New York has been calling you repeatedly. I heard
it on the radio, it is all over Geneva! La drogue!
Drugs, crime, guns . . . murder! It touches even us
now!"

"Is that what they say?"

"They say small packages of cocaine were found
under his shirt, a respected avocat international a
suspected connection "

"It's a lie," Converse broke in.

"It's what they say, what can I tell you? Your
name was mentioned; it was reported that he died as
you reached him. . . . You were not implicated, of
course; you were merely there with the others. I
heard your name and I've been worried sick! Where
have you been?"

"Answering a lot of unanswerable questions down
at police headquarters." Questions that were
answerable, but not by him, not to the authorities in
Geneva. Avery Fowler Preston Halliday deserved
better than that. A trust had been given, and been
accepted in death.

"Christ, you're drenched!" cried Henri, intense
concern in his eyes. "You've been walking in the rain,
haven't you? There were no taxis?"

"I didn't look, I wanted to walk."

"Of course, the shock, I understand. I'll send up
some brandy, some decent Armagnac. And dinner,
perhaps I'll release your table at the
Gentilshommes."

"Thanks. Give me thirty minutes and have your switchboard get New York for me, will you? I never seem to dial it right."

"Joel?"

"What?"

"Can I help? Is there something you should tell me? We have won and lost together over too many grand cry bottles

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for you to go alone when you don't have to. I know Geneva, my friend."

Converse looked into the wide brown eyes, at the lined face, rigid in its concern. "Why do you say that?"

"Because you so quickly denied the police reports of cocaine, what else? I watched you. There was more in what you said than what you said."

Joel blinked, and for a moment shut his eyelids tight, the strain in the middle of his forehead acute. He took a deep breath and replied. "Do me a favor, Henri, and don't speculate. Just get me an overseas line in a half-hour, okay?"

"Entendu, monsieur," said the Frenchman. "Le concierge du R*hemond is here only to serve her guests, special guests accorded special service, of course.... I'm here if you need me, my friend."

"I know that. If I turn a wrong card, I'll let you know."

"If you have to turn any card in Switzerland, call me. The suits vary with the players."

"I'll remember that. Thirty minutes? A line?"

"Certainement, monsieur."

The shower was as hot as his skin could tolerate, the steam filling his lungs, cutting short the breath in his throat. He then forced himself to endure an ice-cold spray until his head shivered. He reasoned that the shock of extremes might clear his mind, at least reduce the numbness. He had to think; he had to decide; he had to listen.

He came out of the bathroom, his white terrycloth robe blotting the residue of the shower, and shoved his feet into a pair of slippers on the floor beside the bed. He removed his cigarettes and lighter from the bureau top, and walked into the sitting room. The concerned Henri had been true to his word; on the coffee table a floor steward had placed a bottle of expensive Armagnac and two glasses for appearance, not function. He sat down

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on the soft, pillowed couch, poured himself a drink,
and lighted a cigarette. Outside, the heavy August
rain pounded the casement windows, the tattoo
harsh and unrelenting. He looked at his watch; it
was a few minutes past six shortly past noon in
New York. Joel wondered if Henri had been able to
get a clear transatlantic line. The lawyer in Converse
wanted to hear the words spoken from New York,
words that would either confirm or deny a dead
man's revelation. It had been twenty-five minutes
since Henri had

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stopped him on the staircase; he would wait another
five and call the switchboard.

The telephone rang, the blaring, vibrating
European bell unnerving him. He reached for the
phone on the table next to the couch; his breath was
short and his hand trembled.

byes? Hello?'

Chew York calling, monsieur," said the hotel
operator. "It's your office. Should I cancel the call
listed for six-fifteen?"

"Yes, please. And thank you."

"Mr. Converse?" The intense, high-pitched voice
belonged to Lawrence Talbot's secretary.

"Hello, Jane."

"Good God, we've been trying to reach you since
ten o'clock! Are you all right? We heard the news
then, around ten. It's all so horrible!"

"I'm fine, Jane. Thanks for your concern."

"Mr. Talbot's beside himself. He can't believe it!"

"Don't believe what they're saying about Halliday.
It's not true. May I speak with Larry, please?"

"If he knew you were on the phone talking to me,
I'd be fired."

"No, you wouldn't. Who'd write his letters?"

The secretary paused briefly, her voice calmer
when she spoke. "Oh, God, Joel, you're the end.
After what you've been through, you still find
something funny to say."

"It's easier, Jane. Let me have Bubba, will you?"

"You are the limit!"

Lawrence Talbot, senior partner of Talbot,
Brooks and Simon, was a perfectly competent
attorney, but his rise in law was as much due to his

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having been one of the few all-American football players from Yale as from any prowess in the courtroom. He was also a very decent human being more of a coordinating coach than the driving force of a conservative yet highly competitive law firm. He was also eminently fair and fair-minded; he kept his word. He was one of the reasons Joel had joined the firm; another was Nathan Simon, a giant both of a man and of an attorney. Converse had learned more about the law from Nate Simon than from any other lawyer or professor he had ever met. He felt closest to Nathan, yet Simon was the most difficult to get close to; one approached this uniquely private man with equal parts of fondness and reserve.

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Lawrence Talbot burst over the phone. ' Good Lord, I'm appalled! What can I say? What can I do?"

"To begin with, strike that horseshit about Halliday. He was no more a drug connection than Nate Simon."

"You haven't heard, then? They've backed off on that. The story now is violent robbery; he resisted and the packets were stuffed under his shirt after they shot him. I think Jack Halliday must have burned the wires from San Francisco, threatened to beat the crap out of the whole Swiss government.... He played for Stanford, you know."

"You're too much, Bubba."

"I never thought I'd enjoy hearing that from you, young man. I do now."

"Young man and not so young, Larry. Clear something up for me, will you?"

"Whatever I can."

"Anstett. Lucas Anstett. '

"We talked. Nathan and I listened, and he was most persuasive. We understand."

"Do you?"

"Not the particulars certainly; he wouldn't elaborate. But we think you're the best in the field, and granting his request wasn't difficult.. T., B. and S. has the best, and when a judge like Anstett confirms it through such a conversation, we have to congratulate ourselves, don't we?"

"Are you doing it because of his bench?"

"Christ, no. He even told us he'd be harder on us in Appeals if we agreed. He's one rough cookie when he wants something. He tells you you'd be worse off if you give it to him."

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"Did you believe him?"

"Well, Nathan said something about billy goats having certain identifiable markings that were not removed without a great deal of squealing, so we should go along. Nathan frequently obfuscates issues, but goddamnit, Joel, he's usually right."

"If you can take three hours to hear a five-minute summation," said Converse.

"He's always thinking, young man."

"Young and not so young. Everything's relative."

"Your wife called.... Sorry, your ex-wife."

"Oh?"

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"Your name came up on the radio or television or something, and she wanted to know what happened."

"What did you tell her?"

"That we were trying to reach you. We didn't know any more than she did. She sounded very upset."

Call her and tell her I'm fine, will you, please? Do you have the number?"

Jane does."

"I'll be leaving, then."

"On full pay," said Talbot from New York.

"That's not necessary, Larry. I'm being given a great deal of money, so save the bookkeeping. I'll be back in three or four weeks."

"I could do that, but I won't," said the senior partner. "I know when I've got the best and I intend to hold him. We'll bank it for you." Talbot paused, then spoke quietly, urgently. "Joel, I have to ask you. Did this thing a few hours ago have anything to do with the Anstett business?"

Converse gripped the telephone with such force his wrist and fingers ached. "Nothing whatsoever, Larry," he said. "There's no connection."

Mykonos, the sun-drenched, whitewashed island of the Cyclades, neighboring worshiper of Delos. Since Barbarossa's conquest it had been host to successive brigands of the sea who sailed on the Meltemi winds Turks, Russians, Cypriots, finally Greeks placed and displaced over the centuries, a small landmass alternately honored and forgotten

The Aquitaine Progression until the arrival of sleek yachts and shining aircraft, symbols of a different age. Low-slung automobiles Porsches, Maseratis, ~Jaguars now sped over the narrow roads past starch-white windmills and alabaster churches; a new type of inhabitant had joined the laconic, tradition-bound residents who made their livings from the sea and the shops. Free-spirited youths of all ages, with their open shirts and tight pants, their sunburned skins serving as foil for adornments of heavy gold, had found a new playground. And ancient Mykonos, once a major port to the proud Phoenicians, had become the Saint-Tropez of the Aegean.

Converse had taken the first Swissair flight out of Geneva to Athens, and from there a smaller Olympic plane to the island. Although he had lost an hour in the time zones, it was barely four o'clock in the afternoon when the airport taxi

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crawled through the streets of the hot, blinding-white harbor and pulled up in front of the smooth white entrance of the bank. It was on the waterfront, and the crowds of flowered shirts and wild print dresses, and the sight of launches chopping over the gentle waves toward the slips on the main pier, were proof that the giant cruise ships far out in the harbor were managed by knowledgeable men. Mykonos was a dazzling snare for tourists; money would be left on the whitewashed island; the tavernas and the shops would be full from early sunrise to burning twilight. The ooze would flow and Greek fishermen's caps would disappear from the shelves and appear on the swaying heads of suburbanites from Crosse Point and Short Hills. And when night came and the last efharisto and paracalo had been awkwardly uttered by the visitors, other games would begin the courtiers and courtesans the beautiful, ageless, self-indulgent children of the blue Aegean, would start to play. Peals of laughter would be heard as drachmas were counted and spent in amounts that would stagger even those who had opulent suites on the highest decks of the most luxurious ships. Where Geneva was con-, trary, Mykonos was accommodating in ways the long-ago

Turks might have envied.

Joel had called the bank from the airport, not knowing its business hours, but knowing the name of the banker he was to contact. Kostas Laskaris greeted him cautiously over the phone, making it clear that he expected not only a passport that would clear a spectrograph but the original letter from A. Preston Halliday with his signature, said signature to be subjected to a scanner, matching the signature the bank had been provided by the deceased Mr. A. Preston Halliday.

"We hear he was killed in Geneva. It is most unfortunate," Laskaris had said.

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"I'll tell his wife and children how your grief overwhelms me."

Converse paid the taxi and climbed the short white steps of the entrance, carrying his suitcase and attache case, grateful that the door was opened by a uniformed guard whose appearance brought to mind a long-forgotten photograph of a mad sultan who whipped his harem's women in a courtyard when they failed to arouse him.

Kostas Laskaris was not at all what Joel had expected from the brief, disconcerting conversation over the phone. He was a balding, pleasant-faced man in his late fifties, with warm

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dark eyes, and relatively fluent in English but certainly not comfortable with the language. His first words upon rising from his desk and indicating a chair in front of it for Converse contradicted Joel's previous impression.

"I apologize for what might have appeared as a callous statement on my part regarding Mr. Halliday. However, it was most unfortunate, and I don't know how else to phrase it. And it is difficult, sir, to grieve for a man one never knew."

"I was out of line. Forget it, please."

"You are most kind, but I am afraid I cannot forget the arrangements mandated by Mr. Halliday and his associate here on Mykonos. I must have your passport and the letter, if you please?"

"Who is he?" asked Joel, reaching into his jacket pocket for his passport billfold; it contained the letter. "The associate, I mean."

"You are an attorney, sir, and surely you are aware that the information you desire cannot be given to you until the barriers have been leaped, as it were. At least, I think that's right."

"It'll do. I just thought I'd try." He took out his passport and the letter, handing them to the banker.

Laskaris picked up his telephone and pressed a button. He spoke in Greek and apparently asked for someone. Within seconds the door opened and a stunning bronzed, dark-haired woman entered and walked gracefully over to the desk. She raised her downcast eyes and glanced at Joel, who knew the banker was watching him closely. A sign from Converse, an other glance from him directed at Laskaris and introductions would be forthcoming, accommodation tacitly promised, and a conceivably significant piece of information would be entered in a banker's file. Joel offered no such sign; he wanted no such entry. A man did not pick up half a million

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dollars for nodding his head, and then look for a bonus. It did not signify stability; it signified something else.

Inconsequential banter about flights, customs and the general deterioration of travel covered the next ten minutes, at which time his passport and the letter were returned not by the striking, dark-haired woman but by a young, balletic blond Adonis. The pleasant-faced Laskaris was not missing a trick; he was perfectly willing to supply one, whichever route his wealthy visitor required.

Converse looked into the Greek's warm eyes, then

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smiled, the smile developing into quiet laughter. Laskaris smiled back and shrugged, dismissing the beachboy.

"I am chief manager of this branch, sir," he said as the door closed, "but I do not set the policies for the entire bank. This is, after all, Mykonos."

"And a great deal of money passes through here," added Joel. "Which one did you bet on?"

"Neither," replied Laskaris, shaking his head. "Only on exactly what you did. You'd be a fool otherwise, and I do not think you are a fool. In addition to being chief manager on the waterfront, I am also an excellent judge of character."

"Is that why you were chosen as the intermediary?"

"No, that is not the reason. I am a friend of Mr. Halliday's associate here on the island. His name is Beale, incidentally. Dr. Edward Beale.... You see, everything is in order."

"A doctor?" asked Converse, leaning forward and accepting his passport and the letter. "He's a doctor?"

"Not a medical man, however," clarified Laskaris. "He's a scholar, a retired professor of history from the United States. He has an adequate pension and he moved here from Rhodes several months ago. A most interesting man, most knowledgeable. I handle his financial affairs in which he is not very knowledgeable, but still interesting." The banker smiled again, shrugging.

"I hope so," said Joel. "We have a great deal to discuss.."

"That is not my concern, sir. Shall we get to the disposition of the funds? How and where would you care to have them paid?"

"A great deal in cash. I bought one of those sensorized money belts in Geneva the batteries are

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guaranteed for a year. If it's ripped off me, a tiny
siren goes off that splits your eardrums. I'd like
American currency for myself and the rest
transferred."

"Those belts are effective, sir, but not if you are
unconscious, or if there is no one around to hear
them. Might I suggest traveler's checks?"

"You could and you'd probably be right, but I
don't think so. I may not care to write out a
signature."

"As you wish. The denominations for yourself,
please?" said Laskaris, pencil in hand, pad below.
"And where would you like the remainder to be
sent?"

"Is it possible," asked Converse slowly, "to have
accounts set up not in my name but accessible to
me?"

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"Of course, sir. Frankly, it is often standard in
Mykonos as well as in Crete, Rhodes, Athens,
Istanbul, and also much of Europe. A description is
wired, accompanied by words written out in your
handwriting another name, or numbers. One man
I knew used nursery rhymes. And then they are
matched. One must use a sophisticated bank, of
course."

"Of course. Name a few."

"Where?"

"In London, Paris, Bonn maybe Tel Aviv," said
Joel, trying to remember Halliday's words.

"Bonn is not easy; they are so inflexible. A wrong
apostrophe and they summon whomever they
consider their authorities.... Tel Aviv is simple;
money is as freewheeling and as serpentine as the
Knesset. London and Paris are standard and, of
course, their greed is overwhelming. You will be
heavily taxed for the transfers because they know you
will not make an issue over covert funds. Very
proper, very mercenary, and very much thievery."

"You know your banks, don't you?"

"I've had experience, sir. Now, as to the
disbursements?"

"I want a hundred thousand for myself nothing
larger than five-hundred-dollar bills. The rest you
can split up and tell me how I can get it if I need it."

"It is not a difficult assignment, sir. Shall we start
writing names, or numbers or nursery rhymes?"

"Numbers," said Converse. "I'm a lawyer. Names

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and nursery rhymes are in dimensions I don't want to
think about right now."

"As you wish," said the Greek, reaching for a pad.
'And here is Dr. Beale's telephone number. When
we have concluded our business, you may call
him or not, as you wish. It is not my concern."

Dr. Edward Beale, resident of Mykonos, spoke
over the telephone in measured words and the slow,
thoughtful cadence of a scholar. Nothing was rushed;
everything was deliberate.

"There is a beach more rocks than beach, and
not frequented at night about seven kilometers
from the waterfront. Walk to it. Take the west road
along the coast until you see the lights of several
buoys riding the waves. Come down to the water's
edge. I'll find you."

* * *

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The night clouds sped by, propelled by
high-altitude winds, letting the moonlight penetrate
rapidly, sporadically, illuminating the desolate
stretch of beach that was the meeting ground. Far
out on the water, the red lamps of four buoys
bobbed up and down. Joel climbed over the rocks
and into the soft sand, making his way to the water's
edge; he could both see and hear the small waves
lapping forward and receding. He lit a cigarette,
assuming the flame would announce his presence. It
did; in moments a voice came out of the darkness
behind him, but the greeting was hardly what he ex-
pected from an elderly, retired scholar.

"Stay where you are and don't move" was the
first command, spoken with quiet authority. "Put the
cigarette in your mouth and inhale, then raise your
arms and hold them straight out in front of you....
Good. Now smoke, I want to see the smoke."

"Christ, I'm choking!" shouted Joel, coughing, as
the smoke, blown back by the ocean breeze, stung
his eyes. Then suddenly he felt the sharp, quick
movements of a hand stabbing about his clothes,
reaching across his chest and up and down his legs.
"What are you doing?" he cried, spitting the cigarette
out of his mouth involuntarily.

"You don't have a weapon," said the voice.

"Of course not!"

"I do. You may lower your arms and turn around
now."

Converse spun, still coughing, and rubbed his
watery eyes. "You crazy son of a bitch!"

"It's a dreadful habit, those cigarettes. I'd give
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them up if I were you. Outside of the terrible things
they do to your body, now you see how they can be
used against you in other ways."

Joel blinked and stared in front of him. The pontificator was a slender, white-haired old man of medium height, standing very erect in what looked like a white canvas jacket and trousers. His face what could be seen of it in the intermittent moonlight was deeply lined, and there was a partial smile on his lips. There was also a gun in his hand, held in a firm grip, levered at Converse's head. "You're Beale?" asked Joel. "Dr. Edward Beale?"

"Yes. Are you calmed down now?"

"Considering the shock of your warm welcome, I guess

"Good. I'll put this away, then." The scholar lowered the

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gun and knelt down on the sand next to a canvas satchel. He shoved the weapon inside and stood up again. "I'm sorry, but I had to be certain."

"Of what? Whether or not I was a commando?"

"Halliday's dead. Could a substitute have been sent in your place? Someone to deal with an old man in Mykonos? If so, that person would most certainly have had a gun."

"Why?"

"Because he would have had no idea that I was an old man. I might have been a commando."

"You know, it's possible just possible that I could have had a gun. Would you have blown my goddamned head off?"

"A respected attorney coming to the island for the first time, passing through Geneva's airport security? Where would you get it? Whom would you know on Mykonos?"

"Arrangements could have been made," protested Converse with little conviction.

"I've had you followed since you arrived. You went directly to the bank, then to the Kouneni hotel, where you sat in the garden and had a drink before going to your room. Outside of the taxi driver, my friend Kostas, the desk clerk, and the waiters in the garden, you spoke to no one. As long as you were Joel Converse I was safe."

"For a product of an ivory tower, you sound more like a hit man from Detroit."

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"I wasn't always in the academic world, but yes, I've been cautious. I think we must all be very cautious. With a George Marcus Delavane it's the only sound strategy."

"Sound strategy?"

"Approach, if you like." Beale reached between the widely separated buttons of his jacket and withdrew a folded sheet of paper. "Here are the names," he said, handing it to Joel. "There are five key figures in Delavane's operation over here. One each from France, West Germany, Israel, South Africa, and England. We've identified four the first four but we can't find the Englishman."

"How did you get these?"

"Originally from notes found among Delavane's papers by Halliday when the general was his client."

"That was the accident he mentioned, then? He said it was an accident that wouldn't happen again."

"I don't know what he told you, of course, but it certainly was an accident. A faulty memory on Delavane's part, an af

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flictionI can personally assure you touches the aging. The general simply forgot he had a meeting with Halliday, and when Preston arrived, his secretary let him into the office so he could prepare papers for Delavane, who was expected in a half hour or so. Preston saw a file folder on the general's desk; he knew that folder, knew it contained material he could cross-check. Without thinking twice, he sat down and began working. He found the names, and knowing Delavane's recent itinerary in Europe and Africa, everything suddenly began to fall into place very ominously. For anyone politically aware, those four names are frightening they dredge up frightening memories."

"Did Delavane ever learn that he'd found them?"

"In my judgment, he could never be certain. Halliday wrote them down and left before the general returned. But then Geneva tells us something else, doesn't it?"

"That Delavane did find out," said Converse grimly.

"Or he wasn't going to take any further chances, especially if there was a schedule, and we're convinced there is one. We're in the countdown now."

"To what?"

"From the pattern of their operations what we've

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pieced together a prolonged series of massive,
orchestrated conflagrations designed to spin
governments out of control and destabilize them."

"That's a tall order. In what way?"

"Guesswork," said the scholar, frowning.
"Probably widespread, coordinated eruptions of
violence led by terrorists everywhere terrorists
fueled by Delavane and his people. When the chaos
becomes intolerable, it would be their excuse to
march in with military units and assume the
controls, initially with martial law."

"It's been done before," said Joel. "Feed and arm
a presumed enemy, then send out provocateurs "

"With massive sums of money and material."

"And when they rise up," continued Converse,
"pull out the rug, crush them, and take over. The
citizens give thanks and call the heroes saviors, as
they start marching to their drums. But how could
they do it?"

"That's the all-consuming question. What are the
targets? Where are they, who are they? We have no
idea. If we had an inkling, we might approach from
that end, but we don't,

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and we can't waste time hunting for unknowns. We
must go after what we do know."

"Again, time," Joel broke in. "Why are you so
sure we're in a countdown?"

"Increased activity everywhere in many cases
frantic. Shipments originating in the States are
funneled out of warehouses in England, Ireland,
France, and Germany to groups of insurgents in all
the troubled areas. There are runors out of Munich,
the Mediterranean and the Arab states. The talk is
in terms of final preparations, but no one seems to
know what exactly for except that all of them must
be ready. It's as though such groups as
Baader-Meinhof, the Brigade Rosse, the PLO, and
the red legions of Paris and Madrid were all in a
race with none knowing the course, only the moment
when it begins."

'When is that?"

"Our reports vary, but they're all within the same
time span. Within three to five weeks."

"Oh, my God." Joel suddenly remembered.
"Avery Halliday whispered something to me just
before he died. Words that were spoken by the men
who shot him. Aquitaine . . . 'They said it was for
Aquitaine.' Those were the words he whispered.
What do they mean, Beale?"

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The old scholar was silent, his eyes alive in the moonlight. He slowly turned his head and stared out at the water. "It's madness," he whispered.

"That doesn't tell me anything."

"No, of course not," said Beale apologetically, turning back to Converse. "It's simply the magnitude of it all. It's so incredible."

"I'm not reading you."

"Aquitaine Aquitania, as Julius Caesar called it was the name given to a region in southwestern France that at one time in the first centuries after Christ was said to have extended from the Atlantic, across the Pyrenees to the Mediterranean, and as far north as the mouth of the Loire west of Paris on the coast "

"I'm vaguely aware of that," Joel broke in, too impatient for an academic dissertation.

"If you are, you're to be commended. Most people are only aware of the later centuries say, from the eighth on when Charlemagne conquered the region, formed the kingdom of Aquitaine and bestowed it on his son Louis, and his

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sons Pepin One and Two. Actually, these and the following three hundred years are the most pertinent. '

'To what?'

"The legend of Aquitaine, Mr. Converse. Like many ambitious generals, Delavane sees himself as a student of history in the tradition of Caesar, Napoleon, Clausewitz . . . even Patton. I was rightly or wrongly considered a scholar, but he remains a student, and that's as it should be. Scholars can't take liberties without substantive evidence or they shouldn't but students can and usually do."

"What's your point?"

"The legend of Aquitaine becomes convoluted, the what-if syndrome riding over the facts until theoretical assumptions are made that distort the evidence. You see, the story of Aquitaine is filled with sudden, massive expansions and abrupt contractions. To simplify, an imaginative student of history might say that had there not been political, marital and military miscalculations on the part of Charlemagne and his son, the two Pepins, and later Louis the Seventh of France and Henry the Second of England, both of whom were married to the extraordinary Eleanor, the kingdom of Aquitaine might have encompassed most if not all of Europe." Beale paused. "Do you begin to understand?" he

asked.

"Yes," said Joel. "Christ, yes. "

"That's not all," continued the scholar. "Since Aquitaine was once considered a legitimate possession of England, it might in time have enveloped all of her foreign colonies, including the original thirteen across the Atlantic later the United States of America.... Of course, miscalculations or not, it could never have happened because of a fundamental law of western civilisation, valid since the deposition of Romulus Augustulus and the collapse of the Roman empire. You cannot crush, then unite by force and rule disparate peoples and their cultures not for any length of time."

"Someone's trying to now," said Converse. "George Marcus Delavane."

"Yes. In his mind he's constructed the Aquitaine that never was, never could be. And it's profoundly terrifying."

"Why? You just said it couldn't happen."

"Not according to the old rules, not in any period since the fall of Rome. But you must remember, there's never been a time in recorded history like this one. Never such weapons, such anxiety. Delavane and his people know that, and they

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will play upon those weapons, those anxieties. They are playing upon them. 'The old man pointed to the sheet of paper in Joel's hand. 'You have matches. Strike one and look at the names."

Converse unfolded the sheet, reached into his pocket and took out his lighter. He snapped it, and as the flame illuminated the paper he studied the names. "Jesus!" he said, frowning. 'They fit in with Delavane. It's a gathering of warlords, if they're the men I think they are." Joel extinguished the flame.

"They are," replied Beale, "starting with General Jacques-Louis Bertholdier in Paris, a remarkable man, quite extraordinary. A Resistance fighter in the war, given the rank of major before he was twenty, but later an unreconstructed member of Salan's OAS. He was behind an assassination attempt on De Gaulle in August of '62, seeing himself as the true leader of the republic. He nearly made it. He believed then as he believes now that the Algerian generals were the salvation of an enfeebled France. He has survived not only because he's a legend, but because his voice isn't alone only he's more persuasive than most. Especially with the elite crowd of promising commanders produced by Saint-Cyr. Quite simply, he's a fascist, a fanatic hiding behind

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a screen of eminent respectability."

"And the one named Abrahms," said Converse.
"He's the Israeli strong man who struts around in a safari jacket and boots, isn't he? The screecher who holds rallies in front of the Knesset and in the stadiums, telling everyone there'll be a bloodbath in Judea and Samaria if the children of Abraham are denied. Even the Israelis can't shut him up."

"Many are afraid to; he's become electrifying, like lightning, a symbol. Chaim Abrahms and his followers make the Begin regime seem like reticent, self-effacing pacifists. He's a sabre tolerated by the European Jews because he's a brilliant soldier, proven in two wars, and has enjoyed the respect if not the affection of every Minister of Defense since the early years of Golda Meir. They never know when they might need him in the field."

"And this one," said Joel, again using his lighter.
"Van Headmer. South African, isn't he? The 'hangman in uniform' or something like that."

"Jan van Headmer, the 'slayer of Soweto,' as the blacks call him. He executes 'offenders' with alarming frequency and

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government tolerance. His family is old-line Amkaner, all generals going back to the Boer War, and he sees no reason on earth to bring Pretoria into the twentieth century. Incidentally, he's a close friend of Abrahms and makes frequent trips to Tel Aviv. He's also one of the most erudite and charming general officers ever to attend a diplomatic conference. His presence denies his image and reputation."

' And Leifhelm," said Converse, coming to the last of the foreign names. "A mixed bag, if I'm accurate. Supposedly a great soldier who followed too many orders, but still respected. I'm weakest on him."

"Entirely understandable," said Beale, nodding.
'In some ways his is the oddest story the most monstrous, really, because the truth has been consistently covered up so as to use him and avoid embarrassment. Field Marshal Erich Leifhelm was the youngest general ever commissioned by Adolf Hitler. He foresaw Germany's collapse and made a sudden about-face. From brutal killer and a fanatic super-Aryan to a contrite professional who abhorred the Nazis' crimes as they were 'revealed' to him. He fooled everyone and was absolved of all guilt; he never saw a Nuremberg courtroom. During the cold war the Allies used his services extensively, granting him full security clearances, and later in the fifties when the new German divisions were mounted for the NATO forces, they made sure he was put in command."

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"Weren't there a couple of newspaper stories about him a few years ago? He had several run-ins with Helmut Schmidt, didn't he?"

"Exactly," agreed the scholar. "But those stories were soft and carried only half the story. Leifhelm was quoted as saying merely that the German people could not be expected to carry the burden of past guilt into future generations. It had to stop. Pride should once more be established in the nation's heritage. There was some saber rattling aimed at the Soviets, but nothing substantively beyond that."

"What was the other half?" asked Converse.

"He wanted the Bundestag's restrictions on the armed forces lifted completely, and fought for the expansion of the intelligence services, patterned after the Abwehr, including rehabilitation sentences for political troublemakers. He also sought extensive deletions in German textbooks throughout the school systems. 'Pride has to be restored,' he kept saying,

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and everything he said was in the name of virulent anti-Communism."

'The Third Reich's first strategy in everything when Hitler took over."

'You're quite right. Schmidt saw through him and knew there'd be chaos if he had his way and he was influential. Bonn could not afford the specter of painful memories. Schmidt forced Leifhelm to resign and literally removed his voice from all government affairs."

"But he keeps speaking."

"Not openly. However, he's rich and retains his friends and contacts."

"Among them Delavane and his people."

"Foremost among them now."

Joel once more snapped his lighter and scanned the lower part of the page. There were two lists of names, the row on the left under the heading State Department, the right under Pentagon. There were perhaps twenty-five people in all. "Who are the Americans?" He released the lever; the flame died and he put the lighter back in his pocket. "The names don't mean anything to me."

"Some should, but it doesn't matter," said Beale elliptically. "The point is that among those men are disciples of George Delavane. They carry out his orders. How many of them is difficult to say, but at

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least several from each grouping. You see, these are the men who make the decisions or conversely, do not oppose decisions without which Delavane and his followers would be stopped in their tracks."

"Spell that out."

"Those on the left are key figures in the State Department's Office of Munitions Control. They determine what gets cleared for export, who under the blanket of 'rational interest' can receive weapons and technology withheld from others. On the right are the senior officers at the Pentagon on whose word millions upon millions are spent for armament procurements. All are decision makers and a number of those decisions have been questioned, a few openly, others quietly by diplomatic and military colleagues. We've learned that much "

"Questioned? why?" interrupted Converse.

"There were rumors there always are rumors of large shipments improperly licensed for export. Then there's surplus military equipment excess supplies lost in transfers

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from temporary warehouses and out-of-the-way storage depots. Surplus equipment is easily unaccounted for, it's an embarrassment in these days of enormous budgets and cost overruns. Get rid of it and don't be too particular. How fortunate in these instances and coincidental if a member of this Aquitaine shows up, willing to buy and with all his papers in order. Whole depots and warehouses are sent where they shouldn't be sent."

"A Libya connection?"

"There's no doubt of it. A great many connections."

"Halliday mentioned it and you said it a few moments ago. Laws broken arms, equipment, technological information sent to people who shouldn't have them. They break loose on cue and there's disruption, terrorism "

"Justifying military responses," old Beale broke in. "That's part of Delavane's concept. Justifiable escalation of armed might, the commanders in charge, the civilians helpless, forced to listen to them, obey them."

"But you just said questions were raised."

"And answered with such worn-out phrases as 'national security' and 'adversarial disinformation' to stop or throw off the curious."

"That's obstruction. Can't they be caught at it?."

"By whom? With what?"

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"Damn it, the questions themselves!" replied Converse. "Those improper export licenses, the military transfers that got lost, merchandise that can't be traced."

"By people without the clearances to go around security classifications, or lacking the expertise to understand the complexities of export licensing."

"That's nonsense," insisted Joel. "You said some of those questions were asked by diplomatic personnel, military colleagues, men who certainly had the clearances and the expertise."

"And who suddenly, magically, didn't ask them any longer. Of course, many may have been persuaded that the questions were, indeed, beyond their legitimate purviews; others may have been too frightened to penetrate for fear of involvement; others still, forced to back off frankly threatened. Regardless, behind it all there are those who do the convincing, and they're growing in numbers everywhere."

"Christ, it's a a network," said Converse softly.

The scholar looked hard at Joel, the night light on the

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water reflecting across the old man's pale, lined face. "Yes, Mr. Converse, a 'network.' That word was whispered to me by a man who thought I was one of them. 'The network,' he said. 'The network will take care of you.' He meant Delavane and his people."

"Why did they think you were a part of them?"

The old man paused. He looked briefly away at the shimmering Aegean, then back at Converse. "Because that man thought it was logical. Thirty years ago I took off a uniform, trading it for the Harris tweeds and unkempt hair of a university professor. Few of my colleagues could understand, for, you see, I was one of the elite, perhaps a later, American version of Erich Leifhelm a brigadier general at thirty-eight, and the Joint Chiefs were conceivably my next assignment. But where the collapse of Berlin and the Götterdämmerung in the bunker had one effect on Leifhelm, the evacuation of Korea and the disembowelment of Panmunjom had another effect on me. I saw only the waste, not the cause I once saw only the futility where once there'd been sound reasons. I saw death, Mr. Converse, not heroic death against animalistic hordes or on a Spanish afternoon with the crowds shouting 'Ore, ' but just plain death. Ugly death, shattering death. And I knew I could no longer be a part of those strategies that called for it.... Had I been qualified in belief, I might have become a priest."

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"But your colleagues who couldn't understand," said Joel, mesmerized by Beale's words, words that brought back so much of his own past. "They thought it was something else?"

"Of course they did. I'd been praised in evaluation reports by the holy MacArthur himself. I even had a label: the Red Fox of Inchon my hair was red then. My commands were marked by decisive moves and countermoves, all reasonably well thought out and swiftly executed. And then one day, south of Chunchon, I was given an order to take three adjacent hills that comprised dead high ground vantage points that served no strategic purpose and I radioed back that it was useless real estate, that whatever casualties we sustained were not worth it. I asked for clarification, a field officer's way of saying 'You're crazy, why should I?' The reply came in something less than fifteen minutes. Because it's there, General.' That was all. Because it's there.' A symbolic point was to be made for someone's benefit or someone else's macho news briefing in Seoul.... I took the hills, and I also

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wasted the lives of over three hundred men and for my efforts I was awarded another cluster of the Distinguished Service Cross."

"Is that when you quit?"

"Oh, Lord no, I was too confused, but inside, my head was boiling. The end came, and I watched Panmunjom, and was finally sent home, all manner of extraordinary expectations to be considered my just rewards.... However, a minor advancement was denied me for a very good reason: I didn't speak the language in a sensitive European post. By then my head had exploded; I used the rebuke and I took my cue. I resigned quietly and went my way."

It was Joel's turn to pause and study the old man in the night light. "I've never heard of you," he said finally. "Why haven't I ever heard of you?"

"You didn't recognize the names on the two lower lists either, did you? 'Who are the Americans?' you said. 'The names don't mean anything to me.' Those were your words, Mr. Converse."

"They weren't young decorated generals heroes in a war."

"Oh, but several were,") interrupted Beale swiftly, "in several wars. They had their fleeting moments in the sun, and then they were forgotten, the moments only remembered by them, relived by them. Constantly."

"That sounds like an apology for them."

"Of course it is! You think I have no feelings for them? For men like Chaim Abrahms, Bertholdier, even Leifhelm? We call upon these men when the barricades are down, we extol them for acts beyond our abilities...."

"You were capable. You performed those acts."

"You're right and that's why I understand them. When the barricades are rebuilt, we consign them to oblivion. Worse, we force them to watch inept civilians strip the gears of reason and, through oblique vocabularies, plant the explosives that will blow those barricades apart again. Then when they're down once more, we summon our commanders."

"Jesus, whose side are you on?"

Beale closed his eyes tightly, reminding Joel of the way he used to shut his own when certain memories came back to him. "Yours, you idiot," said the scholar quietly. "Because I know what they can do when we ask them to do it. I meant what I said before. There's never been a time in history like

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this one. Far better that inept, frightened civilians, still talking, still searching, than one of us forgive me, one of them "

A gust of wind blew off the sea; the sand spiraled about their feet. "That man," said Converse, "the one who told you the network would take care of you. Why did he say it?"

"He thought they could use me. He was one of the field commanders I knew in Korea, a kindred spirit then. He came to my island for what reason I don't know, perhaps a vacation, perhaps to find me, who knows and found me on the waterfront. I was taking my boat out of the Plati Harbor when suddenly he appeared, tall, erect and very military in the morning sun. 'We have to talk,' he said, with that same insistence we always used in the field. I asked him aboard and we slowly made our way out of the bay. Several miles out of the Plati he presented his case, their case. Delavane's case.,'

"What happened then?"

The scholar paused for precisely two seconds, then answered simply, "I killed him. With a scaling knife. Then I dropped his body over a cluster of sharks beyond the shoals of the Stephanos."

Stunned, Joel stared at the old man the iridescent light of the moon heightened the force of the macabre revelation. "Just like that?" he said in a monotone.

"It's what I was trained to do, Mr. Converse. I

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was the Red Fox of Inchon. I never hesitated when
the ground could be gained, or an adversarial
advantage eliminated." -

"You killed him?"

"It was a necessary decision, not a wanton taking
of life. He was a recruiter and my response was in
my eyes, in my silent outrage. He saw it, and I
understood. He could not permit me to live with
what he'd told me. One of us had to die and I simply
reacted more swiftly than he did."

"That's pretty cold reasoning."

'~You're a lawyer, you deal every day with
options. Where was the alternative?"

Joel shook his head, not in reply but in
astonishment. "How did Halliday find you?"

"We found each other. We've never met, never
talked, but we have a mutual friend."

fin San Francisco?"

She's frequently there."

"Who is he?"

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"It's a subject we won't discuss. I'm sorry."

"Why not? Why the secrecy?"

"It's the way he prefers it. Under the
circumstances, I believe it's a logical request."

"Logic? Find me logic in any of this! Halliday
reaches a man in San Francisco who just happens to
know you, a former general thousands of miles away
on a Greek island who just happens to have been
approached by one of Delavane's people. Now,
that's coincidence, but damned little logic!"

"Don't dwell on it. Accept it."

"Would you?"

"Under the circumstances, yes, I would. You see,
there's no alternative."

"Sure there is. I could walk away five hundred
thousand dollars richer, paid by an anonymous
stranger who could only come after me by revealing
himself."

"You could but you won't. You were chosen very
carefully."

"Because I could be motivated? That's what
Halliday said."

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"Frankly, yes."

"You're off the wall, all of you!"

"One of us is dead. You were the last person he spoke with."

Joel felt the rush of anger again, the sight of a dying man's eyes burned into his memory. "Aquitaine," he said softly. "Delavane.... All right, I was chosen carefully. Where do I begin?"

"Where do you think you should begin? You're the attorney; everything must be done legally."

"That's just it. I'm an attorney, not the police, not a detective."

"No police in any of the countries where those four men live could do what you can do, even if they agreed to try, which, frankly, I doubt. More to the point, they would alert the Delavane network."

"All right, I'll try," said Converse, folding the sheet with the list of names and putting it in his inside jacket pocket. "I'll start at the top. In Paris. With this Bertholdier."

"Jacques-Louis Bertholdier," added the old man, reaching down into his canvas bag and taking out a thick manila envelope. "This is the last thing we can give you. It's everything we could learn about those four men; perhaps it can

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help you. Their addresses, the cars they drive, business associates, cafes and restaurants they frequent, sexual preferences where they constitute vulnerability . . . anything that could give you an edge. Use it, use everything you can. Just bring us back briefs against men who have compromised themselves, broken laws above all, evidence that shows they are not the solid, respectable citizens their life-styles would indicate. Embarrassment, Mr. Converse, embarrassment. It leads to ridicule, and Preston Halliday was profoundly right about that. Ridicule is the first step."

Joel started to reply, to agree, then stopped, his eyes riveted on Beale. "I never told you Halliday said anything about ridicule."

"Oh?" The scholar blinked several times in the dim light, momentarily unsure of himself, caught by surprise. "But, naturally, we discussed "

"You never met, you never talked I" Converse broke in.

" through our mutual friend the strategies we might employ," said the old man, his eyes now

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steady. 'The aspect of ridicule is a keystone. Of course we discussed it."

"You just hesitated."

"You startled me with a meaningless statement. My reactions are not what they once were."

"They were pretty good in a boat beyond the Stephanos, ' corrected Joel.

"An entirely different situation, Mr. Converse. Only one of us could leave that boat. Both of us will leave this beach tonight."

"All right, I may be reaching. You would be, too, if you were me." Converse withdrew a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket, shook one up nervously to his lips and took out his lighter. "A man I knew as a kid under one name approaches me years later calling himself something else." Joel snapped his lighter and held the flame under the cigarette, inhaling. ' He tells a wild story that's just credible enough so I can't dismiss it. The believable aspect is a maniac named Delavane. He says I can help stop him stop them and there's a great deal of money for nodding my head provided by a man in San Francisco who won't say who he is, expedited by a former general on a fashionably remote island in the Aegean. And for his efforts, this man I knew under two names is murdered in daylight, shot a dozen times in an elevator, dying in my arms whispering the name 'Aquitaine.'. And then this

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other man, this ex-soldier, this doctor, this scholar, tells me another story that ends with a 'recruiter' from Delavane killed with a scaling knife, his body thrown overboard into a school of sharks beyond the Stephanos whatever that is."

"The Aghios Stephanos," said the old man. "A lovely beach, far more popular than this one."

"Goddamn it, I am reaching, Mr. Beale, or Professor Beale, or General Beale! It's too much to absorb in two lousy days! Suddenly I don't have much confidence. I feel way beyond my depth let's face it, overwhelmed and underqualified . . . and damned frightened."

"Then don't overcomplicate things," said Beale. "I used to say that to students of mine more often than I can remember. I would suggest they not look at the totality that faced them, but rather at each thread of progression, following each until it met and entwined with another thread, and then another, and if a pattern did not become clear, it was not their failure but mine. One step at a time, Mr. Converse."

"You're one hell of a Mr. Chips. I would have

dropped the course."

"I'm not saying it well. I used to say it better. When you teach history, threads are terribly important."

"When you practice law, they're everything."

"Go after the threads, then, one at a time. I'm certainly no lawyer, but can't you approach this as an attorney whose client is under attack by forces that would violate his rights cripple his manner of living, deny his pursuit of peaceful existence in essence, destroy him?"

"Not likely," replied Joel. "I've got a client who won't talk to me, won't see me, won't even tell me who he is."

"That's not the client I had in mind."

"Who else? It's his money."

"He's only a link to your real client. "

"Who's that?"

"What's left of the civilized world, perhaps."

Joel studied the old scholar in the shimmering light. "Did you just say something about not looking at totalities but at threads? You scare the hell out of me."

Beale smiled. "I could accuse you of misplaced concreteness, but I won't."

"That's an antiquated phrase. If you mean out-of-context say it, and I'll deny it. You're securely in well-placed contradiction, Professor."

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"Good heavens, you were chosen carefully. You won't even let an old man get away with an academic bromide."

Converse smiled back. "You're a likable fellow, General or Doctor. I'd hate to have met you across a table if you'd taken up law."

"That could truly be misplaced confidence," said Edward Beale, his smile gone. "You're only about to begin."

"But now I know what to look for. One thread at a time until the threads meet and entwine, and the pattern's there for everyone to see. I'll concentrate on export licenses, and whoever's shuffling the controls, then connect three or four names with each other and trace them back to Delavane in Palo Alto. At which point we blow it apart legally. No martyrs, no causes, no military men of destiny crucified by

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munitions transfer we think is directly related to him. It might be worth a try. If we're right, it's a microcosm of what they intend doing everywhere."

"Is it in here?" asked Converse, tapping the manila envelope containing the dossiers.

"No, it came to light only this morning early this morning. I don't imagine you listened to the news broadcasts."

"I don't speak any language but English. If I heard a news program I wouldn't know it. What happened?"

"All Northern Ireland is on fire, the worst riots the most savage killing in fifteen years. In Belfast and Ballyciare, Dromore and in the Mourne Mountains, outraged vigilantes on both sides are roaming the streets and the hills, firing indiscriminately, slaughtering in their anger everything that moves. It's utter chaos. The Ulster government is in panic, the parliament tied down, emotionally disrupted, everyone trying to find a solution. That solution will be a massive infusion of troops and their commanders."

"What's it got to do with Bertholdier?"

"Listen to me carefully," said the scholar, taking a step forward. "Eight days ago a munitions shipment containing three hundred cases of cluster bombs and two thousand cartons of explosives was air-freighted out of Beloit, Wisconsin. Its destination was Tel Aviv by way of Montreal, Paris, and Marseilles. It never arrived, and an Israeli trace employing the Mossad showed that only the cargo's paperwork reached

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Marseilles, nothing else. The shipment disappeared in either Montreal or Paris, and we're convinced it was diverted to provisional extremists again on both sides in Northern Ireland."

"Why do you think so?"

The first casualties over three hundred men, women, and children were killed or severely wounded, ripped to shreds by cluster bombs. It's not a pleasant way to die, but perhaps worse to be hurt the bombs tear away whole sections of the body. The reactions have been fierce and the hysteria's spreading. Ulster's out of control, the government paralysed. All in the space of one day, one single day, Mr. Converse!"

"They're proving to themselves they can do it," said Joel quietly, the fear in his throat.

Precisely," agreed Beale. it's a test case, a microcosm of the full-scale horror they can bring

about."

Converse frowned. "Outside of the fact that Bertholdier lives in Paris, what ties him to the shipment?"

"Once the plane crossed into France, the French insurers were a firm in which Bertholdier is a director. Who would be less suspect than a company that had to pay for the loss a company, incidentally, that has access to the merchandise it covers? The loss was upward of four million francs, not so immense as to create headlines, but entirely sufficient to throw off suspicion. And one more lethal delivery is made mutilation, death, and chaos to follow."

"What's the name of the insurance company?"

"Compagnie Solidaire. It would be one of the operative words, I'd think. Solidaire, and perhaps Beloit and Belfast."

"Let's hope I get to confront Bertholdier with them. But if I do, I've got to say them at the right time. I'll catch the plane from Athens in the morning."

"Take the urgent good wishes of an old man with you, Mr. Converse. And urgent is the appropriate word. Three to five weeks, that's all you've got before everything blows apart. Whatever it is, wherever it is, it will be Northern Ireland ten thousand times more violent. It's real and it's coming."

Valerie Charpentier woke up suddenly, her eyes wide, her face rigid, listening intently for sounds that might break the dark silence around her and the slap of the waves in the distance. Any second she expected to hear the shattering bell

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of the alarm system that was wired into every window and door of the house.

It did not come, yet there had been other sounds, intrusions on her sleep, penetrating enough to wake her. She pulled the covers back and got out of bed, walking slowly, apprehensively, to the glass doors that opened onto her balcony which overlooked the rocky beach, the jetty, and the Atlantic Ocean beyond.

There it was again. The bobbing, dim lights were unmistakably the same, washing over the boat that was moored exactly where it had been moored before. It was the sloop that for two days had cruised up and down the coastline, always in sight, with no apparent destination other than this particular stretch of the Massachusetts shore. At twilight on the second evening it had dropped anchor no

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more than a quarter of a mile out in the water in front of her house. It was back. After three days it had returned.

Three nights ago she had called the police, who in turn reached the Cape Ann Coast Guard patrols, who came back with an explanation that was no more lucid than it was satisfactory. The sloop was a Maryland registry, the owner an officer in the United States Army, and there were no provocative or suspicious movements that warranted any official action.

"I'd call it damned provocative and suspicious," Val had said firmly. "When a strange boat sails up and down the same stretch of beach for two days in a row, then parks in front of my house within shouting distance shouting distance being swimming distance."

"The water rights of the property you leased don't extend beyond two hundred feet, ma'am" had been the official reply. "There's nothing we can do."

At the first light of the next morning, however, Valerie knew that something had to be done. She had focused her binoculars on the boat, only to gasp and move back away from the glass doors. Two men had been standing on the deck of the sloop, their own binoculars far more powerful than hers directed at the house, at the bedroom upstairs. At her.

A neighbor down the beachside cul-de-sac had recently installed an alarm system. She was a divorced woman too, but with a hostile ex-husband and three children; she needed the alarm. Two phone calls and Val was speaking to the owner of Watchguard Security. A temporary system had been

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hooked up that day while a permanent installation was being designed.

A bell not shatteringly loud but soft and gentle. It was the quiet clanging of a ship's bell out on the dark water, its clapper swinging with the waves. It was the sound that had awakened her, and she felt relieved yet strangely disturbed. Men out on the water at night who intended harm did not announce their presence. On the other hand, those same men had come back to her house, the boat being only several hundred yards offshore. They had returned in the darkness, the moon blocked by a sky thick with clouds, no moonlight to guide them. It was as if they wanted her to know they were there and they were watching. They were waiting.

For what? What was happening to her? A week ago her phone had gone dead for seven hours, and when she had called the telephone company from her friend's house, supervisor in the service

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department told her he could find no malfunctions.
The line was operative.

"Maybe for you, but not for me, and you're not
paying the bills."

She had returned home; the line was still dead.
A second, far angrier phone call brought the same
response. No malfunctions. Then two hours later the
dial tone was inexplicably there, the phone working.
She had put the episode down to the rural telephone
complex having less than the best equipment. She
did not know what explanation there could be for
the sloop now eerily bobbing in the water in front of
her house.

Suddenly, in the boat's dim light, she could see a
figure crawl out of the cabin. For a moment or two
it was hidden in the shadows, then there was a brief
flare of intense light. A match. A cigarette. A man
was standing motionless on the deck smoking a
cigarette. He was facing her house, as if studying it.
Waiting.

Val shivered as she dragged a heavy chair in
front of the balcony door but not too close, away
from the glass. She pulled the light blanket off the
bed and sat down, wrapping it around her, staring
out at the water, at the boat, at the man. She knew
that if that man or that boat made the slightest move
toward shore she would press the buttons she had
been instructed to press in the event of an
emergency. When activated, the huge circular alarm
bells both inside and outside would be
ear-piercing, erupting in concert, drowning

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out the sound of the surf and the waves crashing on
the jetty. They could be heard thousands of feet
away the only sound on the beach, frightening,
overwhelming. She wondered if she would cause
them to be heard tonight this morning.

She would not panic. Joel had taught her not to
panic, even when she thought a well-timed scream
was called for on the dark streets of Manhattan.
Every now and then the inevitable had happened.
They had been confronted by drug addicts or punks
and Joel would remain calm icily calm moving
them both back against a wall and offering a cheap,
spare wallet he kept in his hip pocket with a few
bills in it. God, he was ice! Maybe that was why no
one had ever actually assaulted them, not knowing
what was behind that cold, brooding look.

"I should have screamed!" she once had cried.

"No," he had said. "Then you would have
frightened him, panicked him. That's when those
bastards can be lethal."

Was the man on the boat lethal were the men

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on the boat deadly? Or were they simply novice sailors hugging the coastline, practicing tacks, anchoring near the shore for their own protection curious, perhaps concerned, that the property owners might object? An Army officer was not likely to be able to afford a captain for his sloop, and there were marinas only miles away north and south marinas without available berths but with men who could handle repairs.

Was the man out on the boat smoking a cigarette merely a landlocked young officer getting his sailing legs, comfortable with a familiar anchor away from deep water? It was possible, of course anything was possible, and summer nights held a special kind of loneliness that gave rise to strange imaginings. One walked the beach alone and thought too much.

Joel would laugh at her and say it was all those demons racing around her artist's head in search of logic. And he would undoubtedly be right. The men out on the boat were probably more up-tight than she was. In a way they were trespassers who had found a haven in sight of hostile natives; one inquiry of the Coast Guard proved it. And that clearance, as it were, was another reason why they had returned to the place where, if not welcome, at least they were not harassed. If Joel were with her, she knew exactly what he would do. He would go down to the beach and shout across the water to their temporary neighbors and ask them to come in for a drink.

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Dear Joel, foolish Joel, ice-cold Joel There were times you were comforting when you were comfortable. And amusing, so terribly amusing even when you weren't comfortable. In some ways I miss you, darling. But not enough, thank you.

And yet why did the feeling the instinct, perhaps persist? The small boat out on the water was like a magnet, pulling her toward it, drawing her into its field, taking her where she knew she did not want to go.

Nonsense! Demons in search of logic! She was being foolish foolish Joel, ice-cold Joel stop it, for Cod's sake! Be reasonable!

Then the shiver passed through her again. Novice sailors did not navigate around strange coastlines at night.

The magnet held her until her eyes grew heavy and troubled sleep came.

She woke up again, startled by the intense sunlight streaming through the glass doors, its warmth enveloping her. She looked out at the water. The boat was gone and she wondered for a

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moment whether it had really been there.

Yes, it had. But it was gone.

The 747 lifted off the runway at Athens' Helikon Airport, soaring to the left in its rapid ascent. Below in clear view, adjacent to the huge field, was the U.S. Naval Air Station, permitted by treaty although reduced in size and in the number of aircraft during the past several years. Nevertheless, far-reaching, jet-streamed American craft still roamed the Mediterranean, Ionian and Aegean seas, courtesy of a resentful yet nervous government all too aware of other eyes to the north. Staring out the window, Converse recognized the shapes of familiar equipment on the ground. There were two rows of Phantom F-4T's and A-6E's on opposite sides of the dual strip updated versions of the F-4G's and A-6A's he had flown years ago.

It was so easy to slip back, thought Joel, as he watched three Phantoms break away from the ground formation; they

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would head for the top of the runway, and another patrol would be in the skies. Converse could feel his hands tense, in his mind he was manipulating the thick, perforated shaft, reaching for switches, his eyes roaming the dials, looking for right and wrong signals. Then the power would come, the surging force of pressurised tons beside him, behind him, himself encased in the center of a sleek, shining beast straining to break away and soar into its natural habitat. Final check all in order; cleared for takeout: Release the power of the beast, let it free. Roll Faster, faster; the ground is a blur, the carrier deck a mass of passing "ray, blue sea beyond, blue sky above. Let it free! Let me free!

He wondered if he could still do it, if the lessons and the training of boy and man skill held. After the Navy during the academic years in Massachusetts and North Carolina, he had frequently gone to small airfields and taken up single-engined aircraft just to get away from the pressures, to find a few minutes of blue freedom, but there were no challenges, no taming of all-powerful beasts. Later still, it had all stopped for a long, long time. There were no airfields to visit on weekends, no playing around with trim company planes; he had given his promise. His wife had been terrified of his flying. Valerie could not reconcile the hours he had flown civilian and in combat with her own evaluation of the averages. And in one of the few gestures of understanding in his marriage, he had given his word not to climb into a cockpit. It had not bothered him until he knew they knew the marriage had gone sour at which point he had begun driving out to a field called Teterboro in New Jersey every chance he could find and flown whatever was available, anytime, any hour. Still,

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even then especially then there had been no challenges, no beasts other than himself.

The ground below disappeared as the 747 stabilized and began the climb to its assigned altitude. Converse turned away from the window and settled back in his seat. The lights were abruptly extinguished on the NO SMOKING sign, and Joel took out a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket. Extracting one, he snapped his lighter, and the smoke diffused instantly in the rush of air from the vents above. He looked at his watch it was 12:20. They were due at Orly Airport at 3:35, French time. Allowing for the zones, it was a three-hour flight, and during those three hours he would commit to memory everything he could about General Jacques-Louis Bertholdier if

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Beale and the dead Halliday were right, the arm of Aquitaine in Paris.

At Helikon he had done something he had never done before, something that had never occurred to him, an indulgence that was generally attributed to romantic fiction or movie stars or rock idols. Fear and caution had joined with an excess of money, and he had paid for two adjoining seats in first class. He wanted no one's eyes straying to the pages he would be reading. Old Beale had made it frighteningly clear on the beach last night: if there was the remotest possibility that the materials he carried might fall into other hands

in any other hands he was to destroy them at all costs. For they were in-depth dossiers on men who could order multiple executions by placing a single phone call.

He reached down for his attache case, the leather handle still dark from the sweat of his grip since Mykonos early that morning. For the first time he understood the value of a device he had learned about from films and novels. Had he been able to chain the handle of his attache case to his wrist, he would have breathed far more comfortably.

Jacques-Louis Bertholdier, age fifty-nine, only child of Alphonse and Marie-Therese Bertholdier, was born at the military hospital in Dakar. Father a career officer in the French Army, reputedly autocratic and a harsh disciplinarian. Little is known about the mother; it is perhaps significant that Bertholdier never speaks of her, as if dismissing her existence. He retired from the Army four years ago at the age of fifty-five, and is now a director of Juneau et Cie., a conservative firm on the Bourse des Valeurs, Paris's stock exchange.

The early years appear to be typical of the life of a commanding officer's son, moving from post to post, accorded the privileges of the father's rank and

The Aquitaine Progression influence. He was used to servants and fawning military personnel. If there was a difference from other officers' sons, it was in the boy himself. It is said that he could execute the full-dress manual-of-arms by the time he was five and at ten could recite by rote the entire book of regulations.

In 1938 the Bertholdiers were back in Paris, the father a member of the General Staff. This was a cha

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otic time, as the war with Germany was imminent. The elder Bertholdier was one of the few commanders aware that the Maginot could not hold; his outspokenness so infuriated his fellow officers that he was transferred to the field, commanding the Fourth Army, stationed along the northeastern border.

The war came and the father was killed in the fifth week of combat. Young Bertholdier was then sixteen years old and going to school in Paris.

The fall of France in June of 1940 could be called the beginning of our subject's adulthood. Joining the Resistance first as a courier, he fought for four years, rising in the underground's ranks until he commanded the Calais-Paris sector. He made frequent undercover trips to England to coordinate espionage and sabotage operations with the Free French and British intelligence. In February of 1944, De Gaulle conferred on him the temporary rank of major. He was twenty years of age.

Several days prior to the Allied occupation of Paris, Bertholdier was severely wounded in a street skirmish between the Resistance fighters and the retreating German troops. Hospitalized, he was relieved of further activity for the remainder of the European war. Following the surrender he was appointed to the national military academy at Saint-Cyr, a compensation deemed proper by De Gaulle for the young hero of the underground. Upon graduation he was elevated to the permanent rank of captain. He was twenty-four and given successive commands in the Dra Hamada, French Morocco; Algiers; then across the world to the garrisons at Haiphong, and finally the Allied sectors in Vienna and West Berlin. (Note this last post with respect to the following information on Field Marshal Erich Leifhelm. It was where they first met and were friends, at first openly but subsequently they denied the relationship after both had resigned from military service.)

Putting Erich Leifhelm aside for the moment, Converse thought about the young legend that was Jacques-Louis Bertholdier. Though Joel was as unmilitary as any civilian could be, in an odd way he could identify with the military

phenomenon described in these pages. Although no hero, he had been accorded a hero's return from a war in which very few were so acclaimed, these generally coming from the ranks of those who had endured capture more than they had fought. Nevertheless, the attention the sheer attention that led to privileges was a dangerous indulgence. Although initially embarrassed, one came to accept it all, and then to expect it all. The recognition could be heady, the privileges soon taken for granted. And when the attention began to dwindle away, a certain anger came into play; one wanted it all back.

These were the feelings of someone with no hunger for authority success, yes; power, no. But what of a man whose whole being was shaped by the fabric of authority and power, whose earliest memories were of privilege and rank, and whose meteoric rise came at an incredibly young age? How does such a man react to recognition and the ever-increasing spectrum of his own ascendancy? One did not lightly take away much from such a man; his anger could turn into fury. Yet Bertholdier had walked away from it all at fifty-five, a reasonably young age for one so prominent. It was not consistent. Something was missing from the portrait of this latter-day Alexander. At least so far.

Timing played a major part in Bertholdier's expanding reputation. After posts in the Dra Hamada and pre-crisis Algiers, he was transferred to French Indochina, where the situation was deteriorating rapidly for the colonial forces, then engaged in violent guerrilla warfare. His exploits in the field were instantly the talk of Saigon and Paris. The troops under his command provided several rare but much needed victories, which although incapable of altering the course of the war convinced the hard-line militarists that the inferior Asian forces could be defeated by superior Gallic courage and strategy; they needed only the materials withheld by Paris. The surrender at Dienbienphu was bitter medicine for those men who claimed that traitors in the Quai d'Orsay had brought about France's humiliation. Although Colonel Bertholdier emerged from the defeat as one of the few heroic figures, he was wise enough or cautious enough to keep his own counsel and did not, at least in appearance, join the "hawks."

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Many say that he was waiting a signal that never came. Again he was transferred, serving tours in Vienna and West Berlin.

Four years later, however, he broke the mold he had so carefully constructed. In his
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own words, he was 'infuriated and disillusioned' by De Gaulle's accords with the independence-seeking Algerians; he fled to the land of his birth, North Africa, and joined General Raoul Salan's rebellious OAS, which violently opposed policies it termed betrayals. During this revolutionary interim of his life he was implicated in an assassination attempt on De Gaulle. With Salan's capture in April of 1962, and the insurrectionists' collapse, once again Bertholdier emerged from defeat stunningly intact. In what can only be described as an extraordinary move and one that has never really been understood De Gaulle had Bertholdier released from prison and brought to the Elysee. What was said between the two men has never been revealed, but Bertholdier was returned to his rank. De Gaulle's only comment of record was given during a press conference on May 4, 1962. In reply to a question regarding the reinstated rebel officer, he said (verbatim translation): "A great soldier-patriot must be permitted and forgiven a single misguided interlude. We have conferred. We are satisfied." He said no more on the subject.

For seven years Bertholdier was stationed at various influential posts, rising to the rank of general; more often than not he was the chief military charge d'affaires at major embassies during the period of France's participation in the Military Committee of NATO. He was frequently recalled to the Quai d'Orsay, accompanying De Gaulle to international conferences, always visible in newspaper photographs, usually within several feet of the great man himself. Oddly enough, although his contributions appear to have been considerable, after these conferences or summits he was invariably sent back to his previous station while internal debates continued and decisions were reached without him. It was as though he was constantly being groomed but never summoned for the critical post. Was that ultimate

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summons the signal he had been waiting for seven years before at Dienbienphu? It is a question for which we have no answer here, but we believe it's vital to pursue it.

With De Gaulle's dramatic resignation after the rejection of his demands for constitutional reform in 1969, Bertholdier's career went into an eclipse. His assignments were far from the canyons of power and remained so until his resignation. Research into bank and credit-card references as well as passenger manifests shows that during the past eighteen months our subject made trips to the following: London, 3; New York, 2; San Francisco, 2; Bonn, 3;

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Johannesburg, 1; Tel Aviv, 1 (combined with Johannesburg). The pattern is clear. It is compatible with the rising geographical pressure points of General Delavane's operation.

Converse rubbed his eyes and rang for a drink. While waiting for the Scotch he scanned the next few paragraphs, his memory of the man now jogged; the information was familiar history and not terribly relevant. Bertholdier's name had been put forward by several ultraconservative factions, hoping to pull him out of the military into the political wars but nothing had come of the attempts. The ultimate summons had passed him by; it never came. Currently, as a director of a large firm on the Paris stock exchange, he is basically a figurehead capable of impressing the wealthy and keeping the socialistically inclined at bay by the sheer weight of his own legend.

He travels everywhere in a company limousine (read: staff car), and wherever he goes his arrival is expected, the proper welcome arranged. The vehicle is a dark-blue American Lincoln Continental, License Plate 100-1. The restaurants he frequents are: Taillevent, the Ritz, Julien, and Lucas-Carton. For lunches, however, he consistently goes to a private club called L'Etalon Blanc three to four times a week. It is a very-off-the-track establishment whose membership is restricted to the highest-ranking military, what's left of the rich nobility, and wealthy

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fawners who, if they can't be either, put their money on both so as to be in with the crowd.

Joel smiled; the editor of the report was not without humor. Still, something was missing. His lawyer's mind looked for the lapse that was not explained. What was the signal Bertholdier had not been given at Dienbienphu? What had the imperious De Gaulle said to the rebellious officer, and what had the rebel said to the great man? Why was he consistently accommodated but only accommodated never summoned to power? An Alexander had been primed, forgiven elevated, then dropped? There was a message buried in these pages, but Joel could not find it.

Converse reached what the writer of the report considered relevant only in that it completed the portrait, adding little, however, to previous information.

Bertholdier's private life appears barely pertinent to the activities that concern us. His marriage was one of convenience in the purest La Rochefoucauld sense: it was socially, professionally and financially beneficial for both parties. Moreover, it appears to have been solely a business arrangement. There have been no children, and although Mme. Bertholdier appears frequently at her husband's

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side for state and social occasions, they have rarely been observed in close conversation. Also, as with his mother, Bertholdier has never been known to discuss his wife. There might be a psychological connection here, but we find no evidence to support it. Especially since Bertholdier is a notorious womaniser, supporting at times as many as three separate mistresses as well as numerous peripheral assignations. Among his peers there is a sobriquet that has never found its way into print: La Grand Machin, and if the reader here needs a translation, we recommend drinks in Montparnasse.

On that compelling note the report was finished. It was a dossier that raised more questions than it answered. In broad strokes it described the whets and the bows but few of the whys; these were buried, and only imaginative speculation could unearth even the probabilities. But there were

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enough concrete facts to operate on. Joel glanced at his watch; an hour had passed. He had two more to reread, think, and absorb as much as possible. He had already made up his mind about whom he would contact in Paris.

Not only was Rene Mattilon an astute lawyer frequently called upon by Talbot, Brooks and Simon when they needed representation in the French courts, but he was also a friend. Although he was older than Joel by a decade, their friendship was rooted in a common experience, common in the sense of global geography, futility and waste. Thirty years ago Mattilon was a young attorney in his twenties conscripted by his government and sent to French Indochina as a legal officer. He witnessed the inevitable and could never understand why it cost so much for his proud, intractable-nation to perceive it. Too, he could be scathing in his comments about the subsequent American involvement.

"Mon Dieu! You thought you could do with arms what we could not do with arms and brains? Deraisonnable!"

It had become standard that whenever Mattilon flew to New York or Joel to Paris they found time for dinner and drinks. Also, the Frenchman was amazingly tolerant of Converse's linguistic limitations; Joel simply could not learn another language. Even Val's patient tutoring had fallen on deaf and dead ears and an unreceptive brain. For four years his ex-wife, whose father was French and whose mother was German, tried to teach him the simplest phrases but found him hopeless.

"How the hell can you call yourself an international lawyer when you can't be understood beyond Sandy Hook?" she had asked.

"Hire interpreters trained by Swiss banks and put

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them on a point system," he had replied. "They won't miss a trick."

Whenever he came to Paris, he stayed in a suite of two rooms at the opulent George V Hotel, an indulgence permitted by Talbot, Brooks and Simon, he had assumed, more to impress clients than to satisfy a balance sheet. The assumption was only half right, as Nathan Simon had made clear.

"You have a fancy sitting room," Nate had told him in his sepulchral voice. "Use it for conferences and you can avoid those ridiculously expensive French lunches and God forbid the dinners."

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"Suppose they want to eat?"

"You have another appointment. Wink and say it's personal; no one in Paris will argue."

The impressive address could serve him now, mused Converse, as the taxi weaved maniacally through the midafternoon traffic on the Champs-Élysées toward the Avenue George V. If he made any progress and he intended to make progress with men around Bertholdier or Bertholdier himself, the expensive hotel would fit the image of an unknown client who had sent his personal attorney on a very confidential search. Of course, he had no reservation, an oversight to be blamed on a substituting secretary.

He was greeted warmly by the assistant manager, albeit with surprise and finally apologies. No telexed request for reservations had come from Talbot, Brooks and Simon in New York, but naturally, accommodations would be found for an old friend. They were; the standard two-room suite on the second floor, and before Joel could unpack, a steward brought a bottle of the Scotch whisky he preferred, substituting it for the existing brand on the dry bar. He had forgotten the accuracy of the copious notes such hotels kept on repeating guests. Second floor, the right whisky, and no doubt during the evening he would be reminded that he usually requested a wake-up call for seven o'clock in the morning. It would be the same.

But it was close to five o'clock in the afternoon now. If he was going to reach Mattilon before the lawyer left his office for the day, he had to do so quickly. If Rene could have drinks with him, it would be a start. Either Mattilon was his man or he was not, and the thought of losing even an hour of any kind of progress was disturbing. He reached for the Paris directory on a shelf beneath the phone on the bedside table, he looked up the firm's number and dialed.

"Good Christ, Joel!" exclaimed the Frenchman. "I read about that terrible business in Geneva! It

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was in the morning papers and I tried to call
you Le Richemond, of course but they said you'd
checked out. Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. I was just there, that's all."

"He was American. Did you know him?"

"Only across a table. By the way, that crap about
his having something to do with narcotics was just
that. Crap. He was cornered, robbed, shot and set
up for postmortem confusion."

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"And an overzealous official leaped at the
obvious, trying to protect his city's image. I know; it
was made clear.... It's all so horrible. Crime, killing,
terrorism; it spreads everywhere. Less so here in
Paris, thank God."

"You don't need muggers, the taxi drivers more
than fill the bill. Except nastier, maybe."

"You are, as always, impossible, my friend! When
can we get together?"

Converse paused. "I was hoping tonight. After
you left the office."

"It's very short notice, mon ami. I wish you had
called before."

"I just got in ten minutes ago."

"But you left Geneva "

"I had business in Athens," interrupted Joel.

"Ah, yes, the money flees from the Greeks these
days. Precipitously, I think. Just as it was here."

"How about drinks, Rene. It's important."

It was blattilon's turn to pause; it was obvious he
had caught the trace of urgency in Converse's
brevity, in his voice. "Of course," said the
F'renchman. "You're at the George Cinq, I assume?"

"Yes."

"I'll be there as soon as I can. Say, forty-five
minutes."

"Thanks very much. I'll get a couple of chairs in the
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ery.

"I'll find you."

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That area of the immense marble-arched lobby outside the tinted glass doors of the George V bar is known informally as the "gallery" by habitués, its name derived from the fact that there is an art gallery narrowly enclosed within a corridor of clear glass on the left. However, just as reasonably, the name fits the luxurious room itself. The deeply cushioned cut-velvet chairs, settees, and polished low, dark tables that line the marble walls are beneath works of art mammoth tapestries from long-forgotten chateaux and huge heroic canvases by artists, both old and new. And the smooth stone of the floor is covered with giant Oriental rugs, while affixed to the high ceiling are a series of intricate chandeliers, throwing soft light through filigrees of lacelike gold.

Quiet conversations take place between men and women of wealth and power at these upholstered enclaves, in calcu

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lated shadows under spotlit paintings and woven cloth from centuries ago. Frequently they are opening dialogues, testing questions that as often as not are resolved in boardrooms peopled by chairmen and presidents, treasurers, and prides of lawyers. The movers and the shakers feel comfortable with the initial informality the uncommitted explorations of first meetings in this very formal room. The ceremonial environs somehow lend an air of ritualised disbelief; denials are not hard to come by later. The gallery also lives up to the implications of its name: within the fraternity of those who have achieved success on the international scene, it is said that if any of its members spend a certain length of time there, sooner or later he will run into almost everyone he knows. Therefore, if one does not care to be seen, he should go somewhere else.

The room was filling up, and waiters moved away from the raucous bar to take orders at the tables, knowing where the real money was. Converse found two chairs at the far end, where the dim light was even more subdued. He looked at his watch and was barely able to read it. Forty minutes had passed since his call to Rene, a shower taking up the time as it washed away the sweat-stained dirt of his all-day journey from Mykonos. Placing his cigarettes and lighter on the table, he ordered a drink from an alert waiter, his eyes on the marble entrance to the room.

Twelve minutes later he saw him. Mattilon walked energetically out of the harsh glare of the street lobby into the soft light of the gallery. He stopped for a moment, squinting, then nodded. He started down the canter of the carpeted floor, his eyes levered at Joel from a distance, a broad, genuine smile on his face. Rene Mattilon was in his mid to late fifties, but his stride, like his outlook,

The Aquitaine Progression was that of a younger man. There was about him that aura peculiar to successful trial lawyers; his confidence was apparent because it was the essence of his success, yet it was born of diligence, not merely ego and performance. He was the secure actor comfortable in his role his graying hair and blunt, masculine features all part of a calculated effect. Beyond that appearance, however, there was also something else, thought Joel, as he rose from his chair. Rene was a thoroughly decent man; it was a disarming conclusion. God knew they both had their flaws, but they were both decent men; perhaps that was why they enjoyed each other's company.

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A firm handshake preceded a brief embrace. The Frenchman sat down across from Converse as Joel signaled an attentive waiter. "Order in French, 'Joel said. "I'd end up getting you a hot fudge sundae."

"This man speaks better English than either of us. Campari and ice, please."

"Merci, monsieur. " The waiter left.

"Thanks again for coming over," said Converse. "I mean it."

"I'm sure you do.... You look well, Joel, tired but well. That shocking business in Geneva must give you nightmares."

"Not really. I told you, I was simply there."

"Still, it might have been you. The newspapers said he died while you held his head."

"I was the first one to reach him."

"How horrible."

"I've seen it happen before, Rene," said Converse quietly, no comment in his voice.

"Yes, of course. You were better prepared than most, I imagine."

"I don't think anyone's ever prepared.... But it's over. How about you? How are things?"

Mattilon shook his head, pinching his rugged, weather-beaten features into a sudden look of exasperation. "France is madness, of course, but we survive. For months and months now, there are more plans than are stored in an architect's library, but the planners keep colliding with each other in government hallways. The courts are full, business thrives."

"I'm glad to hear it." The waiter returned with the Campari; both men nodded to him, and then Mattilon fixed his eyes on Joel. "No, I really am,"

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Converse continued as the waiter walked away. "You hear so many stories."

"Is that why you're in Paris?" The Frenchman studied Joel. "Because of the stories of our so-called upheavals? They're not so earthshaking, you know, not so different from before. Not yet. Most private industry here was publicly financed through the government. But, naturally, not managed by government incompetents, and for that we pay. Is that what's bothering you, or more to the point, your clients?"

Converse drank. "No, that's not why I'm here. It's something else."

"You're troubled, I can see that. Your customary glibness

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doesn't fool me. I know you too well. So tell me, what's so important? That was the word you used on the telephone."

"Yes, I guess it was. It may have been too strong." Joel drained his glass and reached for his cigarettes.

"Not from your eyes, my friend. I see them and I don't see them. They're filled with clouds."

"You've got it wrong. As you said, I'm tired. I've been on planes all day, with some ungodly layovers." He picked up his lighter, snapping it twice until the flame appeared.

"We haggle over foolishness. What is it?"

Converse lit a cigarette, consciously trying to sound casual as he spoke. "Do you know a private club called L'Etalon Blanc?"

"I know it, but I couldn't get in the door," replied the Frenchman, laughing. "I was a young, inconsequential lieutenant worse, attached to the judge advocate essentially with our forces to lend an appearance of legality, but, mind you, only an appearance. Murder was a misdemeanor, and rape to be congratulated. L'Etalon Blanc is a refuge for les grands militaires and those rich enough or foolish enough to listen to their trumpets."

"I want to meet someone who lunches there three or four times a week."

"You can't call him?"

"He doesn't know me, doesn't know I want to meet him. It's got to be spontaneous."

"Really? For Talbot, Brooks and Simon? That sounds most unusual."

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"It is. We may be dealing with someone we don't want to deal with."

"Ahh, missionary work. Who is he?"

"Will you keep it confidential? I mean that, not a word to anyone?"

"Do I breathe? If the name is in conflict with something on our schedule, I will tell you and, frankly, be of no help to

you. "

"Fair enough. Jacques-Louis Bertholdier."

Mattilon arched his brows in mock astonishment, less in mockery than in astonishment. "The emperor has all his clothes," said the Frenchman, laughing quietly. "Regardless of who claims otherwise. You start at the top of the line, as they say in New York. No conflict, mon ami; he's not in our league as you also say."

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"Why not?"

"He moves with saints and warriors. Warriors who would be saints, and saints who would be warriors. Who has time for such facades?"

"You mean he's not taken seriously?"

"Oh, no, he is. Very seriously, by those who have the time and the inclination to move abstract mountains. He is a pillar Joel, grounded in heroic marble and himself immovable. He is the De Gaulle who never followed the original, and some say it is a pity."

"What do you say?"

Mattilon frowned, then cocked his head in a Gallic shrug. "I'm not sure. God knows the country needed someone, and perhaps Bertholdier could have stepped in and steered a far better course than the one we embarked upon, but the times were not right. The Elysee had become an imperial court, and the people were tired of royal edicts, imperial sermons. Well, we don't have those any longer; they've been supplanted by the dull, grey banalities of the workers' credo. Perhaps it is a pity, although he could skill do it, I imagine. He began his climb up Olympus when he was very young."

"Wasn't he part of the OAS? Salan's rebels in Algeria? They were discredited, called a national disgrace."

"That is a judgment even the intellectuals must reluctantly admit could be subject to revision. The

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way all of North Africa and the Middle East has
gone, a French Algeria could be a trump card
today." Mattilon paused and brought his hand to his
chin, his frown returning. "Why on earth would
Talbot, Brooks and Simon walk away from
Bertholdier? He may be a monarchist at heart, but
God knows he's honor personified. He's regal,
perhaps even pompous, but a very acceptable client
for all of that.'

"We've heard things," said Converse quietly,
shrugging now himself, as if to lessen the credibility
of hearsay evidence.

"Mon Dieu, not his women?" exclaimed Mattilon,
laughing. "Come now, when will you grow up?"

"Not women."

"What then?"

'Let's say some of his associates, his acquaintances.'

"I hope you make the distinction, loel. A man
like Bertholdier can choose his associates certainly,
but not his acquaintances. He walks into a room and
everyone wants to be his friend most claim he is a
friend."

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' That's what we want to find out. I want to
bring up some names, see whether they are
associates or unremembered acquaintances."

"Bien. Now you're making sense. I can help, I
will help we shall have lunch at L'Etalon Blanc
tomorrow and the next day. It is the middle of the
week and Bertholdier will no doubt choose one or
the other to dine there. If not, there's always the
day after."

"I thought you couldn't in the door?"

"Not by myself, no. But I know someone who
can, and he will be most obliging, I can assure you."

"Why?"

"He wishes to talk with me whenever and
wherever he can. He's a dreadful bore and,
unfortunately, speaks very little English numbers
mainly, and words like 'In and out,' or 'Over and
out,' and 'Dodger-Roger' or 'Roger-Dodger' and
'runway six' or 'Lift off five' and all manner of
incomprehensible phrases."

"A pilot?"

"He flew the first Mirages, brilliantly, I might
add, and never lets anyone forget it. I shall have to
be the interpreter between you, which at least
eliminates my having to initiate conversation. Do

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you know anything about the Mirage?"

"A jet's a jet," said Joel. "Pull and sweep out, what else is there?"

"Yes, he's used that one, too. Pull and sweep something. I thought he was cleaning a kitchen."

"Why does he always want to talk with you? I gather he's a member of the club."

"Very much so. We're representing him in a futile case against an aircraft manufacturer. He had his own private jet and lost his left foot in one of your crash landings "

' Not mine, pal."

"The door was jammed. He couldn't ground~ject where he wished to, when the plane's speed was sufficiently reduced for him to avoid a final collision."

"He didn't slap the right buttons."

"He says he did."

"There are at least two backups, including an instant manual, even on your equipment."

"We've been made aware of that. It's not the money, you understand; he's enormously wealthy. It's his pride. To lose

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brings into question his current or if you will, latter-day skills."

"They'll be a lot more in question under cross-examination. I assume you've told him that."

"Very gently. It's what we're leading up to."

"But in the meantime every conference is a hefty fee."

"We're also saving him from himself. If we did it swiftly or too crudely, he'd simply dismiss us and be driven to someone far less principled. Who else would take such a case? The government owns the plant now, and God knows it won't pay."

"Good point. What'll you tell him about me? About the club?"

Mattilon smiled. "That as a former pilot and an attorney you can bring an expertise to his suit that might be helpful. As to L'Etalon Blanc, I shall suggest it, tell him you'd be impressed. I shall describe you as something of an Attila the Hun of the skies. How does that appeal to you?"

"With very little impact."

"Can you carry it off?" asked the Frenchman. The question was sincere. "It would be one way to meet Bertholdier. My client and he are not simply acquaintances, they are friends."

"I'll carry it off."

"Your having been a prisoner of war will be most helpful. If you see Bertholdier enter, and express a desire to meet him, such requests are not lightly refused former POW's."

"I wouldn't press that too hard," said Converse.

"Why not?"

"A little digging could turn up a rock that doesn't belong in the soil."

"Oh?" Mattilon's brows arched again, neither in mockery nor in astonishment, simply surprise. "'Digging,' as you use it, implies something more than a spontaneous meeting with odd names spontaneously thrown about."

"Does it?" Joel revolved his glass, annoyed with himself, knowing that any argument would only enlarge the lapse. "Sorry, it was an instinctive reaction. You know how I feel about that topic."

"Yes, I do, and I forgot. How careless of me. I apologise."

"Actually, I'd just as soon not use my own name. Do you mind?"

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"You're the missionary, not I. What shall we call you?" The Frenchman was now looking hard at Converse.

"It doesn't matter."

Mattilon squinted. "How about the name of your employer, Simon? If you meet Bertholdier, it might appeal to him. Lieuc de Saint-Simon was the purest chronicler of the monarchy.... Henry Simon. There must be ten thousand lawyers named Henry Simon in the States."

"Simon it is."

"You've told me everything, my friend?" asked Rene, his eyes noncommittal. "Everything you care to."

"Yes, I have," said Joel, his own eyes a blue-white walk. "Let's have another drink."

"I think not. It's late and my current wife has

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malaise if her dinner is cold. She's an excellent cook, incidentally."

"You're a lucky man."

"Yes, I am." Mattilon finished his drink, placed the glass on the table and spoke casually. "So was Valerie. I shall never forget that fantastic canard ~ I'orange she fixed for us three or four years ago in New York. Do you ever hear from her?"

"Hear and see," answered Converse. "I had lunch with her in Boston last month. I gave her the alimony check and she picked up the tab. By the way, her paintings are beginning to sell."

"I never doubted that they would."

"She did."

"Unnecessarily.... I always liked Val. If you see her again, please give her my affectionate best."

"I wit."

Mattilon rose from the upholstered chair, his eyes no longer noncommittal. "Forgive me, I thought so often you were such a matched pair, I believe is the expression. The passions dwindle, of course, but not the de suite, if you know what I mean."

"I think I do, and speaking for both of us, I thank you_for the misplaced concretion.""

'ye ne comprends pas. "

"Forget it, it's antiquated doesn't mean anything. I'll give her your affectionate best."

"Merci. I'll phone you in the morning."

L'Etalon Blanc was a pacifist's nightmare. The club's heavy dark wood walls were covered with photographs and

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prints, interspersed with framed citations and glistening medals red ribbons and gold and silver disks cushioned on black velvet. The prints were a visual record of heroic carnage going back two centuries, while the evolution in warfare was shown in photographs as the horses and caissons and sabers became motorcycles, tanks, planes and guns, but the scenes were not all that different because the theme was constant. Victorious men in uniform were depicted in moments of glory, whatever suffering there might have been was strangely absent. These men did not lose no missing limbs or shattered faces here; these were the privileged warriors. Joel felt a profound fear as he studied the martial array. These were not ordinary men; they were hard and

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strong and the word 'capability' was written across
their faces. What had Beale said on Mykonos? What
had been the judgment of the Red Fox of Inchon, a
man who knew whereof he spoke?

. . . I know what they can do when we ask them to
do it Yet how much more could they do if they asked
it of themselves? wondered Joel. Without the
impediments of vacillating civilian authorities?

'Luboque has just arrived," said Mattilon quietly,
coming up behind Converse. "I heard his voice in the
lobby. Remember, you don't have to overdo it I'll
translate what I think is appropriate, anyway but
not profoundly when he makes one of his angry
remarks. Also laugh when he tells jokes; they're
dreadful, but he likes it."

"I'll do my best."

'I'll give you an incentive. Bertholdier has a
reservation for lunch. At his usual place, table
eleven, by the window."

"Where are we?" asked Joel, seeing the
Frenchman's pressed lips expressing minor triumph.

"Table twelve. Now."

"If I ever need a lawyer, I'll call you."

"We're terribly expensive. Come now, as they say
in all those wonderful films of yours, 'You're on,
Monsieur Simon.' Play the role of Attila but don't
overplay it."

"You know, Rene, for someone who speaks
English as well as you do, you gravitate to the tritest
phrases."

"The English language and American phrases
have very little in common, Joel, trite or otherwise."

"Smart ass."

"Need I say more? . . . Ahh, Monsieur Luboque,
Serge, mon ami!"

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Mattilon's third eye had spotted the entrance of
Serge Luboque; he turned around as the thumping
became louder on the floor. Luboque was a short,
slender man; his physique made one think of those
jet pilots of the early period when compactness was
a requirement. He was also very close to being a
caricature of himself. His short, waxed moustache
was affixed to a miniaturised face that was pinched
in an expression of vaguely hostile dismissal directed
at both no one and everyone. Whatever he had
been before, Luboque was now a poseur who knew
only how to posture. With all that was brilliant and
exciting buried in the past, he had only the memo-
ries, the rest was anger.

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"Et relief l'expert fudiefaire den Tom pannier aerJennes, -he said, looking at Converse and extending his hand.

'Serge is delighted to meet you and is sure you can help us," explained Mattilon.

'4I'II do what I can," said Converse. "And apologize for my not speaking French."

The lawyer obviously did so, and Luboque shrugged, speaking rapidly, incomprehensibly; the word anglais repeated several times.

"He, too, apologizes for not speaking English," said Mattilon, glancing at Joel, mischievousness in his look, as he added, "If he's lying, Monsieur Simon, we may both be placed against these decorated walls and shot."

"No way," said Converse, smiling. "Our executioners might dent the medals and blow up the pictures. Everybody knows you're lousy shots."

"Qutest-ce que vous citez?"

"Monsieur Simon tient a was mmercier pour le dejeuner, " said Mattilon, turning to his client. n en est. tref error il estime que l'o,~icier fran,cais eat l'un ties meilleurs du monde. "

"What did you say?"

"I explained," said the lawyer, turning again, "that you were honored to be here, as you believe the French military especially the officer corps to be the finest on earth."

"Not only lousy shots but rotten pilots," said Joel, smiling and nodding.

"Est-il oral que was aver participe ~ nombkuses missions en Asie d u Sud?" asked Luboque, his eyes fixed on Joel.

"I beg your pardon?"

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'He wants it confirmed that you are really an Attila of the skies, that you flew many missions."

"Quite a few," answered Joel.

"Beaucoup," said Mattilon.

Luboque again spoke rapidly, even more incomprehensibly, as he snapped his fingers for a steward.

"What now?"

"He'd rather tell you about his exploits in the interests of the case, of course."

"Of course," said Converse, his smile now fixed. "Lousy shots, rotten pilots and insufferable egos."

"Ah, but our food, our women, our incomparable understanding of life."

"There's a very explicit word in French one of the few I learned from my ex-wife but I don't think I should use it." Joel's smile was now cemented to his lips.

"That's right, I forgot," said Mattilon. "She and I would converse in notre belle lanque; it used to irritate you so Don't use it. Remember your incentive."

"Qu'est-ce que was cites encore? Notre belle lanqueP" Luboque spoke as a steward stood by his side.

"Notre ami, Monsieur Simon, suit an sours ~ I'ecole Berlitz et pourra ainsi s'entretenir directement aver vous. "

"Bien!"

"WhatP"

"I told him you would learn the Berlitz French so you could dine with him whenever you flew into Paris. You're to ring him up. Nod, smart ass."

Converse nodded.

And so it went. Point, noncounterpoint, non sequitur. Serge Luboque held forth during drinks in the warriors' playroom, Mattilon translating and advising Joel as to the expression to wear on his face as well as suggesting an appropriate reply.

Fmally Luboque stridently described the crash that had cost him his left foot and the obvious equipment failures for which he should be compensated. Converse looked properly pained and indignant, and offered to write a legal opinion for the court based on his expertise as a pilot of jet aircraft. Mattilon translated; Luboque beamed and rattled off a barrage of gargled vowels that Joel took for thanks.

"He's forever in your debt," said Rene.

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"Not if I write that opinion," replied Converse. "He locked himself in the cockpit and threw away the key."

"Write it," countered Mattilon, smiling. "You've just paid for my time. We'll use it as a wedge to

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open the door of retreat. Also, he'll never ask you to dinner when you're in Paris."

"When's lunch? I'm running out of expressions."

They marched in hesitant lockstep into the dining room, matching Luboque's gait as he thumped along on the hard, ornate parquet floor. The ridiculous three-sided conversation continued as wine was proffered a bottle was sent back by Luboque and Converse's eyes kept straying to the dining room's entrance.

The moment came: Bertholdier arrived. He stood in the open archway, his head turned slightly to his left as another man in a light-brown gabardine topcoat spoke without expression. The general nodded his head and the subordinate retreated. Then the great man walked into the room quietly but imperially. Heads turned and the man acknowledged the homage as a dauphin who will soon be king accepts the attentions of the ministers of a failing monarch. The effect was extraordinary, for there were no kingdoms, no monarchies, no lands to be divided through conquest to the knights of Crecy or anybody else, but this man of no royal lineage was tacitly being recognized goddamn it, thought Joel as an emperor in his own right.

Jacques-Louis Bertholdier was of medium height, between five nine and five eleven, certainly no more, but his bearing the sheer straight shaft of his posture, the breadth of his shoulders and the length of his strong slender neck made him appear much taller, much more imposing than another might. He was among his own, and here, indeed, he was above the others, elevated by their own consensus.

"Say something reverential," said Mattilon, as Bertholdier approached, heading for the table next to theirs. "Glance up at him and look tastefully awed. I'll do the rest."

Converse did as he was told, uttering Bertholdier's full name under his breath, but loud enough to be heard. He followed this quiet exclamation by leaning toward Mattilon and saying, "He's a man I've always wanted to meet."

There followed a brief exchange in French between Rene and his client, whereupon Luboque nodded, his expres

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sion that of an arrogant man willing to dispense a favor to a new friend.

Bertholdier reached his chair, the maitre d' and the dining room captain hovering on either side. The pavane took place less than four feet away.

"Mon general," said Luboque, rising.

"Serge," replied Bertholdier, stepping forward, hand extended a superior officer aware of a worthy subordinate's disability. "Comment pa van"

"Bien, Jacques. Et was?"

"Les temps vent bier etranges, mon amt."

The greetings were brief, and the direction of the conversabon was changed quickly by Luboque, who gestured at Converse as he continued speaking. InsUnchvely Joel got to his feet, posture straight, his eyes level, unblinking, staring at Bertholdier, his look as piercing as the general's professional but without awe. He had been right in an unexpected way. The shared Southeast Asian experience had validity for Jacques-Louis Bertholdier. And why not? He, too, had his memories. Mathlon was introduced aknost as an afterthought, and the soldier gave a brief nod as he crossed behind Rene to shake hands with Joel.

"A pleasure, Monsieur Simon," said Bertholdier, his English precise, his grip firm, a comrade acknowledging another comrade, the man's imperious charm instantly apparent.

"I'm sure you've heard it thousands of Ames, sir," said Joel, maintaining the steady, professional burn in his eyes, "but this is an occasion I never expected. If I may say so, General, it's an honor to meet you."

"It is an honor to meet you," rejoined Bertholdier. "You gentlemen of the air did all you could, and I know something about the circumstances. So many missions' I think it was easier on the ground!" The general laughed quietly.

"Gentlemen of the air" the man was unreal, thought Converse. But the connection was firm; it was real, he felt it, he knew it. The combination of words and looks had brought it about. So simple: a lawyer's ruse, taming an adversary in this case an enemy. The enemy.

"I ~onidn't agree with that, General; it was a lot~eaner in the air. But if there'd been more like you on the ground in Indochina, there never would have been a Dienbienphu."

"A flattering statement, but I'm not sure it could stand the test of reality."

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"I'm sure," said Joel quietly, clearly. "I'm convinced of

Luboque, who had been engaged in conversation by Mattilon, interrupted. "Mon general, voulez-vous vous joinder a nous?"

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"Pardonnez-moi. ye suds occupy aver mes visiteurs," answered Bertholdier, turning back to Converse. "I must decline Rene's invitation, I'm expecting guests. He tells me you are an attorney, a specialist in aircraft litigation."

"It's part of the broader field, yes. Air, ground, oceangoing craft we try to represent the spectrum. Actually, I'm fairly new at it not the expertise, I hope but the represen

'I see, 'said the general, obviously bewildered. "Are you in Paris on business?"

This was it, thought Joel. Above all, he would have to be subtle. The words but especially the eyes must convey the unspoken. "No, I'm just here to catch my breath. I flew from San Francisco to New York and on to Paris. Tomorrow I'll be in Bonn for a day or so, then off to Tel Aviv."

"How tiring for you." Bertholdier was now returning his stare.

"Not the worst, I'm afraid," said Converse, a half-smile on his lips. "After Tel Aviv, there's a night flight to Johannes

"Bonn, Tel Aviv, Johannesburg . . ." The soldier spoke softly. "A most unusual itinerary."

"Productive, we think. At least, we hope so."

"We?"

"My client, General. My new client."

"Deraisonnable!" cried Mattilon, laughing at something Luboque had said, and, just as obviously, telling Joel he could no longer keep his impatient litigant in conversation.

Bertholdier, however, did not take his eyes off Converse. "Where are you staying, my young fighter-pilot friend?"

"Young and not so young, General."

"Where?"

"The George Cinq. Suite two-three-five."

"A fine establishment."

"It's habit. My previous firm always posted me there."

"Posted? As in 'garrisoned'?" asked Bertholdier, a half-smile now on his lips.

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"An unconscious slip," said Joel. "But then again,
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it says it, doesn't it, sir?"

"It does, indeed.... Ah ha, my guests arrive!" The soldier extended his hand. "It's been a pleasure, Monsieur Simon."

Swift au revoir's accompanied nods and rapid handshakes as Bertholdier returned to his table to greet his luncheon companions. Through Mathlon, Joel thanked Luboque for the introduction; the disabled pilot gestured with both hands, palms up, and Converse had the distinct feeling that he had been baptised. The insane three-sided dialogue then resumed at high speed, and it was all Joel could do to maintain even minimum concentration.

Progress had been made; it was in Bertholdier's eyes, and he could feel those eyes straying over to him even while the conversation at both tables became animated. The general was diagonally to Converse's left; with the slightest turning of either face, the line of sight between them was direct. Twice it happened. The first time, Joel felt the forceful gaze resting on him as if magnified sunlight were burning into his flesh. He shifted his head barely an inch; their eyes locked, the soldier's penetrating, severe, questioning. The second time was a half-hour later, when the eye contact was initiated by Converse himself. Luboque and Mattilon were discussing legal strategy, and as if drawn by a magnet, Joel slowly turned to his left and watched Bertholdier, who was quietly, emphatically making a point with one of his guests. Suddenly, as a voice replied across the adjacent table, the general snapped his head in Converse's direction, his eyes no longer questioning, only cold and ice-like. Then just as abruptly, there was warmth in them; the celebrated soldier nodded, a half-smile on his face.

Joel sat in the soft leather chair by the window in the dimly lit sitting room; what light there was came from a fringed lamp on the desk. Alternately he stared at the telephone in front of the lamp and looked out the window at the weaving night traffic of Paris and the lights on the wide boulevard below. Then he focused entirely on the phone as he so frequently did when waiting for a call from a legal adversary he expected would capitulate, knowing that man or woman would capitulate. It was simply a question of time.

what he expected now was communication, not capitula

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tion a connection, the connection. He had no idea what form it would take, but it would come. It had to come.

It was nearly seven-thirty, four hours since he had left L'Etalon Blanc after a final, firm handshake exchanged with Jacques-Louis Bertholdier. The look

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in the soldier's eyes was unmistakable: If nothing else, Converse reasoned, Bertholdier would have to satisfy his sheer curiosity.

Joel had covered himself with the hotel's front desk, distributing several well-placed 100-franc notes. The tactic was not at all unusual in these days of national and financial unrest had not been for years, actually, even without the unrest. Visiting businessmen frequently chose to use pseudonyms for any number of reasons, ranging from negotiations best kept quiet to amorous engagements best left untraceable. In Converse's case, the use of the name Simon made it appear logical, if not eminently respectable. If Talbot, Brooks and Simon preferred that all communications be made in the surname of one of the senior partners, who could question the decisions Joel, however, carried the ploy one step further. After telephoning New York, he explained, he was told that his own name was not to be used at all; no one knew he was in Paris and that was the way his firm wanted it. Obviously, the delayed instructions accounted for the mix-up in the reservation, which was void at any rate. There was to be no billing; he would pay in cash, and since this was Paris, no one raised the slightest objection. Cash was infinitely preferable, delayed payment a national anathema.

Whether anyone believed this nonsense or not was irrelevant. The logic was sufficiently adequate and the franc notes persuasive; the original registration card was torn up and another placed in the hotel file. H. Simon replaced J. Converse. The permanent address of the former was a figment of Joel's imagination, a numbered house on a numbered street in Chicago, Illinois, said house and said street most likely nonexistent. Anyone asking or calling for Mr. Converse which was highly unlikely would be told no guest of that name was currently at the George V. Even Rene Mattilon was not a problem, for Joel had been specific. Since he had no further business in Paris, he was taking the six o'clock shuttle to London and staying with friends for several days before flying back to New York. He had thanked Rene profusely, telling the Frenchman that his firm's fears about Bertholdier had been groundless. During their quiet conversation he had brought

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up three key names with the general, and each had been greeted with a blank look from Bertholdier, who apologized for his faulty memory.

"He wasn't Iying," Joel had said.

"I can't imagine why he would," Mattilon had replied.

I can, Converse had thought to himself. They call it Aquitaine.

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A crack! There was a sudden sound, a harsh metallic snap, then another, and another the tumblers of a lock falling out of place, a knob being turned. It came from beyond the open door to the bedroom. Joel bolted forward in his chair; then, looking at his watch, just as rapidly he let out his breath and relaxed. It was the hour when the floor maid turned down the bed; the tension of the expected call and what it represented had frayed his nerves. Again he leaned back, his gaze resting on the telephone. When would it ring? would it ring?

"Pardon, monsieur, " said a feminine voice, accompanied by a light tapping on the open doorframe. Joel could not see the speaker.

"Yes?" Converse turned away from the silent phone, expecting to see the maid.

What he saw made him gasp. It was the figure of Bertholdier, his posture erect, his angled head rigid, his eyes a strange admixture of cold appraisal, condescension, and if Joel was not mistaken a trace of fear. He walked through the door and stood motionless; when he spoke his voice was a rippling sheet of ice.

"I was on my way to a dinner engagement on the fourth floor, Monsieur Simon. By chance, I remembered you were in this very hotel. You did give me the number of your suite. Do I intrude?"

"Of course not, General," said Converse, on his feet.

"Did you expect met"

"Not this way."

"But you did expect me?"

Joel paused. "Yes."

"A signal sent and received?"

Again Joel paused. "Yes."

You are either a provocatively subtle attorney or a strangely obsessed man. Which is it, Monsieur Simon?"

"If I provoked you into coming to see me and I was subtle about it, I'll accept that gladly. As to being obsessed, the word implies an exaggerated or unwarranted concern. Whatever

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concerns I have, I know damned well they're neither exaggerated nor unwarranted. No obsession, General. I'm too good a lawyer for that."

"A pilot cannot lie to himself. If he does so blindly, he crashes to his death."

"I've been shot down. I've never crashed through pilot error."

Bertholdier walked slowly to the brocaded couch against the wall. "Bonn, Tel Aviv, and Johannesburg," he said quietly as he sat down and crossed his legs. "The signal?"

"The signal."

"My company has interests in those areas."

"So does my client," said Converse.

"And what do you have, Monsieur Simon?"

Joel stared at the soldier. "A commitment, General."

Bertholdier was silent, his body immobile, his eyes searching "May I have a brandy?" he said finally. "My escort will remain in the corridor outside this door."

4

Converse walked to the dry bar against the wall, conscious of the soldier's gaze, wondering which tack the conversation would take. He was oddly calm, as he frequently was before a merger conference or a pretrial examination, knowing he knew things his adversaries were not aware of buried information that had surfaced through long hours of hard work. In the present circumstances there had been no work at all on his part, but the results were the same. He knew a great deal about the legend across the room named Jacques-Louis Bertholdier. In a word, Joel was prepared, and over the years he had learned to trust his on-the-feet instincts as he had once trusted those that had guided him through the skies years ago.

Also, as it was part of his job, he was familiar with the legal intricacies of import-export manipulations. They were a maze of often disconnected authorisations, easily made incomprehensible for the uninitiated, and during the next few minutes

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he intended to baffle this disciple of George Marcus Delavane warlord of Saigon until the soldier's trace of fear became something far more pronounced.

Clearances for foreign shipments came in a wide variety of shapes and colors, from the basic export license with specific bills of lading to those with the

The Aquitaine Progression less specific generic limitations. Then there were the more coveted licenses required for a wide variety of products subject to governmental reviews; these were usually shunted back and forth between vacillating departments until deadlines forced bureaucratic decisions often based on whose influence was the strongest or who among the bureaucrats were the weakest.

Finally, there was the most lethal authorisation of all, a document too frequently conceived in corruption and delivered in blood. It was called the End-User's Certificate, an innocuously named permit that was a license to ship the most abusive merchandise in the nation's arsenals into air and sea lanes beyond the controls of those who should have them.

In theory, this deadly equipment was intended solely for allied governments with shared objectives, thus the 'use' at the discretion of the parties at the receiving 'end' calculated death legitimised by a 'certificate' that obfuscated everyone's intentions. But once the equipment was en route, diversion was the practice. Shipments destined for the Bay of Haifa or Alexandria would find their way to the Gulf of Sidra and a madman in Libya, or an assassin named Carlos training killer teams anywhere from Beirut to the Sahara. Fictional corporations with nonexistent yet strangely influential officers operated through obscure brokers and out of hastily constructed or out-of-the-way warehouses in the U.S. and abroad. Millions upon millions were to be made; death was an unimportant consequence and there was a phrase for it all. Boardroom terrorism. It fit, and it would be Aquitaine's method. There was no other.

These were the thoughts the methods of operation that flashed through Converse's mind as he poured the drinks. He was ready; he turned and walked across the room.

"What are you seeking, Monsieur Simon?" asked Bertholdier, taking the brandy from Converse.

"Information, General."

"About what?"

"World markets expanding markets that my client

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might service. " Joel crossed back to the chair by the window and sat down.

"And what sort of service does he render?"

"He's a broker."

"Of what?"

"A wide range of products." Converse brought

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his glass to his lips; he drank, then added, "I think I mentioned them in general terms at your club this afternoon. Planes, vehicles oceangoing craft, munitions material. The spectrum."

"Yes, you did. I'm afraid I did not understand."

"My client has access k production and warehouse sources beyond anyone I've ever known or ever heard of."

"Very impressive. Who is he?"

"I'm not at liberty to say."

"Perhaps I know him."

"You might, but not in the way I've described him. His profile is so low in this area, it's nonexistent."

"And you won't tell me who he is," said Bertholdier

"It's privileged information."

"Yet, in your own words, you sought me out, sent a signal to which I responded, and now say you want information concerning expanding markets for all manner of merchandise, including Bonn, Tel Aviv, and Johannesburg. But you won't divulge the name of your client who will benefit if I have this information which I probably do not. Surely, you can't be serious."

"You have the information and, yes, I'm very serious. But I'm afraid you've jumped to the wrong conclusion."

"I have no fear of it at all. My English is fluent and I heard what you said. You came out of nowhere, I know nothing about you, you speak elusively of this unnamed influential man "

"You asked me, General," interrupted Joel firmly without raising his voice. "What I was seeking."

"And you said information."

"Yes, I did, but I didn't say I was seeking it from you."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Under the circumstances for the reasons you just mentioned you wouldn't give it to me anyway, and I'm well aware of that."

"Then what is the point of this shall I say, induced~onversation? I do not like my time trifled with, monsieur. "

"That's the last thing on earth we'd do I'd do."

"Please be specific."

"My client wants your trust. I want it. But we know it can't be given until you feel it's justified. In a few days a week at the outside I hope to prove that it is."

"By trips to Bonn, Tel Aviv Johannesburg?"

"Frankly, yes."

"Why?"

"You said it a few minutes ago. The signal."

Bertholdier was suddenly wary. He shrugged too casually; he was pulling back. "I said it because my company has considerable investments in those areas. I thought it was entirely plausible you had a proposition, or propositions, to make relative to those interests."

"I intend to have. '

"Please be specific," said the soldier, controlling his irritation.

"You know I can't," replied Joel. "Not yet."

"When?"

"When it's clear to you all of you that my client, and by extension myself, have as strong motives for being a part of you as the most dedicated among you."

"A part of my company? Juneau et Compagnie?"

"Forgive me, General, I won't bother to answer that."

Bertholdier glanced at the brandy in his hand, then back at Converse. "You say you flew from San Francisco."

"I'm not based there," Joel broke in.

"But you came from San Francisco. To Paris. Why were you there?"

"I'll answer that if for no other reason than to show you how thorough we are and how much more thorough others are. We traced I traced overseas shipments back to export licenses originating in the northern California area. The licensees were companies with no histories and warehouses with no records chains of four walls erected for brief, temporary periods of convenience. It was a mass of confusion leading nowhere and everywhere. Names on documents where no such people existed, documents themselves that came out of bureaucratic labyrinths virtually

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un-traceable rubber stamps, of official seals, and
signatures of authorisation where no authority was
granted. Unknowing middle-level personnel told to
expedite departmental clearances That's what I

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found in San Francisco. A morass of complex, highly
questionable transactions that could not bear
intense scrutiny."

Bertholdier's eyes were fixed, too controlled. "I
would know nothing about such things, of course,"
he said.

"Of course," agreed Converse. "But the fact that
my client does through me and the additional fact
that neither he nor I have any desire whatsoever to
call attention to them must tell you something."

"Frankly, not a thing."

"Please, General. One of the first principles of
free enterprise is to cripple your competition, step
in, and fill the void."

The soldier drank, gripping the glass firmly. He
lowered it and spoke. "Why did you come to me?"

"Because you were there."

"What?"

"Your name was there among the morass, way
down deep, but there."

Bertholdier shot forward. "Impossible! Preposterous!"

"Then why am I here? Why are you here?" Joel
placed his glass on the table by the chair, the
movement that of a man not finished speaking. "Try
to understand me. Depending upon which
government department a person's dealing with
certain recommendations are bound to be helpful.
You wouldn't do a damn thing for someone
appealing to Housing and Urban Development, but
over at the State Department's Munitions Controls
or at Pentagon procurements, you're golden."

"I have never lent my name to any such appeals."

"Others did. Men whose recommendations
carried a lot of weight, but who perhaps needed
extra clout."

"What do you mean? This 'clout.'"

"A final push for an affirmative
decision without any apparent personal
involvement. It's called support for an action
through viable second and third parties. For
instance, a memo might read: 'We' the
department, not a person 'don't know much about

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this, but if a man like General Bertholdier is favorably disposed, and we are informed that he is, why should we argue?"

"Never. It could not happen."

"It did," said Converse softly, knowing it was the moment to bring in reality to support his abstractions. He would be able to tell instantly if Beale was right, if this legend of France was responsible for the slaughter and chaos in the cities and

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towns of a violently upended Northern Ireland. "You were there, not often but enough for me to find you. Just as you were there in a different way when a shipment was air-freighted out of Beloit, Wisconsin, on its way to Tel Aviv. Of course it never got there. Somehow it was diverted to maniacs on both sides in Belfast. I wonder where it happened? Montreal? Paris? Marseilles? The Separatists in Quebec would certainly follow your orders, as would men in Paris and Marseilles. It's a shame a company named Solidaire had to pay off the insurance claim. Oh, yes, you're a director of the firm aren't you? And it's so convenient that insurance carriers have access to the merchandise they cover."

Bertholdier was frozen to the chair, the muscles of his face pulsating, his eyes wide, staring at Joel. His guilt was suppressed, but no less apparent for that control. "I cannot believe what you are implying. It's shocking and incredible!"

"I repeat, why am I here?"

"Only you can answer that, monsieur," said Bertholdier, abruptly getting to his feet, the brandy in his hand. Then slowly, with military precision, he leaned over and placed the glass on the coffee table; it was a gesture of finality the conference was over. "Quite obviously I made a foolish error," he continued, shoulders square again and head rigid, but now with a strained yet oddly convincing smile on his lips. "I am a soldier, not a businessman; it is a late direction in my life. A soldier tries to seize an initiative and I attempted to do just that; only, there was there is no initiative. Forgive me, I misread your signal this afternoon."

"You didn't misread anything, General."

"Am I contradicted by a stranger I might even say a devious stranger who arranges a meeting under false pretenses and proceeds to make outrageous statements regarding my honor and my conduct? I think not." As Bertholdier strode across the room toward the hallway door Joel rose from his chair. "Don't bother, monsieur, I'll let myself out. You've gone to enough trouble, for what purpose I haven't the faintest idea."

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"I'm on my way to Bonn," said Converse. "Tell your friends I'm coming. Tell them to expect me. And please, General, tell them not to prejudge me. I mean that."

"Your elliptical references are most annoying Lieutenant. It was 'lieutenant,' wasn't it? Unless you also deceived poor Luboque as well."

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"Whatever deception employed to meet you can only be for his benefit. I've offered to write a legal opinion for his case. He may not like it, but it'll save him a lot of pain and money. And I have not deceived you."

"A matter of judgment, I think." Bertholdier turned and reached for the outsized brass knob.

"Bonn, Germany," pressed Joel.

"I heard you. I haven't the vaguest notion what you "

"Leifhelm," said Converse quietly. "Erich Leifhelm."

The soldier's head turned slowly; his eyes were banked fires, the coals glowing, about to erupt at the merest gust of wind. "A name known to me, but not the man."

"Tell him I'm coming."

"Good night, monsieur," said Bertholdier, opening the door, his face ashen.

Joel raced into the bedroom, grabbed his suitcase and threw it on the luggage rack. He had to get out of Paris. Within hours, perhaps minutes, Bertholdier would have him watched, and if he was followed to an airport, his passport would expose the name Simon as a lie. He could not let that happen, not yet.

It was strange, unsettling. He had never had any reason to leave a hotel surreptitiously, and he was not sure he knew how to do it only that it had to be done. The altering of the registration card had been done instinctively, there were occasions when legal negotiations had to be kept quiet for everyone's benefit. But this was different it was abnormal. He had said to Beale on Mykonos that he was going to become someone he was not. It was an easy thing to say, not at all easy to do.

His suitcase packed, he checked the battery charge on his electric razor and absently turned it on, moving it around his chin, as he walked to the bedside telephone. He shut the switch off as he dialed, unsure of what he would say to the night concierge but nevertheless instinctively orienting his

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mind to a business approach. After initial remarks,
mutually flattering, the words came.

"There's an extremely sensitive situation, and my
firm is anxious that I leave for London just as soon
as possible and as discreetly as possible. Frankly,
I would prefer not to be seen checking out."

"Discretion, monsieur, is honored here, and haste is
a

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normal request. I shall come up and present your bill
myself. Say, ten minutes?"

"I've only one piece of luggage. I'll carry it, but
I'll need a cab. Not in front."

"Not in front, of course. The freight elevator,
monsieur. It connects below with our corridor for
deliveries. Arrangements will be made."

"I've made arrangements," said Bertholdier
harshly into the limousine's mobile phone, the glass
partition between him and the chauffeur tightly shut.
"One man remains in the gallery in sight of the
elevators, another in the cellars where the hotel
supplies are brought in. If he attempts to leave
during the night, it is the only other exit available to
him. I've used it myself on several occasions."

"This . . . is all most difficult to absorb." The
voice on the line spoke with a clipped British accent,
the speaker obviously astonished, his breathing
audible, a man suddenly afraid. "Are you sure?
Could there be some other linkage?"

"Imbecile! I repeat. He knew about the munitions
shipment from Beloit! He knew the routing, even the
method of theft. He went so far as to identify
Solidaire and my position as a board member! He
made a direct reference to our business associate in
Bonn! Then to Tel Aviv . . . Johannesburg! What
other linkage could there be?"

"Corporate entanglements, perhaps. One can't
rule them out. Multinational subsidiaries, munitions
investments, our associate in West Germany also sits
on several boards.... And the locations money pours
into them."

"What in the name of God do you think I'm
talking about? I can say no more now, but what I've
told you, my English flower, take it to be the worst!"

There was a brief silence from London. "I
understand," said the voice of a subordinate rebuked.

"I hope you do. Get in touch with New York. His
name is Simon, Henry Simon. He's an attorney from
Chicago. I have the address; it's from the hotel's
registration file." Bertholdier squinted under the

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glare of the reading lamp, haltingly deciphering the numbers and the numbered street written down by an assistant bell captain, well paid by one of the general's men to go into the office and obtain information on the occupant of suite two-three-five. "Do you have that?"

"Yes." The voice was now sharp, a subordinate about to

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redress a grievance. Was it wise to get it that way? A friend or a greedy employee might tell him someone was inquiring about him.

"Really, my British daffodil? An innocuous bellboy checking the registry so as to post a lost garment to a recent guest?"

Again the brief silence. ' Yes, I see. You know, Jacques, we work for a great cause a business cause, of course more important than either of us, as we did once years ago. I must constantly remind myself of that, or I don't think I could tolerate your insults."

And what would be your recourse, I'Anglais?"

'To cut your arrogant Frog balls off in Trafalgar Square and stuff them in a lion's mouth. The repository wouldn't have to be large; an ancient crack would do. I'll ring you up in an hour or so.'" There was a click and the line went dead.

The soldier lowered the mobile phone in his hand, and a smile slowly emerged on his lips. They were the best, all of them! They were the hope, the only hope of a very sick world.

Then the smile faded, the blood again draining from his face, arrogance turning into fear. What did this Henry Simon want, really want? Who was the unknown man with access to extraordinary sources planes, vehicles, munitions? What in God's name did they know?

The padded elevator descended slowly, its interior designed for moving furniture and luggage, its speed adjusted for room-service deliveries. The night concierge stood beside Joel, his face pleasantly impassive; in his right hand was the leather bourse containing a copy of Converse's bill and the franc notes covering it as well as a substantial gratuity for the Frenchman's courtesy.

A slight whirring sound preceded the stop; the panel light shone behind the letters sou-so~, and the heavy doors parted. Beyond in the wide hallway was a platoon of whitejacketed waiters, maids, porters and a few maintenance personnel commandeering tables racks of linens, luggage and assorted cleaning materials. Loud, rapid chatter,

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heightened by bursts of laughter and guttural
expletives, accompanied the bustling activity. At the
sight of the concierge there was a perceptible
lessening of volume and an increase of concentrated
move

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meet, along with nods and fawning smiles directed at
the man who, with the flick of a pen, could eliminate
their jobs.

"If you'll just point me in the right direction, I'll
be on my way," said Joel, not wishing to call further
attention to himself in the company of the concierge.
'I've taken up too much of your time."

"Merct. If you will follow that corridor, it will lead
to the service exit," replied the Frenchman, pointing
to a hallway on the left, beyond the bank of
elevators. "The guard is at his desk and is aware of
your departure. Outside in the alley, turn right and
walk to the street; your taxi is waiting for you."

"I appreciate my firm appreciates your
cooperation. As I mentioned upstairs, there's nothing
really that secretive, or unusual just sensitive."

The hotel man's impassive countenance did not
change, except for a slightly sharper focus in his eyes.
"It is of no matter, monsieur, an explanation is not
required. I did not request it, and if you'll forgive
me, you should not feel an obligation to offer one.
Au revoir, Monsieur Simon."

"Yes, of course," said Converse, maintaining his
composure though he felt like a schoolboy
admonished for speaking out of turn, for offering an
answer when he had not been called upon. "See you
next time I'm in Paris."

"We await the day, monsieur. Bonsotr."

Joel turned quickly, making his way through the
uniformed crowd toward the hallway, apologising
whenever his suitcase made contact with a body. He
had just been taught a lesson, one he should not
have had to learn. He knew it in a courtroom and in
conference: Never explain what you don't have to.
Shut up. But this was not a court or a conference. It
was, it suddenly dawned on him, an escape, and the
realization was a little frightening, certainly very
strange. Or was it? Escape was in his vocabulary, in
his experience. He had tried it three times before in
his life years ago. And death had been everywhere.
He put the thought out of his mind and walked down
the corridor toward the large metal door in the
distance.

He slowed down; something was wrong. Ahead,
standing in front of the security desk talking to the
guard was a man in a light-colored topcoat. Joel had
seen him before but he did not know where; then the

man moved and Converse began to remember an image came back to him. Another man had moved the same way taking several steps backward before

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turning to disappear from an archway, and now he moved the same way to cross the corridor to lean against the wall. Was it the same man? Yes! It was the one who had accompanied Bertholdier to the dining-room entrance of L'Etalon Blanc. The subordinate who had taken leave of a superior then was here now under orders from that same superior.

The man looked up, the flash of recognition instantly in his eyes. Stretching, he raised himself to his full height and turned away, his hand slowly moving toward the fold in his coat. Converse was stunned. Was the man actually reaching for a gun? With an armed guard barely ten feet away? It was insane! Joel stopped; he considered racing back into the crowd by the elevators but knew it was pointless. If Bertholdier had posted a watchdog in the basement, others would be upstairs, in the corridors, in the lobby. He could not turn and run; there was no place to go, nowhere to hide. So he kept walking, now faster, directly toward the man in the light-brown topcoat, his mind confused, his throat tight.

"There you are!" he cried out loud, not sure the words were his. "The general told me where to find you!"

The man stood motionless, in shock, speechless. "Le general?" he said, barely above a whisper. "He . . . tell you?"

The man's English was not good, and that was very good. He could understand, but not well. Rapidly spoken words, persuasively delivered, might get them both out the door. Joel turned to the guard while angling his attache case into his companion's back. "My name's Simon. I believe the concierge spoke to you about me."

The juxtaposition of the name and the title was sufficient for the bewildered guard. He glanced at his papers, nodding. "One monsieur. Le concierge . . ."

"Come on!" Converse shoved the attache case into the man in the topcoat, propelling him toward the door. "The general's waiting for us outside. Let's go! Hurry up!"

"Le general . . . ?" The man's hands instinctively shot out at the crash bar of the exit door, in less than five seconds he and Joel were alone in the alley. "Que se passe-t-il? Où est le general?... where?"

"Here! He said to wait here. You. You're to wait here! Ici!"

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"Arre^tez!" The man was recovering. He stood his ground. Thrusting his left hand out, he pushed Converse back against the wall. With his right hand he reached into his overcoat.

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"Don't!" Joel dropped his attache case, gripping his suitcase and pulling it up in front of him, about to rush forward. He stopped. The man did not pull out a gun; instead, what he had was a thin rectangular object bound in black leather, from which a long metallic needle rose from the narrow flat top. An antenna . . . a radial

All thought was blurred for Converse, but he knew he had to act instantly only mobon counted. He could not permit the man to use that radio, alerting those with other radios elsewhere in the hotel. With a sudden surge of strength he rammed his suitcase into the man's knees, tearing the radio away with his left hand, whipping his right arm out and over the man's shoulder. He crooked his elbow around the Frenchman's neck as he spun on the pavement. Then without thinking, he yanked Bertholdier's soldier forward, so that both of them hurtled toward the wall, and crashed the man's head into the stone. Blood spread throughout the Frenchman's skull, matUng his hair and streaking down his face in deep-red rivulets. Joel could not think, he could not allow himself to think. If he did, he would be sick and he knew it. Mobon, ma lion!

The man went limp. Converse angled the unconscious body by the shoulders, propelling it against the wall, shoving it away from the metal door and letting it drop in the farther shadows. He leaned down and picked up the radio; he snapped off the antenna and shoved the case into his pocket. He stood up, confused, frightened, trying to orient himself. Then, grabbing his attache case and suitcase, he raced breathlessly out of the alley, conscious of the blood that had somehow erupted over part of his face. The taxi was at the curb, the driver smoking a cigarette in the darkness, oblivious to the violence that had taken place only thirty yards away.

"De Gaulle Airport!" shouted Joel, opening the door and throwing his luggage inside. "Please, I'm in a hurry!" He lurched into the seat, gasping, his neck stretched above the cushioned rim, swallowing the air that would not fill his lungs.

The rushing lights and shadows that bombarded the interior of the cab served to keep his thoughts suspended, allowing his racing pulse to decelerate and the air to reach him, slowly drying the perspiration at his temples and his neck. He leaned forward, wanUng a cigarette but afraid he would vomit from the smoke trapped in his throat. He shut his eyes so tightly a thousand specks of white light assaulted the dark

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screen of his mind. He felt ill, and he knew it was not simply fear alone that had brought on the nausea. It was something else, something that was in and of itself as paralysing fear. He had committed an act of utter brutality, and it both shocked and appalled him. He had actually physically attacked a man, wanting to cripple him, perhaps kill him which he may very well have done. No matter why, he may have killed another human being! Did the presence of a hand-held radio justify a shattered skull? Did it constitute self-defence? Goddamn it, he was a man of words, of logic, not blood! Never blood, that was in the past, so long ago and so painful.

Those memories belonged to another time, to an uncivilized time, when men became what they were not in order to survive. Converse never wanted to go back. Above all things, he had promised himself he never would, a promise he made when the terror and the violence were all around him, at their shattering worst. He remembered so vividly, with such pain, the final hours before his last escape and the quiet, generous man without whom he would have died twenty feet down in the earth, a shaft in the ground designed for troublemakers.

Colonel Sam Abbott, US. Air Force, would always be a part of his life no matter how many years might separate them. At the risk of torture and death, Sam had crawled out at night and had thrown a crudely fashioned metal wedge down the "punishment hole", it was that primitive tool that allowed Joel to build a crude ladder out of earth and rock and finally to freedom. Abbott and he had spent the last twenty-seven months in the same camp, both officers trying to hold together what sanity there was. But Sam understood the burning inside Joel; the Colonel had stayed behind, and during those final hours before breakout, Joel was wracked by the thoughts of what might happen to his friend.

"Don't worry about me, sailor. Just keep your minimum wits about you and get rid of that wedge.

Take care, Sam.

You take care. This is the last shot you've got.

I know.

Joel moved over toward the door and rolled down the window several inches more to increase the rush of wind from the highway. Christ, he needed Sam Abbott's quiet objectivity now! His lawyer's mind told him to get hold of himself; he had

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to think and his thoughts had to stimulate whatever
imaginahon he had. First things first. Think! The
radio he had to get rid of the radio. But not at the
airport it might be found in the airport; it was
evidence, and worse, a means of tracing him. He
rolled the window further down and threw it out, his
eyes on the rearview mirror above the windshield.
The driver glanced up at him, saw the bloody face
but showed no alarm; Joel took repeated deep
breaths and then rolled the window back up. Think.
He had to think! Bertholdier expected him to go
from Paris to Bonn and when the general's soldier
was found and he had undoubtedly been found by
now all flights to Bonn would be watched, whether
the man was alive or dead.

He would buy a ticket for somewhere else,
someplace where connections to Cologne-Bonn were
accessible on a regular basis. As the stream of air
cooled his face it occurred to him to remove the
handkerchief from his breast pocket and wipe away
the moist blood that covered his right cheek and
lower chin.

'Scandinavian Air Icings," he said, raising his
voice to the driver. "SAS. Do you . . . comprehends?"

"Very clearly, monsieur," said the bereted man
behind the wheel in good English. ' Do you have a
reservation for Stockholm, Oslo, or Copenhagen?
They are different gates."

"I'm . . . I'm not sure."

"We have time, monsieur. At least fifteen minutes."

The voice over the telephone from London was
frigid, the words and the delivery an impersonal
rebuke. "There is no attorney by that name in
Chicago, and certainly not at the address you gave
me. In fact, the address does not exist. Do you have
something else to offer, or do we put this down as
one of your more paranoid fantasies, mon general?"

"You are a fool, I'Anglais, with no more
comprehension than a frightened rabbit. I heard what
I heard!"

"From whom? A nonexistent man?"

"A nonexistent man who has put my aide in a
hospital! A fractured skull with a great loss of blood
and severe brain damage. He may not live, and if he
does, he will no doubt be a vegetable. Speak to me
not of fantasies, daffodil The man is real."

"Are you serious?"

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'~Call the hospital! L'hospital Saint-Jerome. Let
the doctors tell you."

"All right, all right, compose yourself. We must think."

"I am perfectly composed," said Bertholdier, getting up from the desk in his study and carrying the phone to the window, the extension cord snaking across the floor. He looked out; it had begun to rain, the street lights diffused in the spattered glass. "He's on his way to Bonn," continued the general. "It was his next stop, he was very clear about it."

"Intercept him. Call Bonn, reach Cologne, give them his description. How many flights can there be from Paris with a lone American on board? Take him at the airport. "

Bertholdier sighed audibly into the phone, his tone one of discouragement bordering on disgust. "It was never my intention to take him. It would serve no purpose and probably cut us off from what we have to learn. I want him followed. I want to know where he goes, whom he calls, whom he meets with; these are the things we must learn."

"You said he made a direct reference to our associate. That he was going to reach him."

"Not our people. H's people."

"I'll say it again," insisted the voice from London. "Call Cologne, reach Bonn. Listen to me, Jacques, he can be found, and once he is, he can be followed."

"Yes, yes, I'll do as you My, but it may not be as easy as you think. Three hours ago I would have thought otherwise, but that was before I knew what he was capable of. Someone who can take another man and rush that man's head into a stone wall at full force is either an animal, a maniac, or a zealot who will stop at nothing. In my judgment, he is the last. He said he had a commitment and it was in his eyes. And he'll be clever; he's already proven he can be clever."

"You say three hours?"

"Yes."

"Then he may already be in Bonn."

"I know."

"Have you called our associate?"

"Yes, he's not at home and the maid could not give me another number. She doesn't know where he is, or when he's expected."

"Probably in the morning."

"No doubt.... Auende^^I There was another man at the dub this afternoon. With Luboque and

this Simon, whose

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name is not Simon. He brought him to Luboquet!
Good-bye, I'Angla~s I'll keep you informed."

ReneMattilon opened his eyes. The streaks of light on the ceiling seemed to shimmer, myriad tiny clots bursting, breaking up the linear patterns. Then he heard the sound of the rain on the windows and understood. The shafts of light from the streetlamps had been intercepted by the glass, distorting the images he knew so well. It was the rain, he concluded; that was what had awakened him. That and perhaps the weight of his wife's hand between his legs. She stirred and he smiled, trying to make up his mind or find the energy to reach for her. She had filled a void for him he had thought would always be there after his first wife died. He was grateful, and along with his feeling of gratitude came excitement, two emotions satisfyingly compatible. He was becoming aroused; he rolled over on his side and pulled down the covers, revealing the swell of her breasts encased in laced silk, the diffused light and the pounding on the windows heightening the sensuality. He reached for her.

Suddenly, there was another sound besides the rain, and though still wrapped in the mists of sleep he recognized it. Quickly he withdrew his hand and turned away from his wife. He had heard that noise only moments before; it was the sound that had awakened him, an insistent tone that had broken the steady rhythm of the downpour: the chimes of his apartment doorbell.

Mattilon climbed out of bed as carefully as he could, reaching for his bathrobe on a nearby chair and sliding his feet into his slippers. He walked out of the bedroom, closing the door quietly behind him, and found the wall switch that turned on the lamps in the living room. He glanced at the ornate clock on the fireplace mantel. It was nearly two-thirty in the morning. Who could possibly be calling on them at this hour? He tied the sash around his robe and walked to the door.

"Yes, who is it?"

"Surete, monsieur. Inspector Prudhomme. My state identification is zero-five-seven-two-zero." The man's accent was Gascon, not Parisian. It was often said that Gascons made the best police officials. "I shall wait while you call my station, monsieur. The telephone number is "

"No need," said Mattilon, alarmed, unlatching the door.

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He knew the man was genuine not only from the
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information offered, but anyone from the Surete
calling on him at this hour would know he was an
attorney. The Surete was legally circumspect.

There were two men, both in raincoats spotted
by the downpour, their hats drenched; one was
older than the other and shorter. Each held out an
open identification for Rene's inspection. He waved
the cards aside and gestured for the two men to
come in, adding, "It's an odd time for visitors,
gentlemen. You must have pressing business."

"Very pressing, monsieur," said the older man,
entering first. He was the one who had spoken
through the door, giving his name as Prudhomme,
and was obviously the senior. "We apologize for the
inconvenience, of course." Both men removed their
hats.

"Of course. May I take your coats?"

"It won't be necessary, monsieur. With your
cooperation we'll only be a few minutes."

"And I shall be most interested to know how I
can cooperate with the Surete at this time of night."

"A matter of identification, sir. Monsieur Serge
Antoine Luboque is a client of yours, we are
informed. Is this so?"

"My God, has something happened to Serge? I
was with him only this afternoon!"

"Monsieur Luboque appears to be in excellent
health. We left his country house barely an hour
ago. And to the point, it is your meeting with him
this afternoon yesterday afternoon that concerns
the Surete."

"In what way?"

"There was a third party at your table. Like
yourself, an attorney, introduced to Monsieur
Luboque--a man named Simon. Henry Simon, an
American."

"And a pilot," said Mattilon warily. "With
considerable expertise in aircraft litigation. I trust
Luboque explained that; it was the reason he was
there at my request. Monsieur Luboque is the
plaintiff in just such a lawsuit. That, of course, is all
I can say on the subject."

"It is not the subject that interests the Surete."

"What is, then?"

"There is no attorney by the name of Henry
Simon in the city of Chicago, Illinois, in the United
States."

"I find that hard to believe."

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The name is false At least, it is not his. The address he gave the hotel does not exist"

The address he gave the hotels, Rene, astonished. Joel did not have to give an address to the George V it knew him well, knew the firm of Talbot, Brooks and Simon very well, indeed

fin his own handwriting, monsieur," added the younger man sbfily

Has the hotel management confirmed this?"

eyes," said Prudhomme The night concierge was very cooperative He told us he escorted Monsieur Simon down the freight elevator to the hotel cellars.'

The cellars?"

Monsieur Simon wished to leave the hotel without being seen. He paid his bill in his room"

A minute, please," said Mathlon, perplexed, his hands protesting, as he turned and walked aimlessly around an armchair. He stopped, his hands on the rim. ' What precisely do you want from mew

Ewe want you to help us," answered Prudhomme. We think you know who he is. You brought him to Monsieur Luboque."

On a confidential matter entailing a legal opinion He agreed to listen and to evaluate on the condition that his idenbty be protected. It's not unusual when seeking expertise if one is involved with, shall we say, an individual as wealthy and as temperamental as Monsieur Luboque You've spoken with him; need I say more?"

'Not on that subject," said the older man from the Surete permitting himself a smile. "He thinks all government personnel work for Moscow. We were surrounded by dogs in his foyer, all salivating, I might add."

'When you can understand why my American colleague prefers to remain unnamed. I know him well, he's a splendid man."

who is he? And do you know where we can find him?"

why do you want him?"

"We wish to question him about an incident that took place at the hotel."

"I'm sorry. As Luboque is a client, so by extension is Simon "

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"That is not acceptable to us under the circumstances, monsieur "

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"I'm afraid it will have to be, at least for a few hours. Tomorrow I shall try to reach him through his office in . . . in the United States, and I'm sure he'll get in touch with you immediately."

"We don't think he will."

"Why not?"

Prudhomme glanced at his starchly postured associate and shrugged. "He may have killed a man," he said matter-of-factly.

Mattilon stared at the Surete officer in disbelief. He ... what?"

It was a particularly vicious assault, monsieur. A man's head was rammed into a wall; there are extensive cranial injuries and the prognosis is not good. His condition as of midnight was critical, the chances of recovery less than half. He may be dead by now, which one doctor said could be a blessing."

No . . . no! You are mistaken! You're wrong!" The lawyer's hands gripped the back of the chair. A terrible error has been made!"

No error. The identification was positive that is, Monsieur Simon was identified as the last person seen with the man who was beaten. He forced the man out into an alley; there were sounds of scuffling and minutes later that man was found, his skull fractured, bleeding, near death."

~Impossible! You don't know him! What you suggest is inconceivable. He couldn't."

"Are you telling us he is disabled, physically incapable of assault?"

"No," said Mattilon, shaking his head. Then suddenly he stopped all movement. "Yes," he continued thoughtfully, his eyes pensive, now nodding, rushing ahead. "He's incapable, yes, but not physically. Mentally. In that sense he is disabled. He could not do what you say he did."

"He's mentally deranged?"

"My God, no! He's one of the most lucid men I've ever met. You have to understand. He went through a prolonged period of extreme physical stress and mental anguish. He endured punishment, to both his body and his mind. There was no permanent damage but there are indelible memories. Like so many men who've been subjected to such treatment, he avoids all forms of physical

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confrontation or abuse. It is repugnant to him. He
can't inflict punishment because too much was
inflicted on him."

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"You mean he would not defend himself, his
own? He would turn the other cheek if he, or his
wife, or his children were attacked?"

"Of course not, but that's not what you described.
You said 'a particularly vicious assault, implying
something quite different. And if it were
otherwise if he were threatened or attacked and
defended himself he most certainly would not have
left the scene. He's too fine a lawyer." Mattilon
paused. "Was that the case? Is that what you're
saying? Is the injured man known to you from the
police files? Is he "

"A limousine chauffeur," interrupted Prudhomme.
"An unarmed man who was waiting for his assigned
passenger of the evening."

"In the cellars?"

"Apparently it is a customary service and not an
unfamiliar one. These firms are discreet. This one
sent another driver to cover before inquiring as to
their employee's condition. The client would not
know."

"Very chic, I'm sure. What do they say happened?"

"According to a witness, a guard who's been with
the hotel for eighteen years, this Simon approached
in a loud voice, speaking English the guard thinks
angrily, although he does not understand the
language and forced the man outside."

"The guard is wrong! It had to be someone else."

"Simon identified himself. The concierge had
cleared his departure. The description fits; it was the
one who called himself Simon."

"But why? There has to be a reason!"

"We should like to hear it, monsieur."

Rene shook his head in bewilderment; nothing
made sense. A man could register at any hotel under
any name he wished, of course, but there were
charges, credit cards, people calling; a false name
served no purpose. Especially at a hotel where one
was presumably known, and if one was known and
chose to travel incognito, that status would not be
protected if a front desk was questioned by the
Surete. "I must ask you again, Inspector, have you
checked thoroughly with the hotel?"

"Not personally, monsieur," replied Prudhomme,
looking at his associate. "My time was taken up

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interrogating those in the vicinity of the assault."

"I checked with the concierge myself, monsieur," said

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the younger, taller man, speaking like a programmed robot. ' Naturally, the hotel is not anxious for the incident to receive attention, was cooperative. The night concierge is newly employed from the Hotel Meurice and wished to minimize the incident, but he himself showed me the registration form. '

I see." And Matfflon did see, at least insofar as Joel's identity was concerned. Hundreds of guests at a large hotel and a nervous concierge protecting his new employer's image. The obvious source was accepted as truth, another truth no doubt forthcoming in the morning from more knowledgeable men. But that was all Rene understood nothing else. He needed a few moments to think, to try to understand.

'I'm curious," he said, reaching for words. 'At worst, this is an assault with severe results, but nevertheless an assault. Why isn't it a simple police matter? Why the Surete?"

'My first question, monsieur," said the plainspoken Prudhomme. The reason given us was that the incident involved a foreigner, obviously a wealthy foreigner. One does not know these days where such things may lead. We have certain controls not available to the arrond~sment police.

PI see.

Ado you?" asked the man from the Surete. May I remind you that as an attorney you have an obligation to uphold the courts and the law? You have been offered our credentials and I have suggested you call my station for any further verification you might wish. Please, monsieur, who is Henry Simon?"

PI have other obligations, as well, Inspector. To my word, to a client, to an old friendship "

You put these above the law?"

Only because I know you're wrong"

.Then where is the harm? If we are wrong, we shall find this Simon undoubtedly at an airport and he will tell us himself. But if we are not, we may find a very sick man who needs help. Before he harms others. I am no psychiatrist, monsieur, but you have described a troubled man a once troubled man, in any event. '

Matfflon was uncomfortable with the blunt

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official's logic . . . and also something else he could not define. Was it Joel? Was it the clouds in his old friend's eyes, the unconscious verbal slip about a blemished rock in the dirt? Rene looked again at the clock on the mantel; a thought occurred to him. It was only eight-forty-two in New York.

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"Inspector, I'm going to ask you to wait here while I go into my study and make a phone call on my private line. The line, incidentally, is not connected to the telephone on the table."

"That was unnecessary, monsieur."

"Then I apologise."

Mattilon walked rapidly to a door on the opposite side of the room, opened it and went inside. He crossed to his desk, where he sat down and opened a red-leather telephone index. He flipped the pages to the letter T, scanning the names until he reached Talbot, Lawrence. He had both the office and the house number; the latter was necessary because the courts in Paris were in operation before the East Coast of America was out of bed. If Talbot was not there, he would try Nathan Simon, then Brooks, if he had to. Neither alternative was necessary. Lawrence Talbot answered the phone.

"I'll be damned, how are you, Rene? You in New York?" "No, Paris."

"Sounds like you're down the block."

"So do you. It's always startling."

"It's also late where you are, if I'm not mistaken."

"It's very late, Larry. We may have a problem, that's why I'm calling."

"A problem? I didn't even know we had any business going. What is it?"

"Your missionary work."

"Our what?"

"Bertholdier. His friends."

"Who?"

"Jacques-Louis Bertholdier."

"Who is he? I've heard the name but I can't place him." "You can't . . . place him?"

"Sorry."

"I've been with Joel. I arranged the meeting."

"Joel? How is he? Is he in Paris now?"

"You weren't aware of it?"

"Last time I spoke with him was two days ago in Geneva after that awful business with Halliday. He told me he was all right, but he wasn't. He was shaken up."

"Let me understand you, Larry. Joel is not in Paris on business for Talbot, Brooks and Simon, is that what you're saying?"

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Lawrence Talbot paused before answering. "No, he's not," said the senior partner softly. "Did he say he was?"

"Perhaps I just assumed it."

Again Talbot paused. "I don't think you'd do that. But I do think you should tell Joel to call me."

"That's part of the problem, Larry. I don't know where he is. He said he was taking the five o'clock plane for London, but he didn't. He checked out of the George Cinq quite a bit later under very odd circumstances."

"What do you mean?"

His hotel registration was altered, changed to another name a name I suggested, incidentally, as he didn't wish to use his own at lunch. Then he insisted on leaving by way of some basement delivery entrance."

"That's strange."

"I'm afraid it's the least of the oddities. They say he assaulted a man. He may have killed him."

"Jesus!"

"I don't believe it, of course," said Mattilon quickly. "He wouldn't, he couldn't",

"I hope not."

"Certainly you don't think "

"I don't know what to think," interrupted Talbot. When he was in Geneva and we talked, I asked him if there was any connection between Halliday's death and what he was doing. He said there wasn't, but he was so remote, so distant; his voice sounded hollow."

"What he's doing . . . ? What is he doing?"

"I don't know. I'm not even sure I can find out, but I'll do my damndest. I tell you, I'm worried."

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Something's happened to him. His voice was like an echo chamber, do you know what I mean?',

Byes, I do," said Mattilon quietly. 41 heard him, I saw him. I'm worried too."

'Find him, Rene. Do whatever you can. Give me the word and I'll drop everything and By over. He's hurting somewhere, somehow."

"I'll do what I can.',

Mattilon walked out of his study and faced the two men from the police.

His name is Converse, Joel Converse," he began.

* * *

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"His name is Converse, first name Joel," said the younger, taller man from the Surete, speaking into the mouthpiece of a pay phone on the Boulevard Raspail, as the rain pounded the booth. "He's employed by a law firm in New York: Talbot, Brooks and Simon; the address is on Fifth Avenue. The assumed name, Simon, however, was apparently a convenience, and not related to the firm."

"I don't understand."

"Whatever this Converse is involved with has nothing to do with his employers. Mattilon reached one of the partners in New York and it was made clear to him. Also both men are concerned, worried; they wish to be kept informed. If Converse is found, Mattilon insists on immediate access to him as the attorney of record. He may be holding back, but in my judgment he's genuinely bewildered. In shock, might be more accurate. He knows nothing of consequence. I could tell if he did."

"Nevertheless, he is holding back. The name Simon was used for my benefit so I would not learn the identity of this Converse. Mattilon knows that; he was there and they are friends and he brought him to Luboquet."

"Then he was manipulated, General. He did not mention

you."

"He might if he's questioned further. I cannot be involved in any way."

"Of course not," agreed the man from the Surete with quiet emphasis.

"Your superior, what's his name? The one assigned to the incident."

"Prudhomme. Inspector First Grade Prudhomme."

"Is he frank with you?"

"Yes. He thinks I'm something of a mechanical ex-soldier whose instincts may outdistance his intellect, but he sees that I'm willing. He talks to me."

"You'll be kept with him for a while. Should he decide to go back and see Mattilon, let me know immediately. Paris may lose a respected attorney. My name must not surface."

"He would go back to Mattilon only if Converse was found. And if word came to the Surete as to his whereabouts, I'd reach you instantly."

"There could be another reason, Colonel. One that might provoke a persistent man into reexamining his progress or lack of it in spite of orders to the contrary."

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"Orders to the contrary, sir?"

"They will be issued. This Converse is solely our concern now. All we needed was a name. We know where he's heading. We'll find him."

"I don't understand, General."

"News has come from the hospital. Our chauffeur has taken a turn for the better."

"Good news, indeed."

"I wish it were. The sacrifice of a single soldier is abhorrent to any field commander, but the broader tactics must be kept in view, they must be served. Do you agree?"

"Yes, of course."

"Our chauffeur must not recover. The larger strategy Colonel."

"If he dies, the efforts to find Converse will be intensified. And you're right, Prudhomme will reexamine everything, including the lawyer, Mattilon."

"Orders to the contrary will be issued. But watch him."

"Yes, sir."

"And now we need your expertise, Colonel. The talents you developed so proficiently while in the service of the Legion before we brought you back to a more civilized life."

"My gratitude isn't shallow. Whatever I can do."

"Can you get inside the Hospital of Saint Jerome with as little notice as possible?"

"With no notice. There are fire escapes on all sides of the building and it's a dark night, heavy with rain. Even the police stay in doorways. It's child's play."

"But man's work. It has to be done."

"I don't question such decisions."

"A blockage in the windpipe, a convulsion in the throat."

"Pressure applied through cloth, sir. Gradually and with no marks, a patient's self-induced trauma.... But I would be derelict if I didn't repeat what I said, General. There'll be a search of Paris, then a large-scale manhunt. The killer will be presumed to be a rich American, an inviting target for the Surete."

"There'll be no search, no manhunt. Not yet. If it is to be it will come later, and if it does, a convicted corpse will be trapped in the net.... Go into the field, my young friend. The chauffeur, Colonel; the broader strategy must be served."

"He's dead," said the man in the telephone booth, and hung up.

5

Erich Leifhelm . . . born March 15, 1912, in Munich to Dr. Heinrich Leifhelm and his mistress, Marta Stoessel. Although the stigma of his illegitimacy precluded a normal childhood in the upper-middle-class, morality-conscious Germany of those years, it was the single most important factor in his later preeminence in the National Socialist movement. At birth he was denied the name of Leifhelm; until 1931 he was known as Erich Stoessel.

Joel sat at a table in the open cafe in Copenhagen's Kastrup Airport, trying to concentrate. It was his second attempt within the past twenty minutes, the first he abandoned when he realised he was absorbing nothing, seeing only black letters forming an unending string of vaguely recognizable words relating to a figure in the outer reaches of his mind. He could not focus on that man; there were too many interferences, real and imagined. Nor had he been able to read on the two-hour flight from Paris, having opted for economy class, hoping to melt in with the greater number of people in the larger section of the aircraft. The concept at least was valid; the seats were so narrow and the plane so fully occupied that elbows and forearms were virtually immobile. The conditions prohibited his taking out the report, both for reasons of space and for fear of

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the proximity to straying eyes.

Heinrich Leifhelm moved his-mistress and their son to the town of Eichstatt, fifty odd miles north of Munich, visiting them now and then, and providing an adequate but not overly comfortable standard of living. The doctor was apparently torn between maintaining a successful practice with no social blemishes_in Munich and a disinclination to aban

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don the stigmatised and child. According to close acquaintances of Erich Stoessel-Leifhelm, these early years had a profound effect on him. Although he was too young to grasp the full impact of world War I, he was later haunted by the memory of the small households subsistence level falling as the elder Leifhelm's ability to contribute lessened with the burden of wartime taxes. Too, his father's visits served to heighten the fact that he could not be acknowledged as a son and was not entitled to the privileges accorded two half brothers and a half sister, strangers he was never to know and whose home he could not enter. Through the absence of proper lineage, certified by hypocritical documents and more hypocritical church blessings, he felt he was denied what was rightfully his, and so there was instilled in him a furious sense of resentment, competitiveness, and a deep-seated anger at existing social conditions. By his own admission, his first conscious longings were to get as much as he could for himself both materially and in the form of recognition through the strength of his own abilities, and, by doing so, strike out at the status quo which had tried to emasculate him. By his mid-teens, Stoessel-Leifhelm was consumed with anger.

Converse stopped reading, suddenly aware of the woman across the half-deserted cafe; she was seated alone at a table, looking at him. Their eyes met and she turned away, placing her arm on the low white railing that enclosed the restaurant studying the thinning, late-night crowds in the terminal, as if waiting for someone. Startled, Joel tried-to analyze the look she had given him. Was it recognition? Did she know him? Know his face? Or was it appraisal? A well-dressed whore cruising the airport in search of a mark, seeking out a lonely businessman far away from home? She turned her head slowly and looked at him again, now obviously upset that his eyes were still on her. Then abruptly, in two swiftly defined motions, she glanced at her watch, tugged at her wide-brimmed hat, and opened her purse. She took out a Krone note, placed it on the table, got up, and walked rapidly toward the entrance of the cafe. Beyond the open gate she walked faster her strides longer, heading for the arch that led to the bag

gage-claim area. Converse watched her in the dull white neon light of the terminal, shaking his head, annoyed at his alarm. With his attache case and leather-bound report, the woman had probably thought he was some kind of airport official. Who was the mark, then?

He was seeing too many shadows, he thought, as he followed the graceful figure nearing the arch. Too many shadows that held no surprises, no alarms. There had been a man on the plane from Paris sitting several rows in front of him. Twice the man had gotten up and gone to the toilet, and each time he came back to his seat he had looked hard at Joel studied him, actually. Those looks had been enough to prime his adrenaline. Had he been spotted at the De Gaulle Airport? Was the man an employee of Jacques-Louis Bertholdier? . . . As a man in an alley had been Don't think about that! He had flicked off an oval of dried blood on his shirt as he had given himself the command.

"I can always tell a good ale Yank! Never miss!"

That had been the antiquated salutation in Copenhagen as both Americans waited for their luggage.

"Well, I missed once. Some son of a bitch on a plane in Geneva. Sat right next to me. A real guinea in a three-piece suit, that's what he was. He spoke English to the stewardess so I figured he was one of those rich Cuban spicks from Florida, you know what I mean?"

An emissary in salesman's clothes. One of the diplomats.

Geneva. It had started in Geneva.

Too many shadows. No surprises, no alarms. The woman went through the arch and Joel pulled his eyes away, forcing his attention back to the report on Erich Leifhelm. Then a slight, sudden movement caught the corner of his eye; he looked back at the woman. A man had stepped out of an unseen recess; his hand had touched her elbow. They exchanged words briefly, swiftly, and parted as abruptly as they had met, the man continuing into the terminal as the woman disappeared. Did the man glance over in his direction? Converse watched closely; had that man looked at him? It was impossible to tell; his head was turning in all directions, looking at or for something. Then, as if he had found it, the man hurried toward a bank of airline counters. He approached the Japan Air Lines desk, and taking out his wallet, he began speaking to an Oriental clerk.

No surprises, no alarms. A harried traveler had asked di

rections; the interferences were more imagined than real. Yet even here his lawyer's mentality intervened. Interferences were real whether based in reality or not. Oh, Christ! Leave it alone! Concentrate!

At the age of seventeen, Erich Stoessel-Leifhelm had completed his studies at the Eichstatt II Gymnasium, excelling both academically and on the playing field, where he was known as an aggressive competitor. It was a time of universal financial chaos, the American stock market crash of '29 further aggravating the desperate economy of the Weimar Republic, and few but the most well-connected students went on to universities. In a move he later described to friends as one of youthful fury, Stoessel-Leifhelm traveled to Munich to confront his father and demand assistance. What he found was a shock, but it turned out to be a profound opportunity, strangely arrived at. The doctor's staid, placid life was in shambles. His marriage, from the beginning unpleasant and humiliating, had caused him to drink heavily with increasing frequency until the inevitable errors of judgment occurred. He was censured by the medical community (with a high proportion of Jews therein), charged with incompetence and barred from the Karlstor Hospital. His practice was in ruins, his wife had ordered him out of the house, an order expedited by an old but still powerful father-in-law, also a doctor and member of the hospital's board of directors. When Stoessel-Leifhelm found his father, he was living in a cheap apartment house in the poorer section of the city picking up pfennigs by dispensing prescriptions (drugs) and deutsche marks by performing abortions.

In what apparently (again according to friends from the time) was a watershed of pent-up emotions, the elder Leifhelm embraced his illegitimate son and told him the story of his tortured life with a disagreeable wife and tyrannical in-laws. It was the classic syndrome of an ambitious man of minimal talents and maximum connections. But withal, the doctor claimed he had never abandoned his beloved mistress and their son. And during this prolonged and

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undoubtedly drunken confession, he revealed a fact Stoessel-Leifhelm had never known. His father's wife was Jewish. It was all the teenager had to hear.

The disfranchised boy became the father to the ruined man.

There was an announcement in Danish over the airport's loudspeakers and Joel looked at his watch.

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It came again, now in German. He listened intently for the words, he could barely distinguish them, but they were there. "HamburgKöln-Bonn." It was the first boarding call for the last flight of the night to the capital of West Germany by way of Hamburg. The flying time was less than two hours, the layover in Hamburg justified for those executives who wanted to be at their desks by the start of the business day. Converse had checked his suitcase through to Bonn, making a mental note as he did so to replace the heavy black leather bag with a carry-on. He was no expert in such matters, but common sense told him that the delays required by waiting for one's luggage in the open for anyone to see was no way to travel swiftly or to avoid eyes that might be searching for him. He put Erich Leifhelm's dossier in his attache case, closed it and spun the brass combination disks. He then got up from the table, walked out of the cafe and across the terminal toward the Lufthansa gate.

Sweat matted his hairline; the tattoo inside his chest accelerated until it sounded like a hammering fugue for kettledrums. He knew the man sitting next to him, but from where or from what period in his life he had no idea. The craggy, lined face, the deep ridges that creased the suntanned flesh, the intense blue-grey eyes beneath the thick, wild brows and brown hair streaked with white he knew him, but no name came, no clue to the man's identity.

Joel kept waiting for some sign of recognition directed at him. None came, and involuntarily he found himself looking at the man out of the corner of his eye. The man did not respond; instead his attention was on a bound sheaf of typewritten pages, the type larger than the print nominally associated with legal briefs or even summonses. Perhaps, thought Converse, the man was half blind, wearing contact lenses to conceal his infirmity. But was there something else? Not an infirmity, but a connection being concealed. Had he seen this man in Paris as he had seen another wearing a light-brown

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topcoat in a hotel basement corridor? Had this man beside him also been at L'Etalon Blanc? Had he been part of a stationary group of ex-soldiers in the warriors' playroom . . . in a corner perhaps, and inconspicuous because of the numbers? Or at Bertholdier's table, his back to Joel, presumably unseen by the American he was now following? Was he following him at this moment? wondered Converse, gripping his attache case. He turned his head barely inches and studied his seatmate.

Suddenly the man looked up from the bound typewritten pages and over at Joel. His eyes were noncommittal, expressing neither curiosity nor irritation.

"Sorry," said Converse awkwardly.

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"Sure, it's okay . . . why not?" was the strange, laconic reply, the accent American, the dialect distinctly Texaswestern. The man returned to his pages.

"Do we know each other?" asked Joel, unable to back off from the question.

Again the man looked up. "Don't think so," he said tersely, once more going back to his report, or whatever it was.

Converse looked out the window, at the black sky beyond, flashes of red light illuminating the silver metal of the wing. Absently he tried to calculate the digital degree heading of the aircraft but his pilot's mind would not function. He did know the man, and the oddly phrased "why not?" served only to disturb him further. Was it a signal, a warning? As his words to Jacques-Louis Bertholdier had been a signal, a warning that the general had better contact him, recognise him.

The voice of a Lufthansa stewardess interrupted his thoughts. "Herr Dowling, it is a pleasure, indeed, to have you on board."

"Thank you, darlin'," said the man, his lined face creasing into a gentle grin. "You find me a little bourbon over ice and I'll return the compliment."

"Certainly, sir. I'm sure you've been told so often you must be tired of hearing it, but your television show is enormously popular in Germany."

"Thanks again, honey, but it's not my show. There are a lot of pretty little fillies runnin' around that screen."

An actor. A goddamned actor! thought Joel. No alarms, no surprises. Just intrusions, far more imagined than real.

"You're too modest, Herr Dowling. They're all so alike,

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so disagreeable. But you are so kind, so manly . . . so understanding.

"Understandin'? Tell you somethin'. I saw an episode in Cologne last week while on this picture and I didn't understand a word I was sayin'."

The stewardess laughed. "Bourbon over ice, is that correct, sir?"

"That's correct, darlin'."

The woman started down the first-class aisle toward the galley as Converse continued to look at

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the actor. Haltingly he spoke. "I am sorry. I should have recognised you, of course."

Dowling turned his suntanned head, his eyes roaming Joel's face, then dropping to the hand-tooled leather attache case. He looked up with an amused smile. "I could probably embarrass you if I asked you where you knew me from. You don't look like a Santa Fe groupie."

"A Santa Fe . . . ? Oh, sure, that's the name of the show." And it was, reflected Converse. One of those phenomena on television that by the sheer force of extraordinary ratings and network profits had been featured on the covers of Time and Newsweek. He had never seen it

"And, naturally," continued the actor, "you follow the tribal rites and wrongs the dramatic vicissitudes of the imperious Ratchet family, owners of the biggest spread north of Santa Fe as well as the historic Chimaya Flats, which they stole from the impoverished Indians."

"The who? what?"

Dowling's leathery face again laminated itself into a grin. "Only Pa Ratchet, the Indians' friend, doesn't know about the last part, although he's being blamed by his red brothers. You see, Pa's no-good sons heard there was oil shale beneath the Chimayas and did their thing. Incidentally, I trust you catch the verbal associations in the name Ratchet, you can take your choice. There's just plain 'rats,' or Ratchet as in 'wretched,' or Ratchet as in the tool screwing everything in front of it by merely pressing forward."

There was something different about the actor now thought Joel, bewildered. Was it his words? No, not the words his voice. The Western inflections were greatly diminished "I don't know what you're talking about, but you sound different."

"War, Ah'll jes' be hornswaggled i" said Dowling, laugh

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ing. Then he returned to the unaccented tones he had begun to display. "You're looking at a renegade teacher of English and college dramatics who said a dozen years ago to hell with old-age tenure, let's go after a very impractical dream. It led to a lot of funny and not very dignified jobs, but the spirit of Thespis moves in mysterious ways. An old student of mine, in one of those indefinable jobs like 'production-coordinator,' spotted me in a crowd scene; it embarrassed the hell out of him. Nevertheless, he put my name in for several small parts. A few panned out, and a couple of years later an accident called Santa Fe came along. That's when my perfectly respectable name of Calvin was changed to Caleb. 'Fits the image belter,' said a pair

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of Gucci loafers who never got closer to a horse
than a box at Santa Anita.... It's crazy, isn't it?"

'Crazy," agreed Converse, as the stewardess
walked back up the aisle toward them.

'Crazy or not," added Dowling under his breath,
' this good old rancher isn't going to offend anyone.
They want Pa Ratchet, they've got him."

"Your bourbon, sir," said the woman, handing
the actor a glass.

"Why, thank you, li'l darlin'! My oh my, you're
purer than any filly on the show!"

"You are too kind, sir."

"May I have a Scotch, please," said Joel.

"That's better, son," said Dowling, grinning
again as the stewardess left. "And now that you
know my crime, what do you do for a living?"

"I'm an attorney."

"At least you've got something legitimate to
read. This screenplay sure as hell isn't."

Although considered by most of Munich's re

spectable citizens to be a collection of misfits and
thugs, the National Socialist German Workers'
Party,
with its headquarters in Munich, was making itself
felt throughout Germany. The radical-populist
movement was taking hold by basing its inflamma-
tory message on the evil un-German "them." It
blamed the ills of the nation on a spectrum of
targets
ranging from the Bolsheviks to the ingrate Jewish
bankers; from the foreign plunderers who had
raped
an Aryan land to, finally, all things not "Aryan,"

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namely and especially the Jews and their
ill-gotten wealth.

Cosmopolitan Munich and its Jewish
community laughed at the absurdities; they were
not listening. The rest of Germany was; it was
hearing what it wanted to hear. And Erich
Stoessel-Leifhelm heard it too. It was his passport
to recognition and opportunity.

In a matter of weeks, the young man literally
whipped his father into shape. In later years he
would tell the story with heavy doses of cruel
humor. Over the dissolute physician's hysterical
objections the son removed all alcohol and
smoking materials from the premises, never

letting his father out of his sight. A harsh regimen of exercise and diet was enforced. With the zeal of a puritanical athletic trainer Stoessel-Leifhelm started taking his father out to the countryside for Gewaltmarschen forced marches gradually working up to all-day hikes on the exhausting trails of the Bavarian mountains, continually shouting at the older man to keep moving, to rest only at his son's commands, to drink water only with permission.

So successful was the rehabilitation that the doctor's clothes began to hang on him like seedy, old-fashioned garments purchased for a much fatter man. A new wardrobe was called for, but good clothing in Munich in those days was beyond the means of all but the wealthy, and Stoessel-Leifhelm had only the best in mind for his father not out of filial devotion but, as we shall see, for a quite different purpose.

Money had to be found, which meant it had to be stolen. He interrogated his father at length about the house the doctor had been forced to leave, learning everything there was to learn. Several weeks later Stoessel-Leifhelm broke into the house on the Luisenstrasse at three o'clock one morning, stripping it of everything of value, including silver, crystal, oil paintings, gold place settings, and the entire contents of a wall safe. Sales to fences were not difficult in Munich of 1930, and when everything was disposed of father and son had the equivalent of nearly eight

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thousand American dollars, virtually a fortune in those times.

The restoration continued; clothes were tailored in the Maximilianstrasse, the best footwear purchased at bootsmiths on the Odeonsplatz, and, finally, cosmetic changes were effected. The doctor's unkempt hair was trimmed and heightened by coloring into a masculine Nordic blond, and his shabby inch-long beard shaved off, leaving only a small, unbroken, well-trimmed moustache above his upper lip. The transformation was complete; what remained was the introduction

Every night during the long weeks of rehabilitation, Stoessel-Leifhelm had read aloud to his father whatever he could get his hands on from the National Socialists' headquarters, and there was no lack of material. There were the standard inflammatory pamphlets, pages of ersatz biological theory purportedly proving the genetic superiority of Aryan purity and, conversely, the racial decline resulting from indiscriminate breeding all the usual Nazi diatribes plus generous excerpts from Hitler's Mein Kampf. The son read incessantly until the

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doctor could recite by rote the salient outrages of the National Socialists' message. Throughout it all, the seventeen-year-old kept telling his father that following the party's program was the way to get back everything that had been stolen from him, to avenge the years of humiliation and ridicule. As Germany itself had been humiliated by the rest of the world, the Nazi party would be the avenger, the restorer of all things truly German. It was, indeed, the New Order for the Fatherland, and it was waiting for men of stature to recognize the fact.

The day came, a day when Stoessel-Leifhelm had learned that two high-ranking party officials would be in Munich. They were the crippled propagandist Joseph Goebbels and the would-be aristocrat Rudolf Hess. The son accompanied the father to the National Socialists' headquarters where the well-tailored, imposing, obviously rich and Aryan Doktor requested an audience with the two Nazi leaders on an urgent and confidential matter. It was

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granted, and according to early party historical archives, his first words to Hess and Goebbels were the

following.

"Gentlemen, I am a physician of impeccable credentials, formerly head surgeon at the Karlstor Hos, pital and for years I enjoyed one of the most successful practices in Munich. That was in the past. I was destroyed by Jews who stole everything from me. I am back, I am well, and I am at your service."

The Lufthansa plane began its descent into Hamburg and Joel, feeling the drag, dog-eared the page of Leifhelm's dossier and reached down for his attache case. Beside him, the actor Caleb Dowling stretched, script in hand, then jammed his screenplay into an open flight bag at his feet.

"The only thing sillier than this movie," he said, "is the amount of money they're paying me to be in it."

"Are you filming tomorrow?" asked Converse.

".Today," corrected Dowling, looking at his watch. "It's an early shoot, too. Have to be on location by five-thirty dawn over the Rhine, or something equally inspiring. Now if they'd just turn the damn thing into a travelogue, we'd all be better off. Nice scenery."

"But you were in Copenhagen."

"Yep."

"You're not going to get much sleep."

"Nope."

"Oh."

The actor looked at Joel, the crow's-feet around his generous eyes creasing deeper with his smile. "My wife's in Copenhagen and I had two days off. This was the last plane I could get."

"Oh? You're married?" Converse immediately regretted the remark; he was not sure why, but it sounded foolish.

"Twenty-six years, young fella. How do you think I was able to go after that impractical dream? She's a whiz of a secretary; when I was teaching, she'd always be this or that dean's gal Friday."

"Any children?"

"Can't have everything. Nope."

"Why is she in Copenhagen? I mean, why isn't she staying with you on location?"

The grin faded from Dowling's suntanned face; the lines

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were less apparent, yet somehow deeper. "That's an obvious question, isn't it? That is, you being a lawyer would pick it up quickly."

"It's none of my business, of course. Forget I asked it."

"No, that's okay. I don't like to talk about it rarely do but friendly seatmates on airplanes are for telling things. You'll never see them again, so why not slice off a bit and feel better." The actor tried haltingly to smile; he failed. "My wife's name was Oppenfeld. She's Jewish. Her story's not much different from a few million others, but for her it's . . . well, it's hers. She was separated from her parents and her three younger brothers in Auschwitz. She watched them being taken away away from her while she screamed, not understanding. She was lucky; they put her in a barracks, a fourteen-year-old sewing uniforms until she showed other endowments that could lead to other work. A couple of days later, hearing the rumors, she got hysterical and broke out racing all over the place trying to find her family. She ran into a section of the camp they called the A/ofall, the garbage, corpses hauled out of the gas chambers. And there they were, the bodies of her mother and

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her father and her three brothers, the sight and the
stench so sickening it's never left her. It never will.
She won't set foot in Germany and I wouldn't ask
her to."

No alarms, just surprises . . . and another Iron
Cross for the Erich Leilhelms of the past, retroactively
presented.

"Christ, I'm sorry," murmured Converse. "I
didn't mean to , ,

"You didn't. I did.... You see, she knows it
doesn't make sense."

"Doesn't make sense? Maybe you didn't hear
what you just described."

"I heard, I know, but I didn't finish. When she
was sixteen, she was loaded into a truck with five
other girls, all on their way to that different type of
work, when they did it. Those kids took their last
chance and beat the hell out of a wehrmacht
corporal who was guarding them in the van. Then
with his gun they got control of the truck from the
driver and escaped." Dowling stopped, his eyes on
Joel.

Converse, silent, returned the look, unsure of its
meaning, but moved by what he had heard. "That's
a marvelous story " he said quietly "It really is."

'And," continued the actor, "for the next two years
they

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were hidden by a succession of German families, who
surely knew what they were doing and what would
happen to them if they got caught. There was a
pretty frantic search for those girls a lot of threats
made, more because of what they could tell than
anything else. Still, those Germans kept moving them
around, hiding them, until one by one they were
taken across the border into occupied France, where
things were easier. They were smuggled across by the
underground, the German underground. 'Dowling
paused, then added. "As Pa Ratchet would say, 'Do
you get my drift, son?' "

"I'd have to say it's obvious."

"There's a lot of pain and a lot of hate in her and
God knows I understand it. But there should be
some gratitude, too. Couple of times clothing was
found, and some of those people those German
people were tortured, a few shot for what they did.
I don't push it, but she could level off with a little
gratitude. It might give her a bit more perspective."
The actor snapped on his seat belt.

Joel pressed the locks on his attache case,
wondering if he should reply. Valerie's mother had

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been part of the German underground. His ex-wife would tell him amusing stories her mother had told her about a stern, inhibited French intelligence officer forced to work with a high-spirited, opinionated German girl, a member of the Untergmud How the more they disagreed, and the more they railed against each other's nationality, the more they noticed each other. The Frenchman was Val's father; she was proud of him, but in some ways prouder of her mother. There had been pain in that woman, too. And hate. But there had been a reason, and it was unequivocal. As there had been for one Joel Converse years later.

"I said it before and I mean it," began Joel slowly, not sure he should say anything at all. "It's none of my business, but I wouldn't ever push it, if I were you."

"Is this a lawyer talkin'to ole Pa?" asked Dowling in his television dialect, his smile false, his eyes far away. "Do I pay a fee?"

"Sorry, 111 shut up." Converse adjusted his seat belt and pushed the buckle in place.

"No, I'm sorry. I laid it on you. Say it. Please."

"All right. The horror came first, then the hate. In sidewinder language that's called *prima facie* the obvious, the first sighting . . . the real, if you like. Without these, there'd

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be no reason for the gratitude, no call for it. So, in a way, the gratitude is just as painful because it never should have been necessary. "

The actor once again studied Joel's face, as he had done before their first exchange of words. "You're a smart son of a bitch, aren't you?"

"Professionally adequate. But I've been there . . . that is, I know people who've been where your wife has been. It starts with the horror."

Dowling looked up at the ceiling light, and when he spoke his words floated in the air, his harsh voice quietly strained. "If we go to the movies, I have to check them out; if we're watching television together, I read the TV section . . . sometimes on the news with some of those tucking nuts I tense up, wondering what she's going to do. She can't see a swastika' or hear someone screaming in German, or watch soldiers marching in a goose step; she can't stand it. She runs and throws up and shakes all over . . . and I try to hold her . . . and sometimes she thinks I'm one of them and she screams. After all these years . . . Chnst!"

"Have you tried professional help not my kind but the sort she might need?"

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"Oh, hell, she recovers pretty quick," said the actor defensively, as if slipping into a role, his teacher's grammar displaced for effect. "Also, until a few years ago we didn't have the money for that kind of thing," he added somberly in his natural voice.

"What about now? That can't be a problem now."

Dowling dropped his eyes to the flight bag at his feet. "If I'd found her sooner . . . maybe. But we were both late bloomers; we got married in our forges two oddballs looking for something. It's too late now."

"I'm sorry."

"I never should have made this goddamn picture. Never."

"Why did you?"

"She said I should. To show people I could play something more than a driveling, south-forty dispenser of fifth-rate bromides. I told her it didn't matter.... I was in the war, in the Marine Corps. I saw some crap in the South Pacific but nothing to compare with what she went through, not a spit in the proverbial bucket. Jesus! Can you imagine what it must have been like?"

"Yes, I can."

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The actor looked up from the flight bag, a half-drawn smile on his lined, suntanned face. "You, good buddy? Not unless you were caught in Korea."

"I wasn't in Korea."

"Then you'd be hard put to imagine it any more than I. You were too young and I was too lucky."

"Well, there was . . ." Converse fell silent, it was pointless. It had happened so often he did not bother to think about it anymore. 'Nam had been erased from the national conversational psyche. He knew that if he reminded a man like Dowling, a decent man, the air would be filled with apologies, but nothing was served by a jarring remembrance. Not as it pertained to Mrs. Dowling, born Oppenfeld. "There's the 'no smoking' sign," said Joel. "We'll be in Hamburg in a couple of minutes."

"I've taken this flight a half-dozen times over the past two months," said Caleb Dowling, "and let me tell you, Hamburg's a bitch. Not German customs, that's a snap, especially this late. Those rubber stamps fly and they push you through in ten minutes tops. But then you wait. Twice, maybe three times,

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it was over an hour before the plane to Bonn even got here. By the way, care to join me for a drink in the lounge?" The actor suddenly switched to his Southern dialect. "Between you and me, they make it mighty pleasant for al' Pa Ratchet. They telex ahead and Ah got me my own gaggle of cowpokes, all ridin' hard to git me to the waterin' hole."

"Well . . . ?" Joel felt flattered. Not only did he like Dowling, but being the guest of a celebrity was a pleasant high. He had not had many pleasant things happen to him recently.

"I should also warn you," added the celebrity, "that even at this hour the groupies crawl out of the walls, and the airline PR people manage to roust out the usual newspaper photographers, but none of it takes too long."

Converse was grateful for the warning. "I've got some phone calls to make," he said casually, "but if I finish them on time, I'd like very much to join you."

"Phone calls? At this hour?"

"Back to the States. It's not this hour back in . . . Chicago."

"Make them from the lounge they keep it open for me."

"It may sound crazy," said Joel, reaching for words, "but I think better alone. There are some complicated things I have to explain. After customs I'll find a phone booth."

"Nothing sounds crazy to me, son. I work in Holl

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Bee-wood." Suddenly, the actor's amused exuberance faded. "In the States," he said softly, his words floating again, eyes distant again. "You remember that crap in Skokie, Illinois? They did a television show on it.... I was in the study learning lines when I heard the screams and the sound of a door crashing open. I ran out and saw my wife racing down to the beach. I had to drag her out of the water. Sixty-seven years old, and she was a little girl again, back in that goddamn camp, seeing the lines of hollow-eyed prisoners, knowing which lines were which . . . seeing her mother and father, her three kid brothers. When you think about it, you can understand why those people say over and over, 'Never again.' It can't ever happen again. I wanted to sell that tucking house; I won't leave her alone in it."

"Is she alone now?"

"Nope," said Dowling, his smile returning. "That's the good part. After that night we faced it; we both

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knew she couldn't be. Got her a sister, that's what we did. Bubbly little thing with more funny stories about Cuckooburg than ever got into print. But she's tough as they come; she's been bouncing around the studios for forty years."

"An actress?"

"Not so's anyone could tell, but she's a great face in the crowd. She's a good lady, too, good for my wife."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Joel, as the aircraft's wheels made bouncing contact with the runway and the jet engines screeched into reverse thrust. The plane rolled forward, then started a left turn toward its dock.

Dowling turned to Converse. "If you finish your calls, ask someone for the VIP lounge. Tell them you're a friend of mine."

"I'll try to get there."

"If you don't," added the actor in his Santa Fe dialect "see y'awl back in the steel corral. We got us another leg on this here cattle drive, pardner. Glad you're ridin' shotgun."

"On a cattle drive?"

"What the hell do I know? I hate horses."

The plane came to a stop, and the forward door opened in less than thirty seconds as a number of excited passengers rapidly jammed the aisle. It was obvious from the whispers and the stares and the few who stood up on their toes to get clearer views that the reason for the swift exodus of this initial crowd was the presence of Caleb Dowling. And the actor was

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playing his part, dispensing Pa Ratchet benedictions with warm smiles, broad infectious winks, and deep-throated laughter, all with good-old-wrangler humility. As Joel watched he felt a rush of compassion for this strange man, this actor, this risk-taker with a private hell he shared with the woman he loved.

Never again. It can 't ever happen again. Words.

Converse looked down at the attache case he held with both hands on his lap. Inside was another story, one that held a time bomb ready to detonate.

I am back, I am well, and I am at your service. Also words from another time but full of menace for the present, for they were part of the story of a living man's silent return. A spoke in the wheel of Aquitaine.

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The first rush of curious passengers filed through the exit door after the television star, and Joel slipped into the less harried line. He would go through customs as rapidly and as unobtrusively as possible, then find a dark corner of the airport and wait in the deepest shadows until the loudspeakers announced the plane for Cologne-Bonn.

Goebbels and Hess accepted Dr. Heinrich Leifhelm's offer with enthusiasm. One can easily imagine the propaganda expert visualising the image of this blond Aryan physician of "impeccable credentials" spread across thousands of pamphlets confirming the specious theories of Nazi genetics, as well as his all too willing condemnation of the inferior, avaricious Jew; he was heaven-sent. Whereas for Rudolf Hess, who wanted more than his little boys to be accepted by the Junkers and the monied class, the Herr Doktor was his answer; the physician was obviously a true

aristocrat, and in time, quite possibly a lover.

The confluence of preparation, timing and appearance turned out to be more than young Stoessel-Leifhelm could have imagined. Adolf Hitler returned from Berlin for one of his Marienplatz rallies, and the imposing Doktor, along with his intense, well-mannered son, was invited to dinner with the Fuhrer. Hitler heard everything he wanted to hear, and Heinrich Leifhelm from that day until his death in 1934 was Hitler's personal physician.

There was nothing that the son could not have,

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and in short order he had everything he wanted. In June of 1931 a ceremony was held at the National Socialists' headquarters, where Heinrich Leifhelm's marriage to "a Jewess was proclaimed invalid because of a "concealment of Jewish blood" on the part of an "opportunistic Hebrew family, ' and all rights, claims and inheritances of the children of that "insidious union" were deemed void. A civil marriage was performed between LeifLehm and Marta Stoessel, and the true inheritor, the only child who could claim the name of LeifLehm, was an eighteen-year-old called Erich.

Munich and the Jewish community still laughed, but not as loudly, at the absurd announcement the Nazis inserted in the legal columns of the newspapers. It was considered nonsense; the Leifhelm name was a discredited name, and certainly no paternal inheritance was involved; finally it was all outside the law. What they were only beginning to understand was that the laws were changing in changing Germany. In two short years there would be only one law: Nazi determination.

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Erich LeifLelm had arrived and his ascendancy in the party was swift and assured. At eighteen he was Jungfuhrer of the Hitler Youth movement, photographs of his strong, athletic face and body challenging the children of the New Order to join the national crusade. During his tenancy as a symbol, he was sent to the University of Munich, where he completed his courses of study in three years with high academic honors. By this time, Adolf Hitler had been swept into power; he controlled the Reichstag, which gave him dictatorial powers. The Thousand-Year Reich had begun and Erich Leifhelm was sent to the Officers Training Center in Magdeburg.

In 1935, a year after his father's death, Erich LeifLelm, now a youthful favorite of Hitler's inner circle, was promoted to the rank of Oberstleutnant in the Gruppenkommando 1 in Berlin under Rundstedt. He was deeply involved in the vast military expansion that was taking place in Germany, and as the war drew nearer he entered what we can term the third phase of his complicated life, one that ulti

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mately brought him to the centers of Nazi power and at the same time provided him with an extraordinary means of separating himself from the leadership of which he was an intrinsic and influential part. This is briefly covered in the following final pages, a prelude to the fourth phase, which we know is his fanatic allegiance to the theories of George Marcus Delavane.

But before we leave the young Erich Leifhelm of Eichstatt, Munich, and Magdeburg, two events should be recorded here that provide insights into the man's psychotic mentality. Mentioned above was the robbery at the Luisenstrasse house and the resulting profits of the theft. Leifhelm to this day does not deny the incident, taking pleasure in the tale because of the despicable images he paints of his father's first wife and her "overbearing" parents. What he does not speak of, nor has anyone spoken of it in his presence, is the original police report in Munich, which, as near as can be determined, was destroyed sometime in August 1934, a date corresponding to Hindenburg's death and Hitler's rise to absolute power as both president and chancellor of Germany with the title of der Fuhrer raised to official mandatory status.

All copies of the police report were removed from the files, but two elderly pensioners from the Munich department remember it clearly. They are both in their late seventies, have not seen each other in years, and were questioned separately.

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Robbery was the lesser crime that early morning on the Luisenstrasse; the more serious one was never spoken of at the insistence of the family. The fifteen-year-old Leifhelm daughter was raped and severely beaten, her face and body battered so violently that upon admission to the Karlstor Hospital she was given little chance of recovery. She did recover physically, but remained emotionally disturbed for the rest of her short life. The man who committed the assault had to be familiar with the interior of the house, had to know there was a back staircase that led to the girl's room, which was separated from the rooms of her two brothers and her

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mother in the front. Erich Leifhelm had questioned his father in depth regarding the inside design of that house; he was there by his own admission, and was aware of the fierce pride and strict moral code held by the "tyrannical in-laws." There is no question; his compulsion was such that he had to inflict the most degrading insult he could imagine, and he did so, knowing the influential family would and could insist on official silence.

The second event took place during the months of January or February 1939. The specifics are sketchy insofar as there are few survivors of the time who knew the family well, and no official records, but from those who were found and interviewed, certain facts surfaced. Heinrich Leifhelm's legal wife, his children and her family tried without success for several years to leave Germany. The official party line was that the old patriarch's medical skills, having been acquired in German universities were owed to the state. Too, there were unresolved legal questions arising from the dissolved union between the late Dr. Heinrich Leifhelm and a member of the family questions specifically relating to commonly shared assets and the rights of inheritance as they affected an outstanding officer of the Wehrmacht.

Erich Leifhelm was taking no chances. His father's "former" wife and children were virtually held prisoners, their movements restricted, the house on the Luisenstrasse was watched, and for weeks following any renewed applications for visas, they were all kept under full "political surveillance" on the chance that they had plans of vanishing. This information was revealed by a retired banker who recalled that orders came from the Finanzministerium in Berlin instructing the banks in Munich to immediately report any significant withdrawals by the former Frau Leifhelm and/or her family.

During what week or on what day it

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happened we did not learn, but sometime in
January or February of 1936, Frau Leifhelm,
her children and her father disappeared.

However, the Munich court records,
impounded by the Allies on April 23, 1945, give
a clear, if incom

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plete, picture of what took place. Obviously driven
by his compulsion to validate his seizure of the estate
in the eyes of the law, he had a brief filed on behalf
of Oberstleutnant Erich Leifhelm listing the articles
of grievance suffered by his father, Dr. Heinrich
Leifhelm, at the hands of a family cabal, said family
of criminals having fled the Reich under indictment.
The charges, as expected, were outrageous lies: from
outright theft of huge nonexistent bank accounts to
character assassination so as to destroy a great doc-
tor's practice. There was the legal certificate of the
'official' divorce, and a copy of the elder Leifhelm's
last will and testament. There was only one true
union and one true son, all rights, privileges and in-
heritances passed on to him: Oberstleutnant Erich
Stoessel-Leifhelm.

Because we possessed reasonably accurate dates,
survivors were found. It was confirmed that Frau
Leifhelm, her three children and her father perished
at Dachau, ten miles outside of Munich.

The Jewish Leifhelms were gone; the Aryan
Leifhelm was now the sole inheritor of considerable
wealth and property that under existing conditions
would have been confiscated. Before the age of thirty,
he had wiped his personal slate clean and
avenged the wrongs he was convinced had been
visited on his superior birth and talents. A killer had
matured.

'You must have one hell of a case there," said
Caleb
Dowling, grinning and poking Joel with his elbow.
"Your butt
burned up in the ashtray a while ago. I reached
over to close
the goddamned lid, and all you did was raise your
hand like
I was out of order."
"I'm sorry. It's . . . it's a complicated brief. Christ, I
wouldn't raise my hand to you, you're a celebrity."
Converse
laughed because he knew it was expected.
"Well, my second bit of news for you, good buddy,
is that
celebrity or no, the smoking lamp's been on for a
couple of
minutes now and you still got a reefer in your
fingers. Now,
I grant you, you didn't light it, but we're getting a
lot of Nazi
looks over here."

"Nazi . . . ?" Joel spoke the word involuntarily as he

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pressed the unlit cigarette into the receptacle; he was not aware that he had been holding it.

"A figure of speech and a bad line, 'said the actor. 'We'll be in Cologne before you put all that legal stuff away. Come on, good buddy, he's going in for the approach."

"No," countered Joel without thinking. "He's making a pitchout until he gets the tower's instructions. It's standard we've got at least three minutes."

"You sound like you know what the hell you're talking about."

"Vaguely," said Converse, putting the Leifhelm dossier into his attache case. "I used to be a pilot."

"No kidding? A real pilot?"

"Well, I got paid."

"For an airline? I mean, one of these real airlines?"

"Larger than this one, I think."

"Goddamn, I'm impressed. I wouldn't have thought so. Lawyers and pilots somehow don't seem compatible."

"It was a long time ago." Joel closed his case and snapped the locks.

The plane rolled down the runway, the landing having been so unobtrusive that a smattering of applause erupted from the rear of the aircraft. Dowling spoke as he unfastened his seat belt. "I used to hear some of that after a particularly good class."

"Now you hear a lot more," said Converse.

"For a hell of a lot less. By the way, where are you staying, counselor?"

Joel was not prepared for the question. 'Actually, I'm not sure," he replied, again reaching for words, for an answer. "This trip was a last-minute decision."

"You may need help. Bonn's crowded. Tell you what, I'm at the Konigshof and I suspect I've got a little influence. Let's see what we can do."

"Thanks very much, but that won't be necessary." Converse thought rapidly. The last thing he wanted was the attention focused on anyone in the actor's

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company. "My firm's sending someone to meet me
and he'll have the accommodations. As a matter of
fact, I'm supposed to be one of the last people off
the plane, so he doesn't have to try to find me in
the crowd."

"Well, if you've got any time and you want a couple
of

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laughs with some actor types, call me at the hotel
and leave a number."

"I probably will. I enjoyed riding shotgun. '

'On a cattle drive, pardner?"

Joel waited. The last stragglers were leaving the
plane, nodding at the flanking stewardesses, some
yawning, others in awkward combat with shoulder
bags, camera equipment and suit-carriers. The final
passenger exited through the aircraft's concave door
and Converse got up, gripping the handle of his
attache case and sliding into the aisle. Instinctively
without having a conscious reason to do so, he
glanced to his right, into the rear section of the
plane.

What he saw and what saw him made him
freeze. His breath exploded silently in his chest.
Seated in the last row of the long fuselage was a
woman. The pale skin under the wide brim of the
hat, and the frightened, astonished eyes that abruptly
looked away all formed an image he vividly re-
membered. She was the woman in the cafe at the
Kastrup Airport in Copenhagen! When he last saw
her she was walking rapidly into the baggage-claim
area, away from the row of airlines' counters. She
had been stopped by a man in a hurry words had
been exchanged and now Joel knew they had
concerned him.

The woman had doubled back, unnoticed in the
last-minute rush for boarding. He felt it, he knew it.
She had followed him from Denmark!

6

Converse rushed up the aisle and through the
metal door into the carpeted tunnel. Fifty feet down
the passageway the narrow walls opened into a
waiting area, the plastic seats and the roped-off
stanchions designating the gate. There was no one;
the place was empty, the other gates shut down, the
lights off. Beyond, suspended from the ceiling were
signs in German, French and English directing
passengers to the main terminal and the downstairs
baggage claim. There was no time for his luggage; he
had to run, to get away from the

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airport as fast as possible, get away without being seen. Then the obvious struck him, and he felt sick. He had been seen; they knew he was on the flight from Hamburg whoever they were. The instant he walked into the terminal he would be spotted, and there was nothing he could do about it. They had found him in Copenhagen; the woman had found him and she had been ordered on board to make certain he did not stay in Hamburg, or switch planes to another destination.

Howe How did they do it?

There was no time to think about it; he would think about it later if there was a later. He passed the arches of the closed-down metal detectors and the black conveyor belts where hand luggage was X-rayed. Ahead, no more than seventy-five feet were the doors to the terminal. What was he going to do, what should he do?

NUR FÜR HIER BESCHAFTIGTE
MANNER

Joel stopped at a door. The sign on it was emphatic, the German forbidding. Yet he had seen those words before. Where? What was it? . . . Zurich! He had been in a department store in Zurich when a stomach attack had descended to his bowels. He had pleaded with a sympathetic clerk who had taken him to a nearby employees' men's room. In one of those odd moments of gratitude and relief, he had focused on the strange words as they had drawn nearer. Nur für trier Beschäftigte. Manner.

No further memory was required. He pushed the door open and went inside, not sure what he would do other than collect his thoughts. A man in green overalls was at the far end of the line of sinks against the wall; he was combing his hair while inspecting a blemish on his face in the mirror. Converse walked to the row of urinals beyond the sinks, his demeanor that of an airlines executive. The affectation was accepted; the man mumbled something courteously and left. The door swung shut and he was alone.

Joel stepped back from the urinal and studied the tiled enclosure, hearing for the first time the sound of several voices . . . outside, somewhere outside, beyond . . . the windows. Three-quarters up from the floor and recessed in the far wall were three frosted-glass windows, the painted white frames melting into the whiteness of the room. He was con

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fused. In these security-conscious days of airline travel with the constant emphasis on guarding against smuggled arms and narcotics, a room inside a gate area that had a means of getting outside

The Aquitaine Progression before entering customs did not make sense. Then the obvious fact occurred to him. It could be his way out! The flight from Hamburg was a domestic flight, this part of the Cologne-Bonn airport a domestic terminal; there were no customs! Of course there were exterior windows in an enclosure like this. What difference did it make? Passengers still had to pass through the electronic arches and, conversely, authorities wanting to pick up a passenger flying domestically would simply wait by a specific gate.

But no one waited for him. He had been the last the second to last passenger off the late night flight. The roped-off gate had been deserted; anyone sitting in one of the plastic chairs or standing beyond the counter would be obvious. Therefore, those who were keeping him in their sights did not want to be seen themselves. Whoever they were, they were waiting, watching for him from some remote spot inside the terminal. They could wait.

He approached the far-right window and lowered his attache case to the floor. When he stood erect, the sill was only inches above his head. He reached for the two white handles and pushed; the window slid easily up several inches. He poked his fingers through the space; there was no screen. Once the window was raised to its full height, there would be enough room for him to crawl outside.

There was a clattering behind him, rapid slaps of metal against wood. He spun around as the door opened, revealing a hunched-over old man in a white maintenance uniform carrying a mop and a pail. Slowly, with deliberation, the old man took out a pocket watch, squinted at it, said something in German, and waited for an answer. Not only was Joel aware that he was expected to speak, but he assumed that he had been told the employees' men's room was being closed until morning. He had to think; he could not leave; the only way out of the airport was through the terminal. If there was another he did not know where, and it was no time to be running around a section of an airport shut down for the remainder of the night. Patrolling guards might compound his problems.

His eyes dropped, centering on the metal pail, and in desperation he knew what he had to do, but not whether he could do it. With a sudden grimace of pain, he moaned and grabbed

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his chest, falling to his knees. His face contorted, he sank to the floor.

"Doctor, doctor . . . doctor!" he shouted over and over again.

The old man dropped the mop and the pail; a guttural stream of panicked phrases accompanied several cautious steps forward. Converse rolled to

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his right against the wall he gasped for breath as he watched the German with wide, blank eyes.

"Doctor. . . !" he whispered.

The old man trembled and backed away toward the door; he turned, opened it and ran out, his frail voice raised for help.

There would be only seconds! The gate was no more than two hundred feet to the left, the entrance to the terminal perhaps a hundred to the right. Joel got up quickly, raced to the pail, turned it upside down, and brought it back to the window. He placed it on the floor and stepped up with one foot, his palms making contact with the base of the window; he shoved. The glass rose about four inches and stopped, the frame lodged against the sash. He pushed again with all the strength he could manage in his awkward positron. The window would not budge; breathing hard he studied it, his intense gaze zeroing in on two small steel objects he wished to God were not in place, but they were. Two protective braces were screwed into the opposing sashes, preventing the window from being opened more than six inches. Cologne-Bonn might not be an international airport with a panoply of sophisticated security devices, but it was not without its own safeguards.

There were distant shouts from beyond the door; the old man had reached someone. The sweat rolled down Converse's face as he stepped off the pail and reached for his attache case on the floor. Action and decision were simultaneous, only instinct unconsciously governing both. Joel picked up the leather case, stepped forward and crashed it repeatedly into the window, shattering the glass and finally breaking away the lower wooden frame. He stepped back up on the pail and looked out. Beyond below was a cement path bordered by a guardrail, floodlights in the distance, no one in sight. He threw the attache case out the window, and pulled himself up, his left knee kicking fragments of glass and what was left of the frame to the concrete below. Awkwardly, he hunched his whole body, pressing his head into his shoulder blades, and

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plunged through the opening. As he fell to the ground he heard the shouts from inside: they grew in volume, all in counterpoint, a mixture of bewilderment and anger. He ran.

Minutes later, at a sudden curve in the cement path, he saw the floodlit entrance of the terminal and the line of taxis waiting for the passengers of Flight 817 from Hamburg to pick up their luggage before the drivers collected their inHated night prices to Bonn and Cologne. There were entrance and exit roads leading to the platform, broken by

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pedestrian crosswalks, and beyond these an immense parking lot with several lighted booths still operating for those driving their own cars. Converse slipped over the guardrail and ran across an intersecting lawn until he reached the first road, racing into the shadows at the first blinding glare of a floodlight. He had to reach a taxi, a taxi with a driver who spoke English; he could not remain on foot.... He had been captured on foot once, years ago. On a jungle trail, where if he had only been able to commandeer a jeep an enemy jeep he might have . . . Stop it! This is not 'Nam, it's a goddamn airport with a million tons of concrete poured between flowers, grass and asphalt! He kept moving in and out of the shadows, until he had made a complete semicircle one-eight zero. He was in darkness, the last of the taxis in the line ahead of him. He approached the first, which was the last.

"English? Do you speak English?"

"~nglisch? Nein. "

The second cabdriver was equally negative, but the third was not. "As you Americans say, only the asshole would drive a taxi here wizzout the English reasonable. Is so?"

"It's reasonable, ' said Joel, opening the door.

"Rein! You cannot do that!"

"Do what?"

"Come in the taxi."

"Why not?"

"The line. Allviss is the line."

Converse reached into his jacket pocket and withdrew a folded layer of deutsche marks. "I'm generous. Can you understand that?"

"Is also urgent sickness. Get in, main Herr."

The cab pulled out of the line and sped toward the exit road. "Bonn or Koln?" asked the driver.

"Bonn," replied Converse, "but not yet. I want you to

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drive into the other lane and stop across the way in front of that parking lot."

"~Was... 9"

"The other lane. I want to watch the entrance back there. I think there was someone on the Hamburg plane I know."

"Many have come out. Only those with luggage "

"She's still inside," insisted Joel. "Please, just do as I say."

' She? . . . Ach, ein Fraulein. Ist ja Ihr Geld, main Herr. "

The driver swung the cab into a cutoff that led to the incoming road and the parking lot. He stopped in the shadows beyond the second booth; the terminal doors were on the left, no more than a hundred yards away. Converse watched as weary passengers, carrying assorted suitcases, golf bags, and the ever-present camera equipment, began to file out of the terminal's entrance, most raising their hands for taxis, a few walking across the pedestrian lanes toward the parking lot.

Twelve minutes passed and still there was no sign of the woman from Copenhagen. She could not have been carrying luggage, so the delay was deliberate, or instructed. The driver of the cab had assumed the role of nonobserver; he had turned off the lights and, with a bowed head, appeared to be dozing. Silence.... Across the parallel roads, the travelers from Hamburg had dwindled. Several young men, undoubtedly students, two in cut-off jeans, their companions drinking from cans of beer, were laughing as they counted the deutsche marks between them. A yawning businessman in a three-piece suit struggled with a bulging suitcase and an enormous cardboard box wrapped in a floral print, while an elderly couple argued, their dispute emphasized by two shaking heads of grey hair. Five others, men and women, were by the curb at the far end of the platform apparently waiting for pre-arranged transportation. But where . . .

Suddenly she was there, but she was not alone. Instead, she was flanked by two men, a third directly behind her. All four walked slowly, casually, out of the automatic glass doors, moving to the left, their pace quickening until they reached the dimmest area of the canopied entrance. Then the three men angled themselves in front of the woman, as if mounting a wall of protection, their heads turning, talking to her over their shoulders while studying the crowd. Their conversation became animated but controlled, anger joining confusion,

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tempers held in check. The man on the right broke away and crossed to the corner of the building, then walked beyond into the shadows. He pulled an object out of an inside pocket and Joel instantly knew what it was; the man raised it to his lips. He was talking by radio to someone in or around the airport.

Barely seconds passed when the beams of powerful headlights burst through the glass over

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Converse's right shoulder, filling the back of the taxi. He pressed himself into the seat his head turned, neck arched, his face at the edge of the rear window. Beyond, by the exit booth of the parking lot, a dark-red limousine had stopped, the driver's arm extended a bill clutched in his hand. The attendant took the money turning to make change, when the large car lurched forward leaving the man in the booth bewildered. It careened around the taxi and headed for the curve in the road that led to the airport terminal's entrance. The timing was too precise; radio contact had been made and Joel spoke to the driver.

"I told you I was generous," he said, startled by the words he was forming in his head. "I can be very generous if you'll do as I ask you to."

"I am an honest man," replied the German, uncertainty in his voice, his eyes looking at Joel in the rearview mirror.

"So am I," said Converse. "But I'm also honestly curious and there's nothing wrong with that. You see the dark-red car over there, the one that's stopping at the corner of the building?"

'pa. "

"Do you think you could follow it without being seen? You'd have to stay pretty far behind, but keep it in sight. Could you do it?"

"Is not a reasonable request. How generous is the American?"

"Two hundred deutsche marks over the fare."

"You are generous, and I am a superior driver."

The German did not underestimate his talents behind the wheel. Skillfully he weaved the cab unobtrusively through a cutoff, swinging abruptly left into the parallel exit road and bypassing the entrance to the terminal.

"What are you doing?" asked Joel, confused. "I want you to follow "

"Is only way out," interrupted the driver, glancing back at the airport platform while maintaining moderate speed. "I

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shall let him pass me. I am just one more insignificant taxi on the autobahn."

Converse sank back into the corner of the seat, his head away from the windows. "That's reasonably good thinking," he said.

"Superior, mein Herr.", Again the driver looked
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briefly back out the window, then concentrated on the road and the rearview mirror. Moments later he gradually accelerated his speed; it was not noticeable; there was no breaking away, instead merely a faster pace. He eased to the left, passing a Mercedes coupe, staying in the lane to overtake a Volkswagen, then returning to the right.

"I hope you know what you're doing," muttered Joel.

No reply was necessary as the dark-red vehicle streaked by on the left.

"Directly ahead the road separates," said the driver. "One way to Koln, the other to Bonn. You say you are going to Bonn, but what if your friend goes to Koln?"

"Stay with him."

The limousine entered the road for Bonn and Converse lighted a cigarette, his thoughts on the reality of having been found, which meant his name was known from the passenger manifest. So be it; he would have preferred otherwise, but once the initial contact had been made with Bertholdier it was not a vital point. He could operate as himself; his past might even be an asset. Also, there was a positive side to the immediate situation; he had learned something several things. Those following him who now had lost him were no part of the authorities; they were not connected with either the German or the French police, or the coordinating Interpol. If they were, they would have taken him at the gate or on the plane itself, and that told him something else. Joel Converse was not wanted for assault or God forbid murder back in Paris. And this assumption could only lead to a third probability: the violent, bloody struggle in the alley was being covered up. Jacques-Louis Bertholdier was taking no chances that because of his severely wounded aide his own name might surface in any connection whatsoever with a wealthy guest of the hotel who had made such alarming insinuations to the revered general. The protection of Aquitaine was paramount.

There was a fourth possibility, so realistically arrived at it could be considered fact. The men in the dark-red limou

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sine who had met the Hamburg plane were also part of Aquitaine, underlings of Erich Leifhelm, the spoke of Aquitaine in West Germany. Sometime during the last five hours, Bertholdier had learned the identity of the ersatz Henry Simon probably through the management of the George V and contacted Leifhelm. Then, alarmed that no passenger manifest listed an American named Converse flying from Paris to Bonn, they had checked the other airlines and found he had gone to Copenhagen. The

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alarms must have been strident. Why Copenhagen?
He said he was going to Bonn. Why did this strange
man with his extraordinary information go to
Copenhagen? Who are his contacts, whom will he
meet? Find him. Find them! Another phone call had
been made, a description given, and a woman had
stared at him in a cafe in the Kastrup Airport. It was
all so through the-looking-glass.

He had flown to Denmark for one reason, but
another purpose had been served. They had found
him, but in the finding they had revealed their own
panic. An agitated reception committee, the use of
a radio at night to reach an unseen vehicle only a
few hundred feet away, a racing limousine: these
were the ingredients of anxiety. The enemy was
off-balance and the lawyer in Converse was satisfied.
At this moment that enemy was a quarter of a mile
down the road speeding into Bonn, unaware that a
taxi behind them, skillfully maneuvered by a driver
slipping around the intermittent traffic, was keeping
them in sight.

Joel crushed out his cigarette as the driver
slowed down to let a pickup truck pass. He could see
the large dark-red car ahead on the long curve. The
German was no amateur, he knew the moves to
make, and Converse understood. Whoever was in
that limousine might well be an influential owner,
and even two hundred deutsche marks were not
worth the probable enmity of a powerful man.

Probabilities . . . everything was probabilities. He
had built his legal reputation on the study of
probabilities, and it was a simpler process than most
of his colleagues believed. The approach, that is, was
simple, not the work; that was never easy. It
demanded the dual discipline of concentrating on the
minute and prodding the imagination to expand until
the minutiae were arranged and rearranged into
dozens of different equations. This exhaustive what-if
process was the keystone of legal thinking; it was as
simple as that. It was also

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a verbal trap, Joel reflected, as he thought back
several years, smiling an uncomfortable smile alone
in the darkness. In one of her moments of pique,
Val had told him that if he would spend one iota of
the time on the two of them that he spent on his
"goddamned probabilities," he would "probably"
come to realize that the "probability" of their
surviving together was "very probably nil."

She had never lacked for being succinct nor
sacrificed her humor in the pursuit of candor. Her
striking looks aside, Valerie Charpentier Converse
was a very funny lady. Unable not to, he had smiled
at her explosion that night years ago, then they both
had laughed quietly until she turned away and left
the room, too much sadness in the truth she had
spoken.

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Large picturesque buildings gradually replaced the quiet countryside, reminding Converse of huge Victorian houses with filigreed borders and overhanging eaves and grilled balconies beneath large rectangular windows stark geometric shapes. These in turn gave way to a contradictory stretch of attractive but perfectly ordinary residential homes, the sort that could be found in any traditional wealthy suburb on the outskirts of a major American city. Scarsdale, Chevy Chase Grosse Pointe or Evanston. Then came the center of Bonn where narrow, gaslit streets ran into wider avenues with modern lighting, quaint squares only blocks away from banks of contemporary stores and boutiques. It was an architectural anachronism Old world ambience coexisting with up-to-the-minute structures, but with no sense of a city, no sense of electricity or grandeur. Instead it appeared to be a large town, growing rapidly larger, the town fathers uncertain of its direction. The birthplace of Beethoven and the gateway to the Rhine Valley was the most unlikely capital imaginable of a major government. It was anything but the seat of a hard-nosed Bundestag and a series of astute, sophisticated prime ministers who faced the Russian bear across the borders.

"Mein Herr!" cried the driver. "They take the road to Bad Godesberg. Das Diplomatenviertel."

"What does that mean?"

"Embassies. They have Polizeistreifen! Patrols. We could be, how do you say, known?"

"Spotted," explained Joel. "Never mind. Do what you've been doing, you're great. Stop, if you have to; park, if you have

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to. Then keep going. You now have three hundred deutsche marks over the fare. I want to know where they stop."

It came six minutes later, and Converse was stunned. Whatever he had thought, wherever his imagination had led him, he was not prepared for the driver's words.

'That is the American embassy, mein Herr. "

Joel tried to focus his thoughts. "Take me to the Hotel Konigshof," he said, remembering, not knowing what else to say.

"Yes, I believe Herr Dowling left a note to that effect," said the desk clerk, reaching below the counter.

"He did?" Converse was astonished. He had used the actor's name in the outside hope of some

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possible preferential treatment. He expected nothing else, if indeed that.

"Here it is." The clerk extracted two small telephone memos from the thin stack in his hand. "You are John Converse, an American attorney."

"Close enough. That's me."

"Herr Dowling said you might have difficulty finding appropriate accommodations here in Bonn. Should you come to the Konigshof tonight, he requested that we be as helpful as possible. It is possible, Herr Converse. Herr Dowling is a very popular man."

"He deserves to be," said Joel.

"I see he also left a message for you."

The clerk turned and retrieved a sealed envelope from one of the mailboxes behind him. He handed it to Converse, who opened it.

Hi, pardner.

If you don't pick this up, I'll get it back in the morning. Forgive me, but you sounded like too many of my less fortunate colleagues who say no when they want to say yes. Now collectively in their case, it's some kind of warped pride because they think I'm suggesting a handout it's either that or they don't want to meet someone who may be where I'm going. By the looks of you, I'd have to rule out the former and stick with the latter. There's someone you don't want to meet here in Bonn, and you don't have to. The room's taken care of and in my name change that if you like but don't argue about the bill. I owe

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you a fee, counselor, and I always pay my debts. At least during the last four years I have.

Incidentally, you'd make a lousy actor. Your pauses aren't at all convincing.

Pa Ratchet

Joel put the note back in the envelope, resisting the temptation to go to a house phone and call Dowling. The man would have little enough sleep before going to work; thanks could wait until morning. Or evening.

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"Mr. Dowling's arrangements are generous and completely satisfactory," he said to the clerk behind the counter. "He's right. If my clients knew I'd come to Bonn a day early I'd have no chance to enjoy your beautiful city."

"Your privacy will be respected, sir. Herr Dowling is a most thoughtful man, as well as generous, of course. Your luggage is outside with a taxi, perhaps?"

"No, that's why I'm so late. It was put on the wrong plane out of Hamburg and will be here in the morning. At least that's what I was told at the airport."

"Ach, so inconvenient, but all too familiar. Is there anything you might require?"

"No, thanks," replied Converse, raising his attache case slightly. "The bare necessities travel with me.... well, there is one thing. would it be possible to order a drink?"

"Of course."

Joel sat up in bed, the dossier at his side, the drink in his hand. He needed a few minutes to think before going back into the world of Field Marshal Erich Leifhelm. With the help of the switchboard, he had called the all-night number for Lufthansa and had been assured that his suitcase would be held for him at the airport. He gave no explanation other than the fact that he had been traveling for two days and nights and simply did not care to wait for his luggage. The attendant could read into his words whatever she liked; he did not care. His mind was on other things.

The American embassy! what appalled him was the stark reality of old Beale's words.... Behind it all are those who do the convincing, and they're growing in numbers everywhere.... We're in the countdown ... three to five Uzbeks that's all you've got.... It's real and it's coming. Joel was not prepared for the reality. He could accept Delavane and

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Bertholdier, certainly I,eifhelm, but the shock of knowing that ordinary embassy personnel American personnel were on the receiving end of orders from Delavane's network was paralysing. How far had Aquitaine progressed? How widespread were its followers, its influence? Was tonight the frightening answer to both questions? He would think about it all in the morning. First, he had to be prepared for the man he had come to find in Bonn. As he reached for the dossier he remembered the sudden deep panic in Avery Fowler's eyes Preston Halliday's eyes. How long had he known? How much had he known?

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It is pointless to recount Erich Leifhelm's exploits in the early to middle years of the war other than to say his reputation grew, and what is most important he was one of the very few superior officers to come up through Nazi party ranks accepted by the old-line professional generals. Not only did they accept him but they sought him out for their commands. Men like Rundstedt and Von Falkenhausen, Rommel and von Treskow; at one time or another each asked Berlin for Leifhelm's services. He was unquestionably a brilliant strategist and a daring of dicer, but there was something else. These generals were aristocrats, part of the ruling class of prewar Germany, and by and large loathed the National Socialists, considering them thugs, exhibitionists and amateurs. It is not difficult to imagine Leifhelm, sitting among these men, modestly expounding on what was clearly noted in his military record. He was the son of the late prominent Munich surgeon Dr. Heinrich Leifhelm, who had left him considerable wealth and property. We need no conjecture, however, to understand how much further he went to ingratiate himself, for the following is extracted from an interview with General Rolf Winter, Standortkommandant of the Wehrbereichskommando in the Saar sectors:

We would sit around having coffee after dinner, the talk quite depressing. We knew the war was lost. The insane orders from Berlin most we agreed would never be carried out guaranteed wholesale

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slaughter of troops and civilians. It was madness, national suicide. And always, this young Leifhelm would say things like "Perhaps the fools will listen to me. They think I'm one of them, they've thought so from the early days in Munich." . . . And we would wonder. Could he bring some sanity to the collapsing front? He was a fine officer, highly regarded, and the son of a well-known doctor, as he constantly reminded us. After all, young men's heads were turned in those early days the cavernous soul-stirring roars of Sieg hell, the fanatic crowds; the banners and drums and marching beside ten thousand torches at night. It was all so melodramatic, so Wagnerian. But Leifhelm was different; he wasn't one of the gangsters; patriotic, of course, but not a hoodlum.... So we sent dispatches with him to our closest comrades in Berlin, dispatches that would have resulted in our executions had they fallen into the wrong hands. We were told he tried very hard, but he could not put sanity in the minds of men who lived in daily fear of death from rumor and gossip. But he maintained his own sanity and loyalty which were constant. We were informed by one of his adjutants not him, mind you that he was confronted by an S.S. colonel who had followed him in the street

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and demanded the contents of his briefcase. He refused, and when threatened with immediate arrest, he shot the man so as not to betray us. He was one of us. It was a noble risk and only a night bombing raid saved his own life.

It is clear what LeifLelm was doing and equally clear that the dispatches were never shown to anyone, nor was there an S.S. colonel shot in the streets during a bombing raid. According to Winter, those dispatches from the Saar were so explosive in content

that someone would have remembered them; no one does. Once again, LeifLelm had seen an opportunity. The war was lost, and the Nazis were about to become the ultimate twentieth-century villains. But not the elite German general corps there was a distinction. He wiped another slate clean and joined the "Prussians." He was so successful that he was rumored to have been part of the plot to assassinate

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Adolf Hitler at Wolfsschanze, and called upon to be a member of Donitz's surrender team.

During the cold war, Allied Central Command asked him to join other key elements of the Wehrmacht officer corps in the Bundesgrenzschutz. He became a privileged military consultant with full security clearance. A mature killer had survived, and history, with the Kremlin's help, took care of the rest.

In May '49 the Federal Republic was established, and the following September the Allied occupation formally came to an end. As the cold war escalated and West Germany began its remarkable recovery, the NATO forces demanded material and personnel support from their former enemies. The new German divisions were formed under the command of ex-Field Marshal Erich Leifhelm.

No one had dredged up the questionable decisions of the Munich courts from nearly two decades past; there were no other survivors and his services were desired by the victors. During the postwar reconstruction when countless settlements and labyrinthine legal resolutions were being sought throughout Germany, he was quietly awarded all assets and property previously decreed, including some of the most valuable real estate in Munich. So ends the third phase of Erich Leifhelm's story. The fourth phase which concerns us most is the one we know least about. The only certainty is that he has become as deeply entrenched in General Delavane's operation as any other man on the primary list.

There was a rapping on the door. Joel lunged off the bed, the Leifhelm dossier cascading to the

Qoor. He looked at his watch in fear and confusion. It was nearly four o'clock. Who wanted him at this hour? Had they found him? Oh, Christ] The dossier! The briefcase! "Joe . . . ?Joe, you up?" The voice was both a whisper and a shout an actor's sotto voce. "It's me, Cal Dowling." Converse ran to the door and opened it, his breath coming in gasps. Dowling was fully dressed, holding up both his hands for silence as he glanced up and down the corridor. Sat
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isfied, he walked rapidly inside, pushing Joel back and closing the door.

"I'm sorry, Cal," said Converse. "I was asleep. I guess the sound startled me."

"You always sleep in your trousers with the lights on?" asked the actor quietly. "Keep your voice down. I checked the hallways, but you can never be clear about what you didn't see."

"Clear about what?"

"One of the first things we reamed on Kwajalein in '44. A patrol doesn't mean shit unless you've got something to report. All it means is that they were better than you were."

"I was going to call you, to thank you "

"Cut it, good buddy," Dowling broke in, his expression serious. "I'm hming this down to the last couple of minutes, which is about all we've got. There's a limo downstairs waiting to take me out to the cameras over an hour away. I didn't want to come out of my room before in case anyone was hanging around, and I didn't want to call you because a switchboard can be watched or bribed ask anyone in Cuckooburg. I don't worry about the desk; they're not too fond of our crowd over here." The actor sighed. "When I got to my room, all I wanted was sleep, and all I got was a visitor. I'm down the hall and I was hoping to Christ if you came here he wouldn't see

you."

"A visitor?"

"From the embassy. The US. embassy. Tell me, Joe "

"Joel," interrupted Converse. "Not that it matters."

"Sorry, I've an obstruction in my left ear and that doesn't matter, either. He spent damn near twenty-five minutes with me asking questions about you. He said we were seen talking together on the plane. Now, you tell me, counselor, are you okay, or are my instincts all bucked up?"

Joel returned Dowling's steady gaze. "Your instincts are perfectly fine," he said without emphasis. "Did the man from the embassy say otherwise?"

"Not exactly. As a matter of fact, he didn't say a hell of a lot. Just that they wanted to talk to you, wanted to know why you'd come to Bonn, where you were."

"But they knew I was on the plane?"

"Yep, said you'd flown out of Paris."

"Then they knew I was on that plane."

"That's what I just said what he said."

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"Then why didn't they meet me at the gate and ask me themselves?"

Dowling's face creased further, his eyes narrowing within the wrinkles of bronzed flesh. "Yeah, why didn't they?" he asked himself.

"Did he say?"

"No, but then, Paris didn't come up until he was about to leave."

"What do you mean?"

"It was like he figured I was holding back something which I certainly was but he couldn't be sure. I'm pretty good at what I do, Joe Joel."

"You also took a risk," said Converse, remembering that he was talking to a risk-taker.

"No, I covered myself. I specifically asked if there were charges against you or anything like that. He said there weren't."

"Still, he was "

"Besides, I didn't like him. He was one of those pushy official types. He kept repeating things, and when he couldn't come up with anything, he said, 'We know he flew out of Paris,' as if he was challenging me. I said I didn't."

"There's not much time, but can you tell me what else he asked you?"

"I told you, he wanted to know everything we talked about. I said I didn't have a tape recorder in my head, but it was mainly small talk, the kind of chatter I get all the time from people I meet on planes. About the show, the business. But he didn't want to settle for that; he kept pushing, which gave me the opportunity to get a little pissed off myself."

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"How so?"

"I said, yes, we did talk about something else but it was very personal, and none of his damn business. He got pretty upset at that, and that let me get even angrier. We exchanged a few barbs but his weren't very sharp; he was too uptight. Then he asked me for about the tenth time if you'd said anything about Bonn, especially where you were staying. So I told him for the tenth time the truth at least what you said. That you were a lawyer and here to see clients and I didn't know where the hell you were. I mean I didn't actually know you were here."

"That's fine."

"Is it? Instincts are okay for first reactions, counselor, but

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then, you have to wonder. An aggravating Ivy League government man, waving an embassy ID and acting obnoxious may be very annoying in the middle of the night, but he is from the Department of State. What the hell's this all about?"

Joel turned and walked to the foot of the bed; he looked down at the LeifLeim dossier on the floor. He turned again and spoke clearly, hearing the exhaustion in his voice. "Something I wouldn't for the life of me involve you in. But for the record, those instincts of yours were right on, pardner."

"I'll be honest," said the actor, his clear eyes amused peering out from behind the creases. "I thought as much. I said to that bastard if I remembered anything else, I'd phone Walter what's-his-name except I called him Walt and let him know."

"I don't understand."

"He's the ambassador here in Bonn. Can you imagine with all the troubles they've got over here, that diplomatic yo-yo had a luncheon for me, a lousy television actor? We'd the suggestion that I might call the ambassador made our preppie more upset than anything else; he didn't expect it. He said three times, as I recall that the ambassador wasn't to be bothered with this problem. It wasn't that important and he had enough on his mind, and actually he wasn't even aware of it. And catch this, Mr. Lawyer. He said you were an in-house, State Department 'query,' as if a simpleminded actor couldn't possibly understand bureaucratic jingoism. I think that's when I said 'BuDshit.'"

' Thank you," said Converse, not knowing what else to say, but knowing what he wanted to find out.

"That's also when I figured my instincts weren't

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so bad." Dowling looked at his watch, then hard at Converse, his eyes now penetrating. "I was a gyrene, but I'm no flag-waver, good buddy. However, I like the flag. I wouldn't live under any other."

"Neither would I."

"Then you make it plain. Are you working for it?"

"Yes, the only way I know how, and that's as I can

ted
you."

"Are you looking into something here in Bonn? Is that why you didn't want to be seen with me? Why you stayed away from me in Hamburg and even getting off the plane here?"

"Yes."

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"And that son of a bitch didn't want me to call the ambassador."

' No, he didn't. He doesn't. He can't afford it. And, please, I ask you not to."

"Are you Oh, Christ! Are you one of those undercover people I read about? I walk into a guy on a plane who can't be seen when he gets to an airport."

"It's not that melodramatic. I'm a lawyer and simply following up on some alleged irregularities. Please accept that And I appreciate what you did for me. I'm kind of new at this

"You're cool, good buddy. Man, are you cool." Dowling turned and walked to the door. He stopped and looked back at Converse. "Maybe I'm crazy," he said. "At my age it's allowed, but there's a streak in you, young fella. Part go-ahead part stay-where-you-are. I saw it when I talked about my wife. Are you married?"

"I was."

"Who isn't? Was married, that is. Sorry."

"I'm not. We're not."

"Who is? Sorry, again. My instincts were right. You're okay." Dowling reached for the knob.

"Cal?"

"Yes?"

"I have to know. It's terribly important. Who was the man from the embassy? He must have identified himself."

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"He did, ' said the actor. "He pushed an ID in front of my face when I opened the door, but I didn't have my glasses on. But when he was leaving I made it clear I wanted to know who the hell he was."

"Who was he?"

"He said his name was Fowler. Avery Fowler."

"Wait!"

"What?"

"What did you say?" Converse reeled under the impact

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of the name. He physically had to steady himself, grabbing the nearest solid object, a bedpost, to keep from buckling.

"What's the matter, Joe? What's wrong with you?"

"That name! Is this some kind of joke a bad joke a bad line! Were you put on that plane? Did I walk into you? Are you part of it, Mr. Actor? You're damned good at what you do!

"You're either juiced or sick. What are you talking about?"

' This room, your note! Everything! That name! Is this whole goddamned night a setup?'

"It's morning, young man, and if you don't like this room you can stay wherever you like as far as I'm concerned."

"Wherever . . . 4" Joel tried to evade the blinding flashes of light from the Quai du Mont Blanc and clear the searing blockage in his throat. "No . . . I came here," he said hoarsely. "There's no way you could have known I'd do that. In Copenhagen, on the plane . . . I got the last ticket in first class, the seat next to me had been sold, an aisle seat."

"That's where I always sit. On the aisle."

"Oh, Jesus!"

"Now you're rambling.'" Dowling glanced at the empty glass on the bedside table, then over at the bureau top where there was a silver tray and a bottle of Scotch whisky provided by an accommodating desk clerk. "How much sauce have you had?"

Converse shook his head. "I'm not drunk.... I'm sorry. Christ, I'm sorry) You had nothing to do with

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it. They're using you trying to use you to find me!
You saved my . . . my job . . . and I went after you.
Forgive me."

"And you don't look like someone who's that
worried about a job," said the actor, his scowl more
one of concern than anger.

"It's not the employment, it's . . . pulling it off.
Joel silently took a deep breath to control himself,
postponing the moment when he would have to
confront the awesome implicabons of what he had
just heard. Avery Fowler! "I want to succeed in what
I'm doing; I want to win," he added limply, hoping
to conceal the slip he saw Dowling had spotted. "All
lawyers want to win."

'Sure. '

"I am sorry, Cal."

"Forget it," said the actor, his voice casual, his look
not

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casual at all. "Where I'm at these days screeching's
an hourly occurrence only, they don't say anything.
I think you just did."

"No, I overreacted, that's all. I told you I was
new at this. Not the law, just this . . . not talking
directly, I guess says it."

"Does it?"

"Yes. Please believe that."

"All right, if you want me to." Dowling again
looked at his watch. "I've got to go, but there's
something else that might be helpful in saving
that" the actor paused convincingly "job of yours.
,

"What is it?" asked Converse tightly, trying not to
leap at the question.

"As this Fowler was leaving I had a couple of
thoughts. One was that I'd been pretty hard on a
fellow who was simply doing his job, and the other
was just plain selfish. I hadn't cooperated, and that
could come back and snap me in the ass. Of course
if you never showed up here, I'd get my note back
and it wouldn't matter. But if you did, and you wore
a black hat, my tail could be in a bucket of boiling
lead."

"That should have been your first concern," said
Joel truthfully.

"Maybe it was, I don't know. At any rate, I told
him that in the course of our conversation I asked
you for drinks, to come out on location if you

The Aquitaine Progression wanted to. He seemed puzzled at the last part, but he understood the first. I asked whether I should call him at the embassy if you took me up on either invitation, and he said no, I shouldn't do that."

"What?"

"In short words, he made it very plain that my calling him would only louse up this 'in-house query.' He told me to wait for his call. He'd phone me around noon."

"But you're filming. You're on location."

"That's the beauty part, but the hell with it. There are mobile telephone hookups; the studios insist on them these days. It's another kind of screeching called budgetary controls. We get our calls."

"You're losing me."

"Then find me. When he calls me, I'll call you. Should I tell him you reached me?"

Surprised, Converse stared at the aging actor, the risk-taker. "You're way ahead of me, aren't you?"

"You're pretty obvious. So was he, when I put it together."

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er which I just did. This Fowler wants to reach you, but he wants to do it solo, away from those people you don't want to meet. You see, when he was at the door and we had our last words, I was bothered by something. He couldn't sustain the role any more than you did on the plane but I couldn't be certain. He kind of fell apart on his exit, and that you never do even if you've got to hold in a sudden attack of diarrhea. . . . What do I tell him, Joe?"

"set his telephone number, I guess.",

"Done. You get some sleep. You look like a coked-up starlet who's just been told she's going to play Medea."

"I'll try."

Dowling reached into his pocket and took out a scrap of paper. "Here," he said approaching Converse and handing it to him. "I wasn't sure I was going to give this to you, but I damn well want you to have it now. It's the mobile number where you can reach me. Call me after you've talked to this Fowler. I'm going to be a nervous wreck until I hear from

you."

"I give you my word.... Cal, what did you mean when you mentioned 'the beauty part' and forgetting about it?"

The actor's head shifted back in perfect precision, at just the right angle for anyone in the audience. "The son of a bitch asked me what I did for a living.... As they say in the Polo Lounge, Ciao, baby."

Converse sat on the edge of the bed, his head pounding, his body tense. Avery Fowler! Jesus! Avery Preston Fowler Halliday! Press Fowler . . . Press Halliday! The names bombarded him, piercing his temples and bouncing off the walls of his mind, screaming echoes everywhere. He could not control the assault; he began to sway back and forth, his arms supporting him, a strange rhythm emerging, the beat accompanying the name names of the man who had died in his arms in Geneva. A man he had known as a boy, the adult a stranger who had manipulated him into the world of George Marcus Delavane and a spreading disease called Aquitaine.

This Fowler wants to reach you, but he wants to do it solo, away from those people you don 't want to meet.... The judgment of a risk-taker.

Converse stopped rocking, his eyes on the Leifhelm dossier on the floor. He had assumed the worst because it was beyond his comprehension, but there was an alternative, an out

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side possibility, perhaps under the circumstances even a probability. The geometries were there; he could not trace them but they were there! The name Avery Fowler meant nothing to anyone but him at least not in Bonn, not as it pertained to a murder in Geneva. Was Dowling right? Joel had asked the actor to get the man's telephone number, but without conviction. The image of a dark-red limousine driving through the embassy's gates would not leave him. That was the connection that had enveloped the shock of Avery Fowler's name. The man using it was from the embassy, and at least part of the embassy was part of Aquitaine, therefore the impostor was part of the trap. That was the logic; it was simple arithmetic . . . but it was not geometry. Suppose there was a break in the line, an insertion from another plane that voided the arithmetic progression? If there was, it was in the form of an explanation he could not possibly perceive unless it was given to him.

The shock was receding; he was finding his equilibrium again. As he had done so many times in courtrooms and boardrooms, he began to accept the totally unexpected, knowing he could do nothing about it until something else happened, something over which he had no control. The most difficult part of the process was forcing himself to function

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until it did happen, whatever it was. Conjecture was
futile; all the probabilities were beyond his
understanding.

He reached down for the Leifhelm dossier.

Erich Leifhelm's years with the Bundesgrenzschutz were unique and require a word about the organization itself. In the aftermath of all wars, a subjugated national police force is required in an occupied country for reasons ranging from the simple language problem to the occupying power's need to understand local customs and traditions. There must be a buffer between the occupation troops and a vanquished people so as to maintain order. There is also a side issue rarely elaborated upon or analyzed in the history books, but no less important for that lack. Defeated armies can still possess talent, and unless that talent is utilized the humiliation of defeat can ferment, at minimum distilling itself into hostilities that are counterproductive to a stabilized political climate, or, at maximum, turning into internal subver

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sion that can lead to violence and bloodshed at the expense of the victors and whatever new government that is being formed. To put it bluntly, the Allied General Staff recognized that it had on its hands another brilliant and popular military man who would not suffer the anonymity of early retirement or a corporate boardroom. The Bundesgrenzschutz literally, federal border police like all police organizations, was and is a paramilitary force, and as such the logical repository for men like Erich Leifhelm. They were the leaders; better to use them than be abused by them. And as always among leaders, there are those few who surge forward, leading the pack. During these years foremost among those few was Erich Leifhelm.

His early work with the Grenzschutz was that of a military consultant during the massive German demobilisation, then afterward the chief liaison between the police garrisons and the Allied occupation forces. Following demobilisation, his duties were mainly concentrated in the trouble spots of Vienna and Berlin where he was in constant touch with the commanders of the American, British and French sectors. His zealous anti-Soviet feelings were rapidly made known by Leifhelm throughout the command centers and duly noted by the senior officers.. More and more he was taken into their confidence until as it had happened before with the Prussians he was literally considered one of them.

It was in Berlin where Leifhelm first came in contact with General Jacques-Louis

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Bertholdier. A strong friendship developed, but it was not an association either one cared to parade because of the age-old animosities between the German and French militaries. We were able to trace only three former officers from Bertholdier's command post who remembered or would speak of seeing the two men frequently at dinner together in out-of-the-way restaurants and cafes, deep in conversation, obviously comfortable with each other. Yet during those occasions when Leifhelm was summoned to French headquarters in Berlin, the formalities were icily proper, with names rarely used and

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certainly never first names, only ranks and titles. In recent years, as noted above, both men have denied knowing each other personally, albeit admitting their paths may have crossed.

Where previously acknowledgment of their friendship was discouraged because of traditional prejudices, the current reasons are far more understandable. Both are spearheads in the Delavane organization. The names on the primary list are there with good reason. They are influential men who sit on the boards of multinational corporations that deal in products and technology ranging from the building of dams to the construction of nuclear plants; in between are a hundred likely subsidiaries throughout Europe and Africa which could easily expedite sales of armaments. As detailed in the following pages, it can be assumed that Leifhelm and Bertholdier communicate through a woman named Ilse Fishbein in Bonn. Fishbein is her married name, the marriage itself questionable in terms of motive insofar as it was dissolved years ago when Yakov Fishbein, a survivor of the camps, emigrated to Israel. Frau Fishbein, born in 1942, is the youngest illegitimate daughter of Hermann Goring.

Converse put down the dossier and reached for a memo pad next to the telephone on the bedside table. He then unclipped from his shirt pocket the gold Cartier ball-point pen Val had given him years ago and wrote down the name Ilse Fishbein. He studied both the pen and the name. The Cartier status symbol was a remembrance of better days no, not really better, but at least more complete. Valerie, at his insistence, had finally quit the New York advertising agency, with its insane hours, and gone free-lance. On her last day of formal work, she had walked across town to Cartier and spent a considerable portion of her last paycheck for his gift. When he asked her what he had done outside of his meteoric rise in Talbot, Brooks and Simon to deserve a gift of such impractical opulence, she had replied: "For making me do what I should have done a long time ago. On the other hand, if free-lancing doesn't pay off, I'll steal it back and pawn it.... what the hell, you'll probably lose it."

Free-lancing had paid off very well, indeed, and he had never lost the pen.

Ilse Fishbein gave rise to another kind of thought. As much as he would like to confront her, it was out of the question. Whatever Erich Leifhelm knew had been provided by Bertholdier in Paris and relayed by Frau Fishbein here in Bonn. And the communication obviously contained a detailed description as well as a warning; the American was dangerous. Ilse Fishbein, as a trusted confidante in Aquitaine, could undoubtedly lead him to others in Germany who were part of Delavane's network, but to approach her was to ask for his own . . . whatever it was they intended for him at the moment, and he was not ready for that. Still, it was a name, a piece of information, a fact he was not expected to have, and experience had taught him to keep such details up front and reveal them, spring them quietly when the moment was right. Or use them himself when no one was looking. He was a lawyer, and the ways of adversary law were labyrinthine; whatever was withheld was no-man's-land. On either side, to the more patient, the spoils.

Yet the temptation was so damned inviting. The bloodline of Hermann Goring involved with the contemplated resurrection of the generals! In Germany. Ilse Fishbein could be an immediate means of unlocking a floodgate of unwanted memories. He held in his hand a spiked club; the moment would come when he would swing it.

Leifhelm's commanding duties in the field with the West German NATO divisions lasted seventeen years, whereupon he was elevated to SHAPE headquarters, near Brussels, as military spokesman for Bonn's interests.

Again his tenure was marked by extreme anti-Soviet postures, frequently at odds with his own government's pragmatic approach to coexistence with the Kremlin, and throughout his final months at SHAPE he was more often appreciated by the Anglo-American right-wing factions than by the political leadership in Bonn.

It was only when the chancellor of the Federal Republic concluded that American foreign policy in the early eighties had been taken out of the hands of professionals and usurped by bellicose ideologues

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that he ordered Leifhelm home and created an innocuous post for the soldier to keep him at bay.

Leifhelm, however, had never been a gullible
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fool, nor was he one now in his new, improvised status. He understood why the politicians had created it it showed recognition of his own subtle strengths. People everywhere were looking to the past, to men who spoke clearly, with candor, and did not obfuscate the problems facing their countries and the world, especially the western world.

So he began to speak. At first to veterans' groups and splinter organisations where military pasts and long-established partisan politics guaranteed him a favorable reception. Spurred by the enthusiastic responses he evoked, Leifhelm began to expand, seeking larger audiences, his positions becoming more strident, his statements more provocative.

One man listened and was furious. The chancellor learned that Leifhelm had carried his quasi-politicking into the Bundestag itself, implying a constituency far beyond what he really had, but by the sheer force of his personality swaying members who should not have been swayed. Leifhelm's message came back to the chancellor: an enlarged army in far greater numbers than the NATO commitments; an intelligence service patterned after the once extraordinary Abwehr; a general revamping of textbooks, deleting injurious and slanderous materials; rehabilitation camps for political troublemakers and subversives pretending to be "liberal thinkers." It was all there.

The chancellor had had enough. He summoned Leifhelm to his office, where he demanded his resignation in the presence of three witnesses. Further he ordered Leifhelm to remove himself from all aspects of German politics, to accept no further speaking engagements, and to lend neither his name nor his presence to any cause whatsoever. He was to retire totally from public life. We have reached one of those witnesses whose name is not pertinent to this report. The following is his recollection:

The chancellor was furious. He said to Leifhelm:

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'Herr General, you have two choices, and, if you'll forgive me, a final solution. Number one, you may do as I say. Or you can be stripped of your rank and all pensions and financial accruals afforded therein, as well as the income from some rather valuable real estate in Munich, which in the opinion of any enlightened court would be taken from you instantly. That is your second choice.'

I tell you, the field marshal was apoplectic!

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He demanded his rights, as he called them, and the chancellor shouted, "You've had your rights, and they were wrong! They're skill wrong!" Then Leifhelm asked what the final solution was, and I swear to you, as crazy as it sounds, the chancellor opened a drawer of his desk, took out a pistol, and aimed it at Leifhelm. "I, myself, will kill you right now," he said. "You will not, I repeat, not take us back."

I thought for a moment that the old soldier was going to rush forward and accept the bullet, but he didn't. He stood there staring at the chancellor, such hatred in his eyes, matched by the statesman's cold appraisal. Then Leifhelm did a stupid thing. He shot his arm forward not at the chancellor, but away from him and cried "Heil Hitler." Then he turned in military fashion and walked out the door.

We were all silent for a moment or two, until the chancellor broke the silence. "I should have killed him," he said. "I may regret it. We may all regret it."

Five days after this confrontation, Jacques-Louis Bertholdier made the first of his two trips to Bonn following his retirement. On his initial visit he stayed at the Schlosspark Hotel, and as hotel records are kept for a period of three years, we were able to obtain copies of his billing charges. There were numerous calls to various firms doing business with Juneau et Cie, too numerous to examine individually, but one number kept being repeated, the name having no apparent business connections with Bertholdier or his company. It was use Fishbein. However, upon checking Erich Leifhelm's telephone bills for the dates in question, it was found that he, too, had placed calls to use Fishbein, identical in number with

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those placed by Bertholdier. Inquiries and brief surveillance further established that Frau Fishbein and Leifhelm have known each other for a number of years. The conclusion is apparent: She is the conduit between Paris and Bonn in Delavane's apparatus.

Converse lit a cigarette. There was the name again, the temptation again. Ilse Fishbein could be the shortcut. Threatened with exposure, this daughter of Hermann Goring could reveal a great deal. She could confirm that she was not only the liaison between Leifhelm and Bertholdier but conceivably much more, for the two ex-generals had to transmit information to each other. The names of companies, of buried subsidiaries, and of firms doing business related to Delavane in Palo Alto might surface, names he could pursue legally, looking for the illegalities that had to be there. If there only was a way to make his presence felt but not seen.

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An intermediary. He had used intermediaries in the past, often enough to know the value of the procedure. It was relatively simple. He would approach a third party to make contact with an adversary carrying information that could be of value to him insofar as it might be deemed damaging to his interests, and if the facts presented were strong enough, an equitable solution was usually forthcoming. The ethics was questionable, but contrary to accepted belief, ethics was in three dimensions, if not four. The end did not justify the means, but justifiable means that brought about a fair and necessary conclusion were not to be dismissed.

And nothing could be fairer or more necessary than the dismantling of Aquitaine. Old Beale was right that night on the moonlit beach on Mykonos. His client was not an unknown man in San Francisco but instead a large part of this so-called civilised world. Aquitaine had to be stopped, aborted.

An intermediary? It was another question he would put off until the morning. He picked up the dossier, his eyes heavy.

Leifhelm has few intimate friends that appear to be constant, probably because of his awareness that he is under watch by the government. He sits on the boards of several prominent corporations,

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which have stated frankly that his name justifies his stipend....

Joel's head fell forward. He snapped it back, widened his eyes, and scanned the final pages rapidly, absorbing only the general impressions; his concentration was waning. There was mention of several restaurants, the names meaningless; a marriage during the war that ended when Leifhelm's wife disappeared in November of '43, presumed killed in a Berlin bombing raid; no subsequent wife or wives. His private life was extraordinarily private, if not austere; the exception here was his proclivity for small dinner parties, the guest lists always varied, again names, again meaningless. The address of his residence on the outskirts of Bad Godesberg.... Suddenly Converse's neck stiffened, his eyes fully alert.

The house is in the remote countryside, on the Rhine River and far from any shopping areas or suburban concentration. The grounds are fenced and guarded by attack dogs who bark viciously at all approaching vehicles except Leifhelm's dark-red Mercedes limousine.

A dark-red Mercedes! It was Leifhelm himself who had been at the airport! Leifhelm who had driven directly to the embassy! How could it

happens How?

It was too much to absorb, too far beyond his understanding. The darkness was closing in, Joel's brain telling him it could no longer accept further input; it simply could not function. The dossier fell to his side; he closed his eyes and slept.

He was plunging headlong down through a cavernous hole in the earth, jagged black rocks on all sides, infinite darkness below. The walls of irregular stone kept screaming in frenzy, screeching at him like descending layers of misshapen gargoyles with sharp beaks and raised claws lunging at his flesh. The hysterical clamor was unbearable. Where had the silence gone? Why was he falling into black nothingness?

He flashed his eyes open; his forehead was drenched with sweat, his breath coming in gasps. The telephone by his head was ringing, the erratic bell jarringly dissonant. He tried to shake the sleep and the fear from his semiconsciousness; he reached for the blaring instrument, glancing at his watch as

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he did so. It was twelve-fifteen, a quarter past noon, the sun streaking through the hotel window. Blinding.

"Yes? Hello . . . ?"

"Joe? Joel ?"

"Yes." it's Cal Dowling. Our boy called."

What? Who?"

"This Fowler. Avery Fowler."

"Oh, Jesus!" It was coming back, it was all coming back. He was seated at a table in the Chat Botte on the Quai du Mont Blanc, flashes of sunlight bouncing off the grillwork on the lakeside boulevard. No . . . he was not in Geneva. He was in a hotel room in Bonn, and only hours ago he had been plunged into madness by that name. "Yes," he choked, catching his breath. "Did you get a telephone number?"

"He said there wasn't time for games, and besides, he doesn't have one. You're to meet him at the east wall of the Alter Zoll as fast as you can get there. Just walk around; he'll find you."

"That's not good enough!" cried Converse. "Not after Paris! Not after the airport last night! I'm not stupid!"

"I didn't get the impression he thought you were," replied the actor. "He told me to tell you something, he thought it might convince you."

What is it?"

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"I hope I get this right, I don't even like saying it. . . He said to tell you a judge named Anstett was killed last night in New York. He thinks you're being cut loose."

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The Alter Zoll, the ancient tower that had once been part of Bonn's southern fortress on the Rhine razed to the ground three centuries ago was now a tollhouse standing on a green lawn dotted with antique cannons, relics of a might that had slipped away through the squabblings of emperors and kings priests and princes. A winding mosaic wall of red and grey stone overlooked the massive river below where boats of vari

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ous descriptions plowed furrows in the open water, caressing the shorelines on both sides, diligent and somber in their appointed rounds; no Lake Geneva here, far less the blue-green waters of the mischievous Como. Yet in the distance was a sight envied by people the world over: the Siebengebirge, the seven mountains of Westerwald, magnificent in their intrusions on the skyline.

Joel stood by the low wall, trying to focus on the view hoping it would calm him, but the exercise was futile. The beauty before him was lost, it would not distract him from his thoughts; nothing could.... Lucas Anstett, Second Circuit Court of Appeals, judge extraordinary and intermediary between one Joel Converse and his employers and an unknown man in San Francisco. Outside of that unknown man and a retired scholar on the island of Mykonos, the only other person who knew what he was doing and why. How in the space of eighteen hours or less could he have been found ? Found and killed!

"Converse?"

Joel turned, whipping his head over his shoulder, his body rigid. Standing twenty feet away on the far edge of a graveled path was a sandy-haired man several years younger than Converse, in his early to mid thirties; his was a boyish face that would grow old slowly and remain young long after its time. He was also shorter than Joel, but not by much perhaps five ten or eleven and dressed in light-grey trousers and a cord jacket, his white shirt open at the neck.

"Who are you?" asked Converse hoarsely.

A couple strolled between them on the path as the younger man jerked his head to his left, gesturing for Joel to follow him onto the lawn beyond. Converse did so, joining him by the huge iron wheel of a bronze cannon.

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"All right, who are you?" repeated Joel.

"My sister's name is Meagen," said the sandy-haired man. "And so neither one of us makes a mistake, you tell me who I am."

"How the hey . . . ?" Converse stopped, the words coming back to him, words whispered by a dying man in Geneva. Oh, Christ! Meg, the kids . . . " 'Meg, the kids,' " he said out loud. "Fowler called his wife Meg."

"Short for Meagen, and she was Halliday's wife only, you knew him as Fowler."

"You're Avery's brother-in-law."

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"Press's brother-in-law," corrected the man, extending his hand. "Connal Fitzpatrick," he added.

"Then we're on the same side."

"I hope so."

"I've got a lot of questions to ask you, Connal."

"No more than I've got for you, Converse."

"Are we going to start off belligerently?" asked Joel, noting the harsh use of his own last name and releasing Fitzpatrick's hand.

The younger man blinked, then reddened, embarrassed. "Sorry," he said. "I'm one angry brother on both sides and I haven't had much sleep. I'm still on San Diego time."

"San Diego? Not San Francisco?"

"Navy. I'm a lawyer stationed at the naval base there."

"Whew," whistled Converse softly. "It's a small world."

"I know all about the geography," agreed Fitzpatrick. "And also you, Lieutenant. How do you think Press got his information? Of course, I wasn't in San Diego then, but I had friends. "

"Nothing's sacred, then."

"You're wrong; everything is. I had to pull some very thick strings to get that stuff. It was about five months ago when Press came to me and we made our . . . I guess you'd call it the contract between us."

"Clarification, please."

The naval officer placed a hand on the barrel of the cannon. "Press Halliday wasn't just my brother-in-law, he came to be my best friend, closer than any blood brother, I think."

"And you with the militaristic hordes?" asked Joel, only half joking, a point of information on the line

Fitzpatrick smiled awkwardly, boyishly. "That's part of it, actually. He stood by me when I wanted to go for it. The services need lawyers too, but the law schools don't tell you much about that. It's not where they're going to get any endowments from. Me, I happen to like the Navy, and I like the life and the challenges, I guess you'd call them."

"Who objected?"

"Who didn't? In both our families the pirates who go back to skimming the earthquake victims have always been attorneys. The two current old men knew Press and I got along and saw the writing they wrote on their own wall. Here's this sharp wasp and this good Catholic boy, now, if they ring in a Jew and a light-skinned black and maybe even

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a not-too-offensive gay, they've got half the legal market in San Francisco in their back pockets."

"What about the Chinese and the Italians?"

"Certain country clubs still have remnants of the old school ties in their lockers. Why soil the fabric? Deals are made on the fairways, the accent on 'ways,' not 'fair.'"

"And you didn't want anything to do with that, counselor?"

"Neither did Press, that's why he went international. Old Jack Halliday pissed bright red when Press began corralling all those foreign clients; then purple when he added a lot of U.S. sharks who wanted to operate overseas. But old Jack couldn't complain; his wild-eyed stepson was adding considerably to the bottom line."

"And you went happily into uniform," said Converse, watching Fitzpatrick's eyes, impressed by the candor he saw in them.

"Back into uniform, and very happy with Press's blessings, legal and otherwise."

"You were fond of him, weren't you?"

Connal lifted his hand off the cannon. "I loved him, Converse. Just as I love my sister. That's why I'm here. That's the contract."

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"Incidentally," said Joel kindly, "speaking of your sister even if I were somebody else I could easily have found out her name was Meagan."

"I'm sure you could have; it was in the papers."

"Then it wasn't much of a test."

"Press never called her Meagen in his life, except for that one phrase in the wedding ceremony. It was always 'Meg.' I would have asked you about that somehow, and if you were lying I'd have known it. I'm very good on direct."

"I believe you. What's the contract between you and . . . Press?"

"Let's walk," said Fitzpatrick, and as they strolled toward the wall with the winding river below and the seven mountains of Westerwald in the distance, Connal began. "Press came to me and said he was into something pretty heavy and he couldn't let it go. He'd come across information that tied a number of well-known men or once well-known men together in an organization that could do a lot of harm to a lot of people in a lot of countries. He was going to stop

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it, stop them, but he had to go outside the usual courtroom ballparks to do it do it legally.

"I asked the normal questions: was he involved, culpable that sort of thing, and he said no, not in any indictable sense, but he couldn't be sure whether or not he was entirely safe. Naturally, I said he was crazy; he should take his information to the authorities and let them handle it."

"Which is exactly what I told him," interrupted Converse.

Fitzpatrick stopped walking and turned to Joel. "He said it was more complicated than that."

"He was right."

"I find that hard to believe."

"He's dead. Believe it."

"That's no answer!"

"You didn't ask a question," said Converse. "Let's walk. Go on. Your contract."

Bewilderment on his face, the naval officer began. "It was very simple," he continued. "He told me he would keep me up to date whenever he traveled, letting me know if he was seeing anyone related to his major concern that's what we called

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it, his 'major concern.' Also anything else that could
be helpful if . . . if . . . goddamn it, if!

"If what?"

Fitzpatrick stopped again, his voice harsh. "If
anything happened to him!"

Converse let the emotion of the moment pass.
"And he told you he was going to Geneva to see me.
The man who knew Avery Preston Fowler Halliday
as Avery Fowler roughly twenty-odd years ago in
school."

"Yes. We'd been over that before when I got him
the security material on you. He said the time was
right, the circumstances right. By the way, he thought
you were the best." Connal permitted himself a brief
uncomfortable smile. "Almost as good as he was."

"I wasn't," said Joel, a half-smile returned. "I'm
still trying to figure out his position on some Class B
stock in the merger."

"What?"

"Nothing. What about Lucas Anstett? I want to
hear about that."

"It's in two parts. Press said they'd worked
through the judge to spring you if you'd agree to
take on the "

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"They? Who's they?"

"I don't know. He never told me."

"Goddamn it! Sorry, go ahead."

"That Anstett had talked to your firm's senior
partners and they said okay if you said okay. That's
part one. Part two is a personal idiosyncrasy; I'm a
news freak, and like most of my ilk, I'm tuned into
the hourly AFR."

"Clarification. "

"Armed Forces Radio. Oddly enough, it's
probably got the best news coverage on the air; it
pools all the networks. I have one of those small
transistorised jobs with a couple of shortwave bands
I pack when I'm traveling."

"I used to do that," said Converse. "For the BBC,
mainly because I don't speak French or anything
else for that matter."

"They've got good coverage, but they shift bands
too much. Anyway, I had AFR on early this
morning and heard the story, such as it was."

"What was it?"

"Short on details. His apartment on Central Park South was broken into around two in the morning, New York time. There were signs of a struggle and he was shot in the head "

"Not quite. According to a housekeeper, nothing was taken, so robbery was ruled out. That's it."

"Jesus. I'll call Larry Talbot. He may have more information. There wasn't anything else?"

"Only a quick sketch of a brilliant jurist. The point is nothing was taken."

"I understand that," broke in Joel. "'11 talk to Talbot." They started walking again, south along the wall. "Last night," continued Converse, "why did you tell Dowling you were an embassy man? You must have been at the airport."

"I'd been at that airport for seven hours going from counter to counter asking for passenger information, trying to find out what plane you were on."

"You knew I was on my way to Bonn?"

Beale thought you were."

Beale?" asked Joel, startled. "Mykonos?"

"Press gave me his name and the number but said I wasn't to use either unless the worst happened." Fitzpatrick paused. "The worst happened," he added.

"What did Beale tell you?"

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"What you went to Paris, and as he understood it, you were going to Bonn next."

"What else?"

"Nothing. He said he accepted my credentials, as he called them, because I had his name and knew how to reach him; only Press could have given me that information. But anything else I'd have to learn from you, if you felt there was something to tell me. He was pretty damned cold."

"He had no choice."

"Although he did say that in case I couldn't find you, he wanted to see me on Mykonos before I began raising my voice . . . 'for everything Mr. Halliday stood for.' That's the way he put it. I was going to give you two more days to get here, if I could hold up."

"Then what? Mykonos?"

"I'm not sure. I figured I'd call Beale again, but he'd have to tell me a lot more than he did to convince me."

"And if he didn't? Or couldn't?"

"Then I'd have flown straight to Washington and gone to whomever the top floor of the Navy Department suggested. If you think for one goddamned minute I'm going to let this thing pass for what it isn't, you're wrong and so is Beale."

"If you'd have made that clear to him, he would have come up with something. You'd have gone to Mykonos." Converse reached into his shirt pocket for his cigarettes; he offered one to Fitzpatrick, who shook his head. "Avery didn't smoke either," said Joel aimlessly as he snapped his lighter. "Sorry . . . Press." He inhaled.

"It's okay; that name's how I got you to see me."

"Let's go back to that a minute. There's a slight inconsistency in your testimony, counselor. Let's clear it up just so neither one of us makes a mistake."

"I don't know what you think you're crowding in on, but go ahead."

"You quid you were going to give me two more days to get here, is that right?"

"Yes, if I could make arrangements, get some sleep and

'How did you know I didn't get here two days before you

Fitzpatrick glanced at Joel. "I've been a legal officer in the Navy for the past eight years, both as defense counsel and as Judge advocate in any number of situations not always

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courts-marhal. They've taken me to most of the countries where Washington has reciprocal legal agreements."

'That's a mouthful, but I'm not in the Navy."

"You were, but I wasn't going to use it if I didn't have to, and I didn't. I flew into Dusseldorf, showed my naval papers to the Inspektor of immigration, and asked for his cooperation. There are seven international airports in West Germany. It took roughly five minutes with the computers to find out that you hadn't entered any of them during the past three days, which was all I was concerned about."

"But then you had to get to Cologne-Bonn."

"I was there in forty minutes and called him back. No Converse had been admitted, and unless you were crossing the border incognito which I suspect I know more about than you do you had to fly in sooner or later."

"You're tenacious."

"I've given you my reasons."

"What about Dowling and that embassy routine at the hotel."

"Lufthansa had you listed on the passenger manifest from Hamburg you'll never know how relieved I was. I hung around the counter in case there was a delay or anything like that when these three embassy guys showed up flashing their ID's, the head man speaking rotten German."

"You could tell?"

"I speak German and French, Italian, and Spanish. I have to deal with different nationalities."

"I'll let that pass."

"I suppose that's why I'm a lieutenant commander at thirty-four. They move me around a lot."

Pass again. What caught you about the embassy people

"Your name, naturally. They wanted confirmation that you were on flight Eight-seventeen. The clerk sort of glanced at me and I shook my head; he cooperated without a break in his conversation. You see, I'd given him a few deutsche marks but that wasn't it. These people don't really dig the official U.S. over here."

'I heard that last night. From Dowling. How did he come

"Dowling himself, but later. When the plane arrived I stood at the rear of the baggage claim; the embassy boys were by the entrance to the gates about fifty feet away. We all

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waited until there was only one piece of luggage on the conveyor belt. It was yours, but you never showed up. Finally a woman came out and the embassy contingent surrounded her, everyone excited, upset I heard your name mentioned, but that's all I heard because by that time I had decided to go back and speak to the clerk.

"To see if I'd really been on the plane?" asked Converse. "Or whether I turned out to be a no-show."

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"Yes," agreed Fitzpatrick. "He was cute; he made me feel like I was suborning a juror. I paid him, and he told me this Caleb Dowling whom I think I was expected to know had stopped at the desk before going out to the platform."

"Where he left instructions," said Joel, interrupting quietly.

"How did you know?"

"I picked up a set at the hotel."

"That was it, the hotel. Dowling told him he'd met this lawyer on the plane, a fellow American named Converse who'd sat with him since Copenhagen. He was worried that his new friend might not have accommodations in Bonn, and if he asked Lufthansa for suggestions, the clerk should send him to the Konigshof Hotel."

"So you totaled up the figures and decided to become one of the embassy people who'd lost me," said Converse, smiling. "To confront Dowling. Who among us hasn't taken advantage of a hostile witness?"

"Exactly. I showed him my naval ID and told him I was an attache. Frankly, he wasn't very cooperative."

"And you weren't very convincing, according to his theatrical critique. Neither was I. Strangely enough, that's why he got us together." Joel stopped, crushed out his cigarette against the wall and threw it over the stone. "All right, Commander, you've passed muster or roster or whatever the hell you call it. Where do we stand? You speak the language and you've got government connections I don't have. You could help."

The naval officer stood motionless; he looked hard at Joel, his eyes blinking in the glare of the sunlight, but not from any lack of concentration. "I'll do whatever I can," he began slowly, "as long as it makes sense to me. But you and I have to understand each other, Converse. I'm not backing away from the two days. That's all you've got~'ve got if I come on board."

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"Who made the deadline?"

"I did. I do now."

"It can't work that way."

"Who says?"

"I did. I do now." Converse started walking along the wall.

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'You're in Bonn,' said Fitzpatrick, catching up, neither impatience nor supplication in his gait or in his voice, only control. 'You've been to Paris and you came to Bonn. That means you have names, areas of evidence, both concrete or hearsay. I want it all.'

'You'll have to do better than that, Commander.'

'I made a promise.'

'To whom?'

'My sister! You think she doesn't know? It was tearing Press apart! For a whole goddamned year he'd get up in the middle of the night and wander around the house, talking to himself but shutting her out. He was obsessed and she couldn't crack the shell. You'd have to know them to appreciate this, but they were good, I mean good together. I know it's not very fashionable these days to have two people with a passer of kids who really like each other, who can't wait to be with each other when they're apart, but that's the way they were.'

'Are you married?' asked Joel without breaking his stride.

'No,' answered the Navy man, obviously confused by the question. 'I expect to be. Perhaps. I told you, I move around a lot.'

'So did Press . . . Avery.'

'What's your point, counselor?'

'Respect what he was doing. He knew the dangers and he understood what he could lose. His life.'

'That's why I want the facts! His body was flown back yesterday. The funeral's tomorrow and I'm not there because I gave Meagen a promise! I'm coming back too, but with everything I need to blow this whole tucking thing apart!'

'You'll only implode it, sending it way down deep if you're not stopped before that.'

'That's your judgment.'

'It's all I've got.'

'I don't buy it!'

'Don't. Go back and talk about rumors, about a killing'

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in Geneva that nobody will admit was anything but a robbery or a murder in New York that remains

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and probably will remain something it wasn't. If you
mention a man on Mykonos believe me, he'll
disappear. Where are you, Commander? Are you
just a freak, after all, a philosophical blood brother
of Press Halliday who stormed the Presidio and
burned his draft card in the good old days of
muscatel and grass?"

' That's a crock of shit!"

"It's on the record, Commander. By the way, as
a judge advocate, how many officers did you
prosecute?"

"What?"

"And as defense counsel, how many cases did you
lose?"

"I've had my share of wins and losses, mostly
wins, frankly."

"Mostly? Frankly? You know there are certain
people who can take fifteen numbers, insert what
they call variables and make the statistics say
anything they want them to say."

"What's that got to do with anything? How is it
connected to Press's death, his murder?"

"Oh, you'd be surprised, Commander Fitzpatrick.
Beneath that brass could be a very successful
infiltrator, perhaps even an agent provocateur in a
uniform you shouldn't be
wearing."

"What the hell are you talking about? . . . Forget
it, I don't want to know. I don't have to listen to you,
but you have to listen to me! You've got two days,
Converse. Am I on board or not?"

Joel stopped and studied the intense young face
beside him young and not so young, there were
hints of creases around the angry eyes. "You're not
even in the same fleet," said Converse wearily. "Old
Beale was right. It's my decision and I choose to tell
you nothing. I don't want you on board sailor.
You're a hotheaded piss ant and you bore me."

Joel turned and walked away.

"All right, curl That's a print! Nice work, Cal, I
almost believed that drive!" The director, Roger
Blynn, checked the clipboard thrust in front of him
by a script girl and issued instructions to the camera
crew's interpreter before heading over to the
production table.

Caleb Cowling remained seated on the large rock
on the slope of the hill above the Rhine; he patted
the head of an odoriferous goat, which had just
defecated on the toe of his

boot. "I'd like to kick the rest of the shit out of you, li'l partner, ' he said quietly, "but it wouldn't fit my well-developed image."

The actor got up and stretched, aware that the onlookers beyond the roped-off set were staring at him, chattering away like tourists in a zoo. In a few minutes he would walk over no, not walk, amble over and pull the rope off the carriage of an arc light so he could mingle with the fans. He never tired of it, probably because it came so late in his life and was, after all, symbolic of what he and his wife currently could afford. Also every now and then there was a bonus: the appearance of one of his former students, who usually approached him cautiously, obviously wondering if the good-natured rapport he had established in the classroom had survived the onslaught of national recognition or been drowned in the tidal wave of so-called stardom. Cal was good at remembering faces, and not too bad with at least one of a person's two names, so when these occasions arose, he invariably would eye his former charge and ask him if he had completed yesterday's assignment. Or would walk up to him or her and pedagogically inquire something like "Of the chronicles Shakespeare drew from for his histories, which had the greatest impact on his language, Daniel, Holinshed, or Froissart?" If the answer came back naming the last, he would slap his thigh and exclaim words akin to "Hot damn, li'l wrangler, you busted a tough bronc there!" Laughter would follow, and frequently drinks and reminiscences later.

It was a good life these days, almost perfect. If only some sunlight would reach into the painfully dark corners of his wife's mind. If it could, she'd be here on a hillside in Bonn chatting in her quietly vivacious way with the people beyond the rope mostly women, mostly those around her age telling them that her husband was really quite like their own. He never picked up his socks and was a disaster in the kitchen; people liked to hear that even if they didn't believe it. But the sunlight did not reach those far, dark corners. Instead, his Frieda remained in Copenhagen, walking along the beaches of Sjaelland Island, having tea in the botanical gardens, and waiting for a call from her husband saying that he had a few days off and would come out of hated Germany. Dowling looked around at the efficient, enthusiastic crew and the curious spectators; laughter punctuated their conversations, a certain respect as well. These were not hateful people,

' Cal?" the voice belonged to Blynn, the film's director who was walking rapidly across the slope of the hill. "There's someone here to see you."

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"I hope more than one, Roger. Otherwise the men who go under the dubious title of our employers are grossly overpaying me."

"Not for this pile of kitsch." The director's smile disappeared, as he approached the actor. Are you in any trouble, Cal?

"Constantly, but not so it's noticeable."

"I'm serious. There's a man here from the German police, the Bonn police. He says he has to talk to you."

"What about?" Dowling felt a rush of pain in his stomach it was the fear he lived with.

"He wouldn't tell me. Just that it was an emergency and he had to see you alone."

"Oh, Christ!" whispered the actor. Freddie! . . . where is he?"

"Over in your trailer."

"In my "

"Rest easy," said Blynn. "That stunt jock Moose Rosenberg's with him. If he moved an ashtray, I think that gorilla would throw him through the wall."

"Thanks, Roger."

"He meant it when he said 'alone'!"

Dowling did not hear this; he had started running across the hill toward the small camper he used for brief periods of relaxation. He prayed to no one in particular for the best, preparing himself for the worst.

It was neither, simply another complication in an enigma. Freda Dowling was not the subject; instead it was Joel Converse, an American attorney-at-law. The stunt man climbed out of the trailer, leaving Caleb and the police officer alone. The man was in civilian clothes, his English fluent, his manner vaguely officious yet courteous.

"I'm sorry to have upset you, Herr Dowling," said the German in response to Caleb's initial, intense inquiry about his wife. "We know nothing of Frau Dowling. Is she ill, perhaps?"

"She's had a few spells lately, that's all. She's in Copenhagen."

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"Yes, so we understand. You fly there frequently, don't you?"

'Whenever I can.,'

She does not care to join you here in Bonn?''

Tier was Oppenfeld, and the last time she was in Germany she wasn't considered much of a human being. Her memories are, let's say, memorable in the extreme. They come back with a lot of acid."

`Yes," said the police officer, his eyes as steady as Caleb's. "We will live with that for generations."

"I hope so," said the actor.

"I wasn't alive, Herr Dowling. I'm very happy she survived, I mean that."

Dowling was not sure why but he lowered his voice, the words nearly inaudible, if not involuntary. "Germans helped her."

"I would hope so," said the German quietly. "My business, however, concerns a man who sat next to you last night on the planes from Copenhagen to Hamburg and from Hamburg to Bonn. His name is Joel Converse, an American attorney."

"What about him? By the way, may I see your identification?"

"Certainly." The police officer reached into his pocket removed his plastic ID case, and handed it to the actor, who had his glasses firmly in place. "I trust everything is in order," added the man.

"What's this Sonder Dezernat?" asked Dowling, squinting at the small print on the card.

"It is best translated as 'special' 'branch' or department.' We are a unit of the Bundespolizei, the federal police. It is our job to look into matters the government feels are more sensitive than the normal jurisdictional complaints."

What doesn't say a damn thing, and you know it," said the actor. We can use lines like that in movies and get away with it because we write in all those reactions, but you're not Helmut Dantine or Martin Kosleck and I'm not Elissa Landi. Spell it out."

every well, I shall spell it out. Interpol. A man died in a Paris hospital as a result of head injuries inflicted by the American, Joel Converse. His condition was diagnosed as improving, but unfortunately it was only temporary; he was found dead this morning. The death is attributed to an unpro

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yoked attack by Herr Converse. We know he flew into Koln-Bonn, and according to the airline

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stewardesses, you sat with him for three and a half hours. We want to know where he is. Perhaps you can help us."

Dowling removed his glasses, lowering his chin and swallowing as he did so. And you think I know?"

We have no idea, but you talked with him. And we hope you do know that there are severe penalties for withholding information about a fugitive, especially one sought for a killing."

The actor fingered the stems of his glasses, his instincts in conflict, erupting. He walked over to the cot against the wall and sat down, looking up at the police officer.. "why don't I trust you?" he asked.

"Because you think of your wife and will trust no German," replied the German. I am a man of law and peace Herr Dowling. Order is something the people decide for themselves, myself among them. The report we have received states clearly that this Converse may be a very disturbed man."

"He didn't sound disturbed to me. In fact, I thought he had a damned good head on his shoulders. He said a lot of very perceptive things."

"That you wanted to hear?"

"Not all of them."

"But a good percentage, leading up to all of them."

"What does that mean?"

"A madman is convincing; he plays on all sides, eventually weighing everything in his favor. It's the essence of his madness, his psychosis, his own convictions."

Dowling dropped the glasses on the cot, exhaling audibly feeling the pain of fear again in his stomach. PA madman?" he said without conviction. "I don't believe that."

"Then let us have a chance to disprove it. Do you know where he is?"

The actor squinted at the German. "Give me a card or a number where I can reach you. He may get in touch with me."

"Who was responsible?" The man in the red silk robe behind the large desk sat in semidarkness, a brass lamp serving to throw a harsh circle of light on the surface in front of him. The glow was sufficient to reveal the outlines of a huge map

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cantered on the wall behind the man and the desk. It was a strange map, not of the global world but of

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fragments of the world. The shapes of nations were clearly defined yet oddly shadowed, eerily colored, as if an attempt had been made to create a single landmass out of disparate geographical areas. They included all of Europe, most of the Mediterranean and selected portions of Africa. And as if the wide expanse of the Atlantic Ocean were merely a pale blue connector, Canada and the United States of America were part of this arcane entity.

The man stared straight ahead. His lined, squarejawed face, with its aquiline nose and thin, stretched lips, seemed molded from parchment; his close-cropped salt-and-pepper hair was singularly appropriate for a man with such a rigidly framed torso. He spoke again; his voice was rather high, with no resonance but with a secure sense of command. One could easily imagine this voice raised in volume even to fever pitch like a tomcat screeching across a frozen lake. It was not raised now, however; it was the essence of quiet urgency. 'Who was responsible?' he repeated. "Are you still on the line, London?"

"Yes," replied the caller from Great Britain. "Yes, of course. I'm trying to think, trying to be fair."

"I admire that, but decisions have to be made. In all likelihood the responsibility will be shared, we simply have to know the sequence." The man paused; when he continued, his voice suddenly took on an intensity that was a complete departure from his previous tone. It was the shrill call of the cat across the ice-bound lake. "How was Interpol involved?"

Startled, the Englishman answered quickly, his phrases clipped, the words rushing headlong over one another. "Bertholdier's aide was found dead at four in the morning Paris time. Apparently he was to receive hospital medication at that hour. The nurse called the Surete "

"The Surete?" shouted the man behind the desk in front of the fragmented map. "Why the Surete'? Why not Bertholdier? It was his employee, not the Surete's!"

"That was the lapse," said the Britisher. "No one realised instructions to that effect had been left at the hospital desk apparently by an inspector named Prudhomme, who was awakened and told of the man's death."

"And he was the one who called in Interpol?"

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'~Yes, but too late to intercept Converse at German immigration. "

' For which we can be profoundly grateful," said
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the man, lowering his voice.

'Normally, of course, the hospital would have waited and reached Bertholdier in the morning, telling him what happened. As you say, the patient was an employee, not a member of the family. After that, undoubtedly the arrondissement police would have been informed and finally the Surete. By then our people would have been in place and fully capable of preventing Interpol's involvement. We can still stop them but it will take several days. Personnel transfers, new evidence, amendments to the case file; we need time."

Then don't waste any."

' It was those damned instructions."

"Which no one had the brains to look for," said the man in front of the shadowed map. "This Prudhomme's instincts were aroused. Too many rich people, too much influence, the circumstances too bizarre. He smells something."

"We'll get him off the case, just a few days," said the Englishman. "Converse is in Bonn, we know that. We're closing in 't

"So possibly are Interpol and the German police. I don't have to tell you how tragic that would be."

"We have certain controls through the American embalm sy. The fugitive is American."

"The fugitive has information!" insisted the man behind the desk, his fist clenched in the circle of light. "How much and supplied by whom we don't know and we must know."

"Nothing was learned in New York? The judge?"

"Only what Bertholdier suspected and what I knew the moment I heard his name. After forty years Anstett came back, still hounding me, still wanting my neck. The man was a bull, but only a go-between; he hated me as much as I hated him, and up to the end he shielded those behind him. Well he's gone and his holy righteousness with him. The point is Converse is not what he pretends to be. Now, find him!"

"As I say, we're closing in. We have more sources, more informers than Interpol. He's an American fugitive in Bonn who, we understand, doesn't speak the language. There are only so many places he can hide. We'll find him; we'll break him and learn where he comes from. After which, we'll terminate immediately, of course."

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"No!" The sleek male cat again shrieked across the frozen lake. "We play his game! We welcome

him, embrace him. In Paris he talked about Bonn, Tel Aviv, Johannesburg; therefore you'll accommodate him. Bring him to LeifLelm even better, have Leifhelm go to him. Fly in Abrahms from Israel, Van Headmer from Africa, and, yes, Bertholdier from Paris. He obviously knows who they are anyway. He claims ultimately to want a council meeting, to be a part of us. So we'll hold a conference and listen to his lies. He'll tell us more with his lies than he can with the truth."

'I really don't understand."

"Converse is a point, but only a point. He's exploring, studying the forward terrain, trying to understand the tactical forces ahead of him. If he were anything else, he'd deal directly through legitimate authorities and legitimate methods. There'd be no reason for him to use a false name or give false information or to run away, forcibly overcoming a man he thinks is trying to stop him. He's an infantry point who has certain information but doesn't know where he's going. Well, a point can be sucked into a trap, the advancing company ambushed. Oh, yes, we must give him his conference!"

"I submit that's extraordinarily dangerous. He has to know who recruited him, who gave him the names, his sources. We can break him physically or chemically and get that information."

"He probably doesn't have it," explained the man patiently. "Infantry points are not privileged to know command decisions; frankly, if they were, they might turn back. We have to know more about this Converse, and by six o'clock tonight I'll have every report, every resume, every word ever written about him. There's something here we can't see."

"We already know he's resourceful," said the Britisher. "From what we can piece together in Paris, he's considered an outstanding attorney. If he sees through us or gets away from us, it could be catastrophic. He will have met with our people, spoken with them."

"Then once you find him don't let him out of your sight. By tomorrow I'll have other instructions~r you."

"oh?"

"Those records that are being gathered from all over the country. For a man to do what Converse is doing, he had to be manipulated very carefully, very thoroughly, a driving intensity instilled in him. It's the manipulators we have to find."

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They're not even who we think they are. I'll be in touch tomorrow."

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George Marcus Delavane replaced the telephone in its cradle and slowly, awkwardly twisted his upper body around in the chair. He gazed at the strange, fragmented map as the first light of dawn fired the eastern sky, its orange glow filling the windows. Then, with effort, his hands gripping the arms of the steel chair, he pivoted himself around again, his eyes on the stark pool of light on the desk. He moved his hands to his waist and carefully, trembling, unbuttoned his dark-red velvet jacket, forcing his gaze downward, ordering himself to observe the terrible truth once more. He stared past the five-inch-wide leather strap that diagonally held him in place, now commanding his eyes to focus, to accept with loathing what had been done to him.

There was nothing to see but the edge of the thick steel seat and, below it, the polished wood of the floor. The long, sturdy legs that had carried his trained, muscular body through battles in the snow and the mud, through triumphant parades in the sunlight, through ceremonies of honor and defiance, had been stolen from him. The doctors had told him that his diseased legs were instruments of death that would kill the rest of him. He clenched his fists and pressed them slowly down on the desk, his throat filled with a silent scream.

9

"Goddamn you, Converse, who do you think you are?" cried Connal Fitzpatrick, his voice low, furious, as he caught up with Joel, who was walking rapidly between the tall trees near the Alter Zöll.

"Someone who knew Avery Fowler as a boy and watched a man named Press Halliday die a couple of hundred years later in Geneva," replied Converse, quickening his pace heading toward the gates of the national landmark where there were taxis.

"Don't puff that crap on me! I knew Press far better and

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far longer than you ever did. For Christ's sake, he was married to my sister! We were close friends for fifteen years!"

"You sound like a kid playing one-upmanship. Get lost."

Fitzpatrick rushed forward, pivoting in front of Joel blocking him. "It's true! Please, I can help, I want to help! I know the language: you don't! I have connections here; you don't."

"You also have your own idea about a deadline, which I don't. Get out of my way, sailor. "

"Come on," pleaded the naval officer. I didn't get

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everything I wanted. Don't crowd me out."

"I beg your pardon?"

Fitzpatrick shifted his weight awkwardly. "You've come on strong before yourself, haven't you, counselor?"

"Not if I didn't know the circumstances."

"Sometimes it's a way of finding them out."

"Not with me, it isn't."

"Then my error was in not knowing you; the circumstances were beyond that scope. With someone else it might have worked."

"Now you're talking tactics, but you meant it when you said 'two days.'"

"You're damned right I did," agreed Connal, nodding. "Because I want whatever it is exposed, I want whoever it is to pay! I'm mad, Converse, I'm mad as hell. I don't want this thing to linger and die away. The longer nothing is done the less people care; you know that as well as I do and probably better. Have you ever tried to reopen an old case? I have with a few courts-martial where I thought things had been screwed up. Well, I learned something: the system doesn't like it! You know why?"

"Yes I do," said Joel. "There are too many new cases in the dockets, too many rewards in going after the current ones."

"Bingo, counselor. Press deserves better than that. Meagen deserves better."

"Yes, he does they do. But there's a complication that Press Halliday understood better than either of us. Put simply and cruelly his life wasn't terribly important compared with what he was going after."

"That's pretty damned cruel," said the officer..

"It's very damned accurate," said Converse. "Your brother-in-law would have wrestled you to the mat, burns and all,

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for walking into this and trying to call the shots. Back off Commander. Go back to the funeral."

"No. I want to come on board. I withdraw the deadline."

'4How considerate of you."

"You call the shots," said Fitzpatrick, nodding again, exhaling in defeat. "I'll do what you tell me to

do."

"Why?" asked Joel, their eyes locked.

The Navy lawyer did not flinch; he spoke simply.
"Because Press trusted you. He said you were the best."

"Except for him," Converse added, permitting his expression to relax slightly, with a hint of a smile.
"All right, I believe you, but there are ground rules. You either accept them or, as you put it, on board you're not."

"Let's hear them. I'll wince inside so you can't see it."

"Yes," agreed Joel, "you'll wince. To begin with, I'll tell you only what I think you have to know in a given situation. Whatever you develop will be on your own; that way it's freewheeling, no way can you tip the evidence we've compiled."

"That's rough."

"That's the way it is. I'll give you a name now and then when I think it will open a door, but it will always be a name you heard second or third hand. You're inventive; figure out your own unidentifiable sources so as to protect yourself."

"I've done that on quite a few waterfronts "

wohu heave? How good are you at playactin'g?"

"Never mind, I think you just answered that. You didn't go down to those waterfronts in your dress whites as a lieutenant commander."

"Hell, no."

"You'll do."

"You've got to tell me something."

"I'll give you an overview, a lot of abstractions and a few facts. As we progress ii we progress you'll learn more. If you think you've put it together, tell me. That's essential. We can't risk blowing everything while you operate under wrong assumptions."

"Who's 'we'?"

"I wish to hell I knew."

"That's comforting."

"Yes, isn't it."

"Why don't you tell me everything now?" asked fitzpatrick.

"Because Meagen Halliday lost a husband. I don't want to see her lose a brother."

"I'll accept that."

"By the way, how long have you got? I mean you're on active duty."

"My initial leave is thirty days, with extensions as warranted. Christ, an only sister with five kids and her husband is killed. I could probably write my own ticket."

"We'll stick to the thirty days, Commander. It's more than we're allowed. We may not have even two weeks."

"Start talking, Converse."

"Let's walk," said Joel, heading back to the Alter Zoll wall and the view of the Rhine below.

The "overview" delivered by Converse described a current situation in which like-minded individuals in various countries were coming together and using their considerable influence to get around the laws and ship armaments and technology to hostile governments and organisations.

"For what purpose?" asked Fitzpatrick.

'I could say 'profits,' but you'd see through it."

"As the only motive, yes," said the Navy lawyer pensively. "Influential people as I understand the word 'influential' as related to existing laws would operate singly or at best in small groups within their own countries. That is, if profits were the primary objective. They wouldn't coordinate outside; it isn't necessary. It's a sellers' market; they'd only water down the profits."

"Bingo, counselor."

"So?" Fitzpatrick looked at Joel, as they strolled toward a break in the stone wall where a bronzed cannon was in place.

"Destabilization," said Converse. "Mass destabilisation. A series of flash points in highly volatile areas that will call into question the ability of democratic governments to cope with the violence."

"I've got to ask you again, for what purpose?"

"You're quick," said Joel, "so I'll let you answer that. What happens when an existing political structure is crippled by disorder, when it can no longer function, when things are out of control?"

The two men stopped by the cannon, the naval officer's eyes following the line of the huge, threatening barrel. "It's

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restructured or replaced," he said, turning to look at Converse.

"Bingo again," said Converse softly. "That's the overview."

"It doesn't make sense." Fitzpatrick creased his eyes in the sunlight, as well as in thought. "Let me recap. Am I allowed?"

"You're allowed."

" 'Influential individuals' connotes people in pretty good standing in very high places. Assuming we're not talking about an out-and-out criminal element which the lack of a pure profit motive would seem to eliminate we're talking about reasonably respectable citizens. Is there another definition I'm not aware of?"

"If there is, I'm not aware of it, either."

"Then why would they want to destabilise the political structures that guarantee them their influence? It doesn't make sense."

"Ever hear of the phrase 'Everything's relative'?"

"To a fare-thee-well. So what?"

"So think."

"About what?"

"Influence." Joel took out his cigarettes, shook one to his lips and lighted it. The younger man stared at the Seven Mountains of the Westerwald in the distance.

"They want more," said Fitzgerald slowly, turning back to Converse.

"They want it all," said Joel. "And the only way they can get it is to prove that their solutions are the only solutions, all others having proved worthless against the eruption of chaos suddenly everywhere."

Connal's expression was fixed, immobile, as he absorbed Converse's words. "Holy Mary. . . " he began, his voice a whisper, yet still a cry. "An international plebiscite the peoples' will for the almighty state. Fascism. It's multinationalfasasm. "

"I'm sick of saying 'Bingo,' so I'll say 'Right on,' counselor. You've just said it better than any of us."

"Us? which is 'use,' but you don't know who you

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arel" added Fitzpatrick, both bewildered and angry.

"Live with it," said Joel. "As I have."

"Why?"

"Avery Fowler. Remember him?"

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"Oh, jesust"

"And an old man on the island of Mykonos.
That's all we have. But what they said is true. It's
real. I've seen it, and that's all I need to know. In
Geneva, Avery said there was very little time left.
Beale refined it; he called it a countdown.
Whatever's going to happen will happen before your
leave is up two weeks and four days is the earliest
report. That's what I meant before."

"Oh my God," whispered Fitzpatrick. "What else
can you tell me will you tell me?"

"Very little."

"The embassy," Connal interrupted. "It's been a
couple of years, but I was there. I worked with the
military attache. I don't need any introductions. We
can get help there."

"We can also get killed there."

"What?"

"It's not clean. Those three men you saw at the
airport the ones from the embassy "

"What about them?"

"They're on the other side."

"I don't believe your"

"Why do you think they were at the airport?"

"To meet you, talk to you. There could be a
dozen different reasons. Whether you know it or
not, you're considered a hotshot lawyer on the
international scene. Foreign service personnel
frequently want to touch base with guys like you."

"I've had this conversation before," said
Converse, irritated.

"What does that mean?"

"If they wanted to see me, why didn't they go to
the gate?"

"Because they thought you'd come into the
terminal like everybody else."

"And when I didn't according to you they
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were upset, angry. That's what you said."

"They were."

"All the more reason to meet me at the gate."

Fitzpatrick frowned. "Still, that's kind of flimsy "

"The woman. Do you remember the woman?"

"Of course."

"She spotted me in Copenhagen. She followed me. Also there's something else. Later, on the platform, all four were picked up by a car belonging to a man we know we know is part of everything I've described to you. They drove to

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the embassy, and you'll have to take my word for that. I saw them."

Connal fixed his gaze on Joel, accepting what he had heard. "Oh, Jesus," he said. "Okay, no embassy. What about Brussels, SHAPE? There's a Navy intelligence unit; I've dealt with those people before."

Not yet. Maybe not at all."

"I thought you wanted to use the uniform, my connections."

"Maybe I will. It's nice to know they're there."

"Well, what do you want me to do? I've got to do something."

"Are you really fluent in German?"

"Hochdeutsch, Schwa'bisch, Bayerisch, and several dialects in between. I told you, I can handle five languages."

"You've made it obnoxiously clear," interrupted Converse. "There's a woman named Fishbein here in Bonn. That's the first name I'm going to give you. She's involved we're not sure how, but she's suspected of being a conduit a relayer of information. I want you to meet her, talk with her establish a relationship. We'll have to think of something that'll be convincing in order for you to do it. She's in her forties, and she's the youngest daughter of Hermann Goring. She married a survivor of the holocaust for obvious reasons; he's long gone. Any ideas?"

"Sure," said Fitzpatrick without hesitating. "Inheritance. There are a couple of thousand last wills and testaments every year that the deceased want processed through the military. They're from crazies who leave everything they've got to the other

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survivors. The true Aryan Germanic stock and all that horseshit. We bounce them back to the civil courts, which don't know what to do with them, so they end up in limbo and eventually in the Treasury Department's coffers."

"No kidding?"

"girls, owed drei. Believe me, those people mean it."

"Can you use the device?"

"How about a million-plus legacy from a small Midwest brewer of lager beer?"

"You'll do," said Joel. "You're on board."

Converse did not mention Aquitaine or George Marcus Delavane or Jacques-Louis Bertholdier or Erich Leifhelm, or twenty-odd names at the State Department and the Pentagon. Nor did he describe the network as it appeared in the dossiers, or as described by Dr. Edward Beale on Mykonos.

.=OBERTLUDLUM

He gave Connal Fitzpatrick the barest bones of the body of information. Joel's reasoning was far less benign than he had stated: if the Navy lawyer was taken and interrogated no matter how brutally there was little of substance he could reveal.

"You're not really telling me a hell of a lot," said Fitzpatrick.

"I've told you enough to get your head blown off, and that's not a phrase normally in my lexicon."

"Nor mine."

"Then consider me a nice fellow," said Converse, as the two men headed for the entrance gate of the Alter Zoll.

"On the other hand," continued Halliday's brother-in-law, "you've been through a lot more than I ever have I read that stuff about you in the security files files, not file they were cross-correlated with the files of a lot of other prisoners. You were something else. According to most of the men in those camps, you held them together until they put you into solitary."

"They were wrong, sailor. I was shaking and scared to death and would have fucked a Peking duck to save my skin."

"That's not what the files say. They say "

"I'm really not interested, Commander," said Joel as they passed through the ornate gate, "but I've got an immediate problem you can help solve."

"What is it?"

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"I gave my word I'd call Dowling on some mobile phone line. I wouldn't know how to ask for it."

"There's a booth over there," said Connal, pointing to a white plastic bubble that protruded from a concrete pylon on the pavement abutting the drive. "Do you have the number?"

"It's here somewhere," replied Converse, rummaging through various pockets. "Here it is," he said as he separated the scrap of paper from several credit-card charges.

"'Vermittlung, bitts." The naval officer sounded authentic as he spoke crisply into the telephone. "Sieben, drei, pier zwei, zwei. Bitte, Fraulein." Fitzpatrick then inserted a series of coins into the metal box and turned to Joel. "Here you are. They're ringing."

Stay there. Ask for him say it's his lawyer calling the

"Guten Tag, Fraulein. Ist Herr Oh, no, I speak English. Do you speak English? No, I'm not calling from California, but it's an emergency.... Dowling, I have to reach "

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"Caleb, " said Joel quickly.

"Caleb Dowling." The Navy man covered the mouthpiece. "What kind of name is that?"

"Something to do with Gucci shoes."

"What? . . . la yes, thanks." Fitzpatrick handed the phone to Converse. "They're getting him."

"foe?"

"Yes, Cal. I said I'd call you after I met with Fowler. Everything's okay."

"No, it's not, Mr. Lawyer," said the actor quietly. "You and I had better have a very serious talk, and I don't mind telling you a hunk of beef named Rosenberg will be just a few feet away."

"I don't understand."

"A man died in Paris. Does that clear things up for you?"

"Oh, God " Converse felt the blood draining from his head and a hollowness in his throat. For a moment he thought he was going to be sick. "They came to you?" he whispered.

"A man from the German police a little over an hour ago, and this time I didn't have any doubts about my visitor. He was the real item."

"I don't know what to say," stammered Joel.

"Did you do it?"

"1. . . I guess I did." Converse stared at the telephone dial, seeing the bloodied face of the man in the alleyway, feeling the blood on his own fingers

"You guess? That's not something you guess about."

"Then yes.... The answer is yes. I did it."

"Did you have a reason?"

"I thought I did."

"I want to hear it, but not now. I'll tell you where to meet me."

"Nor" exclaimed Joel, confused but emphatic. "I can't involve you. You can't be involved!"

"This fellow gave me a card and wants me to call him if you got in touch with me. He was very specific about withholding information, how it's considered aiding a fugitive."

"He was right, absolutely right! For God's sake, tell him everything, Call The truth. You got me a room for the night because you thought I might not have a reservation and we had a pleasant few hours on the plane. You put it in your name because you didn't want me to pay. Don't hide anything! Not even this call."

"Why didn't I tell him before?"

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"That's all right, you're telling him now. It was a shock and I'm a fellow American and you're in a foreign country. You wanted time to think, to reflect. My phone call shook you into behaving rationally. Tell him you confronted me with the accusation and I didn't deny it. Be honest with him, Cal."

"How honest? Should I include my session with Fowler?"

"That's all right, too, but it's not necessary. Let me back up and clarify. Fowler's a false name and he's not relevant to Paris, I give you my word. Bringing him in is only volunteering an unnecessary complication."

"Should I tell him you're at the Alter Zoll?"

"It's where I'm calling you from. I just admitted it."

"You won't be able to go back to the Konigshof."

"It doesn't matter," said Joel, speaking rapidly,

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wanting to get off the phone and start thinking. "My luggage is at the airport and I can't go back there either."

"You had a briefcase."

"I've taken care of that. It's where I can get it."

The actor paused, then spoke slowly. "So your advice to me is to level with the police, to tell them the truth."

"Without volunteering extraneous and unrelated material. Yes, that's my advice, Cal. It's the way you can stay clean and you are clean."

"It sounds like fine advice, Joe Joel, and I certainly wish I could take it, but I'm afraid I can't."

"What? why?"

"Because bad men like thieves and killers don't give advice like that. It's not in any script I ever read."

"That's nonsense! For Christ's sake, do as I tell you!"

"Sorry, pardner, it's not good dramaturgy. So you do as I tell you. There's a big stone building at the university beautiful place, a restored palace actually with a layout of gardens you don't see very often. They're on the south side with benches here and there on the main path. It's a nice place on a summer's night, kind of out of the way and not too crowded. Be there at ten o'clock."

"Cal, I won't involve you in thist"

"I'm already involved. I've withheld information and I've aided a fugitive." Dowling paused again. "There's someone I want you to meet," he said.

"No. "

There was a click and the line went dead.

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Converse hung up the phone and braced himself on the sides of the plastic booth, trying to clear his head. He had killed a man, not in a war anyone knew about, and not in the heat of survival in a Southeast Asian jungle, but in a Paris alleyway because he had to make an instant decision based on probabilities. Rightly or wrongly the act had been done and he could not dwell on it. The German police were looking for him, which meant that Interpol had entered the picture, transmitting the information from Paris somehow supplied by Jacques-Louis Bertholdier, who remained out of sight, beyond the scope of the hunt. Joel recalled his own words spoken only minutes ago. If Press Halliday's life was not terribly

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important compared with what he was going after,
neither was the life of a minion who worked for
Bertholdier, Delavane's disciple, Aquitaine's arm in
France. There were no options, thought Converse. He
had to go on; he had to stay free.

"What's the matter?" asked Fitzpatrick, standing
anxiously near him. "You look like you got kicked by
a mule."

"I got kicked," agreed Converse.

"What happened to Dowling? Is he in trouble?"

"He mull be!" exploded Joel. "Because he's a
misguided idiot who thinks he's in some kind of
goddamned movie!"

"That wasn't your opinion a little while ago."

"We met; it came out all right. This can't, not for
him." Converse pushed himself away from the booth
and looked at the Navy lawyer, his mind now trying
desperately to concentrate on the immediate. "I may
tell you and I may not," he said, glancing around for
an available taxi. "Come on, we're going to put your
awesome linguistic abilities to work. We need shelter,
expensive but not showy, especially not a place where
the well-heeled tourists go who don't speak German.
If there's one thing they'll spread about me, it's that
I can't talk my way through the five boroughs of New
York. I want

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a rich hotel that doesn't need foreigners, doesn't
cater to them. Do you know the kind of place I
mean?"

Fitzpatrick nodded. "Exclusive, clubby, German
business-oriented. Every large city has hotels like
that, and they're always twenty times my per diem
for breakfast."

"That's okay, I've got money here in Bonn. I
might as well try to get it out."

"You're full of surprises," said Cormac. "I mean
real surprises."

"Do you think you can handle it? Find a hotel like
that?"

"I can explain what I want to a cabdriver; he'll
probably know. Bonn's small, nothing like New
York or London or Paris.... There's a taxi letting
people out." The two men hurried to the curb,
where the cab was discharging a quartet of
passengers balancing camera equipment and
outsized Louis Vuitton handbags.

"How will you do it?" asked Converse as they nodded to the tourists, two couples in the midst of an argument, male versus female, Nikon versus Vuitton.

"A combination of what we both said," answered Fitzpatrick. "A quiet, nice hotel away from the Ausländer."

"What?"

"The clamor of tourists and worse. I'll tell him we're calling on some very important German businessmen bankers, say and we'd like a place they'd be most comfortable in for confidential meetings. He'll get the drift."

"He'll see we don't have any luggage," objected Joel.

"He'll see the money in my hand first," said the naval officer, holding the door for Converse.

Lieutenant Commander Connal Fitzpatrick, USN, member of the military bar and limited thereby, impressed Joel Converse, vaunted international attorney, to the point where the latter felt foolish. Effortlessly the Navy lawyer got them in a two-bedroom suite at an inn on the banks of the Rhine called Das Rektorat. It was one of those converted prewar estates where most of the guests seemed to have at least a nodding acquaintance with several others and the clerks rarely looked anyone in the eye, as if tacitly confirming their subservience or the fact that they would certainly not acknowledge having seen Herr So-and-So should someone ask them.

Fitzpatrick had begun his campaign with the taxi driver by leaning forward in the seat and speaking rapidly and quiet

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ly. Their exchanges seemed to grow more confidential as the cab sped toward the heart of the city; then it abruptly veered away, crossing the railroad tracks that intersected the capital, and entered a smooth road paralleling the river north. Joel had started to speak, to ask what was happening, but the Navy lawyer had held up his hand, telling Converse to be quiet.

Once they had stopped at the entrance of an inn, reached by an interminably long, manicured drive, Fitzpatrick got out.

"Stay here," he said to Joel. "I'll see if I can get us a couple of rooms. And don't say anything."

Twelve minutes later Connal returned, his demeanor stern, his eyes, however, lively. "Come on, Chairman of the Board, we're going straight up." He paid the driver handsomely and once again held the

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door for Converse now a touch more deferentially,
thought Joel.

The lobby of Das Rektorat was unmistakably German, with oddly delicate Victorian overtones; thick heavy wood and sturdy leather chairs were beside and below filigrees of brass ornamentation forming arches over doorways, elegant borders for large mirrors, and valances above thick bay windows where none were required. One's first impression was of a quiet, expensive spa from decades ago, its solemnity lightened by flashes of reflecting metal and glass. It was a strange mixture of the old and the very old. It smelled of money.

Fitzpatrick led Converse to a paneled elevator recessed in the paneled corridor; no bellboy or manservant was in attendance. It was a small enclosure, room for no more than four people, the walls of tinted, marbled glass, which vibrated as the elevator ascended two stories.

"I think you'll approve of the accommodations," said Connal. "I checked them out; that's why it took me so long."

"We're back in the nineteenth century, you know," countered Joel. "I trust they have telephones and not just the Hessian express."

"All the most modern communications, I made sure of that, too." The elevator door opened. "This way," said Fitzpatrick, gesturing to the right. "The suite's at the end of the hall."

"The suited"

"You said you had money in Bonn."

Two bedrooms flanked a tastefully furnished sitting room, with French doors that opened onto a small balcony overlook

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ingthe Rhine. The rooms were sunlit and airy, the decor of the walls again an odd mixture: a reproduction of an Impressionist floral arrangement was beside dramatic prints of past champion horses from the leading German tracks and breeding farms.

"All right, wonder boy," said Converse, looking out the open French doors, then turning back to Connal Fitzpatrick, who stood in the middle of the room, the key skill in his hand. "How did you do it?"

"It wasn't hard," replied the Navy lawyer, smiling. "You'd be surprised what a set of military papers will do for a person in this country. The older guys sort of stiffen up and look like boxer puppies smelling a pot roast, and there aren't that many people here much under sixty."

"That doesn't tell me anything unless you're enlisting us."

"It does when I combine it with the fact that I'm an aide assigned by the U.S. Navy to accompany an important American financier over here to hold confidential meetings with his German counterparts. While in Bonn, naturally, incognito is the best means for my eccentric financier to travel. Everything's in my name."

"What about reservations?"

"I told the manager that you'd rejected the hotel reserved for us as having too many people you might know. I also hinted that those countrymen of his you're going to meet might be most appreciative of his cooperation. He agreed that I might have a point there."

"How did we hear about this place?" asked Joel, still suspicious.

"Simple. I remembered it from several conversations I had at the International Economic Conference in Dusseldorf last year."

"You were there?"

"I didn't know there was one," said Fitzpatrick, heading for the door on the left. "I'll take this bedroom, okay? It's not as large as the other one and that's the way it should be, since I'm an aide which Jesus, Mary, and Joseph all know is the truth."

"Wait a minute," Converse broke in, stepping forward. "What about our luggage? Since we don't have any, didn't that strike your friend downstairs as a little odd for such important characters?"

"Not at all," said Connal, turning. "It's skill in the city at

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that unnamed hotel you rejected so emphatically after twenty minutes. But only I can pick it up."

"Why?"

Fitzpatrick brought his index finger to his lips. "You also have a compulsion for secrecy. Remember, you're eccentric."

"The manager bought all that swill?"

"He calls me Kommandant."

"You're quite a bullshitter, sailor."

"I remind you, sir, that in the land of Erin go brash it's called good healthy blarney. And although

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you lack certain qualifications, Press said you were a master of it in negotiations." Connal's expression became serious. "He meant it in the best way, counselor, and that's not bullshit."

As the Navy lawyer began walking to the bedroom, Joel felt an odd sense of recognition but could not define it. What was it about the younger man that struck a chord in him? Fitzpatrick had that boldness that came with the untried, that lack of fear in small things that caution would later teach him often led to larger things. He tested waters bravely; he had never come close to drowning.

Suddenly Converse understood the recognition. What he saw in Connal Fitzpatrick was himself before things had happened. Before he had learned the meaning of fear, raw fear. And finally of loneliness.

It was agreed that Connal would return to the Cologne-Bonn airport, not for Joel's luggage but for his own, which was stored in a locker in the baggage-claim area. He would then go into Bonn proper, buy an expensive suitcase and fill it with a half-dozen shirts, underwear, socks and best off-the-rack clothing he could find in Joel's sizes namely, three pairs of trousers, a jacket or two and a raincoat. It was further agreed that casual clothes were the most appropriate an eccentric financier was permitted such lapses of sartorial taste, and also such attire more successfully concealed their non-custom-made origins. Finally, the last stop he would make before returning to Das Rektorat was at a second locker in the railroad station where Converse had left his attache case. Once the case was in the Navy lawyer's possession and the taxi waiting outside had picked up its passenger, there were to be no further stops. The cab was to drive directly to the countryside inn.

"I wanted to ask you something," said Fitzpatrick just before

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leaving. "Back at the Alter Zoll you said something about how 'they' would spread the word that you couldn't talk your way through the five boroughs of New York. I gathered that referred to the fact that you don't speak German."

"That's right. Or any other language, adequate English excepted. I tried but it never took. I was married to a girl who spoke fluent French and German, and even she gave up. I don't have the ear, I guess."

"Who did 'they' refer to?" asked Connal, barely listening to Converse's explanation. "The embassy men?"

Joel hesitated. "A little wider, I'm afraid," he

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said, choosing his words carefully. "You'll have to know but not now, not yet. Later."

"Why later? Why not now?"

"Because it wouldn't do you a damned bit of good, and it might raise questions you wouldn't want raised under, shall we say, adverse circumstances."

"That's elliptical."

'fit certainly is. '

"Is that it? Is that all you'll say?"

"No. There's one other thing. I want my briefcase."

Fitzpatrick had assured him that the switchboard of Das Rektorat was capable of handling telephone calls in English as well as at least six other languages, including Arabic and he should have no qualms about placing a call to Lawrence Talbot in New York.

"Christ, where are you, Joel?" Talbot shouted into the phone.

"Amsterdam," replied Converse, not wanting to say Bonn and having had the presence of mind to make the call station-to-station. "I want to know what happened to Judge Anstett, Larry. Can you tell me anything?"

"I want to know what's happened to you! Rene called last night...."

"Mattilon?"

"You told him you were flying to London."

"I changed my mind."

"What the hell has opened? The police were with him; he had no choice. He had to tell them who you were." Talbot suddenly paused, then spoke in a calmer voice, a false voice. "Are you all right, Joel? Is there something you want to tell me, something bothering you?"

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"Something bothering me?"

' Listen to me, Joel. We all know what you went through, and we admire you, respect you. You're the finest we've got in the international division "

"I'm the only one you've got," Converse broke in, trying to think, trying to buy time as well as information. "What did Rene say? Why did he call you?"

'You sound like your old self, fella."

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"I am my old self, Larry. What did Rene call you about? Why were the police with him?" Joel could feel the slippage; he was entering another sphere and he knew it, accepted it. The lies would follow, guile joining deceit, because time and freedom of movement were paramount. He had to stay free; there was so much to do, so little time.

"He called me back after the police left to fill me in incidentally, they were from the Surete. As he understood it, the driver of a limousine was assaulted outside the George Cinq's service entrance "

"The driver of a limousine?" interrupted Converse involuntarily. "They said he was a chauffeur?"

"From one of those high-priced services that ferry around people who make odd stops at odd hours. Very posh and very confidential. Apparently the fellow was pretty well smashed up and they say you did it. No one knows why, but you were identified and they say the man may not live."

"Larry, this is preposterous!" objected Joel, his protestation accompanied by feigned outrage. "Yes, I was there in the area but it had nothing to do with me! Two hotheads got into a fight, and since I couldn't stop them, I wasn't going to get my head handed to me. I got out of there, and before I found a taxi I yelled at the doorman to call for help. The last thing I saw he was blowing his whistle and running toward the alley."

"You weren't even involved, then," said Talbot. The statement was a lawyer's positive fact.

"Of course not! Why would I be?"

"That's what we couldn't understand. It didn't make sense."

"It doesn't make sense. I'll call Rene and fly back to Paris, if I have to."

"Yes, do that," agreed Talbot haltingly. "I should tell you I may have aggravated the situation."

"You? How?"

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"I told Mattilon that perhaps you were . . . well, not yourself. When I spoke with you in Geneva, you sounded awful, Joel. Just plain awful."

'Good God, how did you think I'd feel? A man I was negotiating with dies in front of me bleeding from a dozen bullet wounds. How would you feel?"

"I understand," said the lawyer in New York, "but then Rene thought he saw something in

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you heard something that disturbed him, too."

"Oh, come on, will you people get off it!"
Converse's thoughts raced; every word he spoke had to be credible, his now diminished "outrage" rooted in believability. 'Mathlon saw me after I'd been flying in and out of airports for damn near fourteen hours. Christ, I was exhausted!"

"Joel?" Talbot began, obviously not quite ready to get off it. "Why did you tell Rene you were in Paris for the firm?"

Converse paused, not for lack of a response but for effect. He was ready for the question; he had been ready when he first approached Mattilon. "A white lie, Larry, and no harm to anyone. I wanted some information, and it seemed the best way to get it."

"About this Bertholdier? He's the general, isn't he?"

"He turned out to be the wrong source. I told Rene as much, and he couldn't agree with me more." Joel lightened his tone of voice. "Also it would have appeared strange if I'd said I was in Paris for somebody else, wouldn't it? I don't think it would have done the firm any good. Rumors and speculation run rampant down our corridors; you told me that once."

"Yes, and it's true. You did the right thing.... Damn it Joel, why the hell did you leave the hotel the way you did? From the basement, or wherever it was."

It was the moment for expressing with total conviction a small inconsequential untruth that if not carried off would lead to the larger, far more dangerous lie. Connal Fitzpatrick could do it well, reflected Converse. The Navy lawyer had not learned to fear the small things; he did not know they were spoors that could lead one back to a rat cage in the Mekong River.

"Bubba, my friend and sole support," said Joel, as cavalierly as he could muster. "I owe you many things, but not the intimacies of my private life."

"The what of your what?"

"I am approaching middle age at least it's not far

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off and I have no matrimonial encumbrances or guilt about fidelity."

"You were avoiding a woman?"

"Fortunately for the firm, not a man."

"Jee-sus! I m so well into middle age I don't
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think about those things. Sorry, young fella."

"Young and not so young, Larry."

"We were all off base then. You'd better call Rene right away and get this thing cleared up. I can't tell you how relieved I am."

"You can tell me about Anstett. That's why I called you."

"Of course." Talbot lowered his voice. "A terrible thing, a tragedy. What did the papers over there say?"

Converse was caught; he had not anticipated the question. "Very little," he replied, trying to remember what Fitzpatrick had told him. "Just that he was shot and apparently nothing was taken from his apartment."

"That's right. Naturally, the first thing Nathan and I thought of was you, and whatever the hell you're involved with, but that wasn't the case. It was a Mafia vendetta, pure and simple. You know how rough Anstett was on appeals from those people; he'd throw them out as fast as he'd call their attorneys a disgrace to the profession."

"It was a confirmed Mafia killing?"

"It will be, and that's straight from O'Neil down at the commissioner's office. They know their man, he's an ex-cuboner for the Delvecchio family and last month Anstett threw the key away on Delvecchio's oldest son. He's in for twelve years with no appeals left; the Supreme Court won't touch him."

"They know the man?"

"It's only a matter of picking him up."

"How come it's so clear-cut?" asked Joe, confused.

"The usual way," said Talbot. "An informer who needs a favor. And since everything's happened so fast and so quietly, it's assumed that the ballistics will prove out."

"So fast? So quietly?"

"The informer reached the police first thing this morning. A special unit was dispatched and only they know the man's identity. They figure the gun will still be in his possession. He'll be picked up anytime now; he lives in Syosset."

Something was wrong, thought Converse. There was an inconsistency, but he could not spot the flaw. Then it came

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to him. "Larry, if everything's so quiet, how do you know about it?"

"I was afraid you'd ask that," said Talbot uneasily. "I might as well tell you; it'll probably be in the newspaper follow-ups anyway. O'Neil's keeping me posted; call it courtesy, and also because I'm nervous."

"Why?"

"Except for the man who killed him, I was the last person to see Anstett alive."

"Your"

"Yes. After Rene's second call I decided to phone the judge, after conferring with Nathan, of course. When I finally reached Anstett, I said I had to see him. He wasn't happy about it but I was adamant. I explained that it concerned you. All I knew was that you were in terrible trouble and something had to be done. I went over to his apartment on Central Park South and we talked. I told him what had happened and how frightened I was for you, frankly letting him know that I held him responsible. He didn't say much, but I think he was frightened, too. He said he'd get in touch with me in the morning. I left, and according to the coroner's report, he was killed approximately three hours later."

Joel's breath was short, his head splitting. His concentration was absolute. "Let me get this straight, Larry. You went over to Anstett's apartment after Rene's call his second call. After he told the Surete who I was."

"That's right."

"How long was it?"

"How long was what?"

"Before you left for Anstett's. After you spoke with Mattilon."

"Well, let me see. Naturally, I wanted to talk to Nathan first, but he was out to dinner, so I waited. Incidentally, he concurred and offered to join me "

"How long, Larry?"

"An hour and a half, two hours at the outside."

Two hours plus three hours totaled five hours. More than enough time for the killer puppets to be put in place. Converse did not know how it had been done, only that it had been done. Things had suddenly erupted in Paris, and in New York an agitated Lawrence Talbot had been followed to an apartment on Central Park South, where someone,

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somewhere, recognized a name and a man and the part he had

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played against Aquitaine. Were it otherwise, Talbot would be the corpse, not Lucas Anstett. All the rest was a smoke screen behind which the disciples of George Marcus Delavane manipulated the puppets.

"~and the courts owed so much to him, the country owed so much." Talbot was speaking, but Joel could no longer listen.

"I have to go, Larry," he said, hanging up.

The killing was obscene. That it was carried out so quickly, so efficiently and with such precise deception was as frightening as anything Converse could imagine.

Joseph Joey the Nice) Albanese drove his Pontiac down the quiet, tree-lined street in Syosset, Long Island, waving to a couple in a front yard. The husband was trimming a hedge under his wife's guidance. They stopped what they were doing, smiled and waved back. Very nice. His neighbors liked him, thought Joey. They considered him a sweet guy and very generous, what with letting the kids use his pool and serving their parents only the best booze when they dropped over and the biggest steaks money could buy when he had weekend barbecues which he did often, rotating the neighbors so no one should feel left out.

He was a sweet guy, mused Joey. He was always pleasant and never raised his voice in anger to anyone, offering only a glad hand, a nice word and a happy smile to everybody, no matter how lousy he really felt. That was it, goddamn it! thought Joey. Irra fuckin' gardless of how upset he was, he never let it show! Joey the Nice was what they called him and they were right. Sometimes he figured he had to be some kind of saint may Jesus Christ forgive him for having such thoughts. He had just waved to neighbors, but in truth he felt like smashing his fist through the windshield and shoving the glass down their throats.

It wasn't them, it was last night that did it! A crazy night, a crazy hit, everything crazy! And that Rumba they brought in from the West Coast, the one they called Major, he was the nuttiest fruitcake of them all! And a sadist to boot, the way he beat the shit out of that old man and the crazy questions he asked, and shouting all the time. Tutti pazzi!

One minute he's playing cards in the Bronx, and the next the phone is ringing. Get down to Manhattan fast! A bad heat is needed attualmente! So he goes and what does he find? It's

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that iron-balled judge, the one who closed the steel doors on Delvecchio's boy! What craziness! They'll trace it back to the old man for sure. He'll know such a~izione from the cops and the courts he'll be lucky to own a small whorehouse in Paler mo if he ever got back.

Then maybe just maybe thought Joey at the time, there was a turning muscle in the organisation. Old Delvecchio was losing his grip; just maybe it was being called for, this ap?izione that surely would follow. And possibly just possibly Joey himself was being tested. Maybe he was too nice, too soave, to put the bad heat on someone like the old judge who gave them all such a hard time. Well, he wasn't. No sirree, the nice stopped with the handle of a gun. It was his job, his profession. The Lord Jesus decided who should live and who should die, only He spoke through mortal men on earth who told people like Joey whom to hit. There was no moral dilemma for Joey the Nice. It was important, however, that the orders always come from a man with respect; that was necessary.

They did last night; the order came from a man with great respect. Although Joey did not know him personally, he had heard for years about the powerful padrone in Washington, D.C. The name was whispered, never spoken out loud.

Joey touched the brakes of his car, slowing down so as to swing into his driveway. His wife, Angie, would be pissed off at him, maybe shout a little because he didn't come home last night. One more irritation on top of all the craziness, but what the hell was he going to say? Sorry, Angie, but I was gainfully employed throwing six bullets into an old guy who definitely discriminated against Italians. So, you see, Angie, I had to stay across the the bridge in Jersey where one of the paesans I played cards with and who'll swear I was there all night happens to be the chief of police.

But, of course, he would never go into such details with his wife. That was his own law. No matter how aggravated he was he never brought the job home. More husbands should be like him and there would be happier households in Syosset.

Shit/ One of the bucking kids had left a bicycle in front of the attached garage; he wouldn't be able to open the automatic door and drive inside. He'd have to get out. Shill One more aggravation. He couldn't even park by the Millers' curb next door; some creep's car was there but it wasn't the Millers' Buick. Double shill

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Joey brought the Pontiac to a stop halfway into the sloping driveway and got out. He went up to the bike and leaned down. The rotten kid didn't even

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use the kickstand and Joey hated bending over, what with his heavy gut and all.

'~Joseph Albanese!"

Joey the Nice spun around, crouching, reaching under his jacket. That tone of voice was used by only one type of slime! He pulled out his .38 and dove toward the grille of his car.

The explosions reverberated throughout the neighborhood. Birds fluttered out of trees and there were screams along the block in the bright afternoon sunlight. Joseph Albanese was sprawled against the grille of the Pontiac, rivulets of blood slowly rolling down the shiny chrome. Joey the Nice had been caught in the fire, and gripped in his hand was the gun he had used so effectively the night before. Ballistics would prove out. The killer of Lucas Anstett was dead. The judge had been the victim of a gangland assassination, and as far as the world was concerned, it had nothing to do with events taking place six thousand miles away in Bonn, Germany.

Converse stood on the small balcony, his hands on the railing, looking down at the majestic river beyond the forest of trees that formed the banks of the Rhine. It was past seven o'clock; the sun was going below the mountains in the west, its orange rays shooting up, creating blocks of shadows over the earth moving shadows that floated across the waters in the descending distance. The vibrant colors were hypnotic, the breezes cooling, but nothing could stop the pounding echo in his chest. Where was Fitzpatrick? Where was his attache case? The dossiers. He tried to stop thinking, to stop his imagination from catapulting into frightening possibilities....

There was a sudden harsh echo, not from his chest but from inside the room. He turned quickly as the door opened and Connal Fitzpatrick stood there, removing his key from the lock. He stepped aside, letting a uniformed porter enter with two suitcases, instructing the man to leave them on the floor while he reached into his pocket for a tip. The porter left and the Navy lawyer stared at Joel. There was no attache case in his hand.

"Where is it?" said Converse, afraid to breathe, afraid to move.

"I didn't pick it up."

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"Why not?" cried Joel, rushing forward.

"I couldn't be sure . . . maybe it was just a feeling, I don't know."

"What are you talking about?"

"I was at the airport for seven hours yesterday,"

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going from counter to counter asking about you," said Connal softly. "This afternoon I passed the Lufthansa desk and the same clerk was there. When I said hello, he didn't seem to want to acknowledge me; he looked nervous, and I couldn't understand. I came back out of the baggage claim with my suitcase and watched him. I remembered how he had glanced at me last night, and as I passed him I swore his eyes kept shooting to the center of the terminal, but there were so many people so much confusion, I couldn't be certain."

"You think you were picked up? Followed?"

"That's just it, I don't know. When I was shopping in Bonn, I went from store to store and every now and then I'd turn around, or shift my head, to see if I could spot anyone. A couple of times I thought I saw the same people twice, but then again, it was always crowded, and again I couldn't be sure. But I kept thinking about that Lufthansa clerk; something was wrong."

"What about when you were in the taxi? Did you "

"Naturally. I kept looking out the rear window. Even during the drive out here. Several cars made the same turns we did, but I told the driver to slow down and they passed us."

"Did you watch where they went after they passed you?"

"What was the point?"

"There is one," said Joel, recalling a clever driver who followed a deep-red Mercedes limousine.

"All I knew was that you're pretty uptight about that attache case. I don't know what's in it and I figure you don't want anyone else to know, either."

"Bingo, counselor."

There was a knocking at the door, and although it was soft, it had the effect of a staccato burst of thunder. Both men stood motionless, their eyes riveted on the door.

"Ask who it is," whispered Converse.

"Wer ist da, bittet" said Fitzpatrick, loud enough to be heard. There was a brief reply in German and Connal breathed again. "It's okay. It's a message for me from the manager. He probably wants to sell us a conference room." The Navy lawyer went to the door and opened it.

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However, it was not the manager, or a bellboy, or a porter bringing a message from the manager. Instead, standing there, was a slender, elderly man in

a dark suit with erect posture and very broad shoulders. He glanced first at Fitzpatrick, then looked beyond at Converse.

"Excuse me, please, Commander," he said courteously walking through the door, and approached Joel, his hand outstretched. "Herr Converse, may I introduce myself? The name is Leifhelm. Erich Leifhelm."

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Joel took the German's hand, too stunned to do anything else. "field Marshal . . . ?" he uttered, instantly regretting it he could at least have had the presence of mind to say "General." The pages of Leifhelm's dossier flashed across Converse's mind as he looked at the man his straight hair still more blond than white, his pale-blue eyes glacial, his pinkish skin lined, waxen, as if preserved for decades to come.

"An old title and one, thankfully, I have not heard in many years. But you flatter me. You were sufficiently interested to learn something of my past."

"Not very much."

"I suspect enough." Leifhelm turned to Fitzpatrick. "I apologize for my little ruse, Commander. I felt it was best."

Fitzpatrick shrugged, bewildered. "You know each other, apparently."

"Of one another," corrected the German. "Mr. Converse came to Bonn to meet with me, but I imagine he's told you

"No, I haven't told him that," said Joel.

Leifhelm turned back, studying Converse's eyes. "I see Perhaps we should talk privately."

"I think so." Joel looked over at Fitzpatrick. "Commander, I've taken up too much of your time. Why not go downstairs to dinner and I'll join you in a while?"

"Whatever you say, sir," said Connal, an officer assuming

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the status of an aide. He nodded and left, closing the door firmly behind him.

"A lovely room," said Leifhelm, taking several steps toward the open French doors. "And with such a lovely view."

"How did you find me?" asked Converse.

"Him," replied the former field marshal, looking at Joel. "in according to the front desk. Who is he?"

"How?" repeated Converse.

"He spent hours last night at the airport inquiring about you; many remembered him. He was obviously a friend."

"And you knew he'd checked his luggage? That he'd be back for it?"

"Frankly, no. We thought he might come for yours. We knew you wouldn't. Now, please, who is he?"

Joel understood it was vital that he maintain a level of arrogance, as he had done with Bertholdier in Paris. It was the only route he could take with such men; to be accepted by them, they had to see something of themselves in him. "He's not important and he knows nothing. He's a legal officer in the Navy who's worked in Bonn before and is over here now I gather, on personal business. A prospective fiancée, I think he mentioned. I saw him the other week; we chatted, and I told him I was flying in today or tomorrow and he said he'd make it a point to meet me. He's obsequious, and persistent I'm sure he has delusions of a civilian practice. Naturally under the circumstances I used him. As you did."

"Naturally." Leifhelm smiled; he was polished. "You gave him no arrival time?"

"Paris changed any possibility of that, didn't it?"

"Oh, yes, Paris. We must discuss Paris."

"I spoke to a friend who deals with the Surete. The man died."

"Such men do. Frequently."

"They said he was a driver, a chauffeur. He wasn't."

"Would it have been wiser to say he was a trusted associate of General Jacques-Louis Bertholdier?"

"Obviously not. They say I killed him."

"You did. We gather it was an uncontrollable miscalculation, no doubt brought on by the man himself."

"Interpol's after me."

"We, too, have friends; the situation will change. You have nothing to fear as long as we have nothing to fear.;" The German paused, glancing around the room. "May I sit down?"

'Please. Shall I ring for a drink?'

"I drink only light wine and very sparingly. Unless you wish . . . it's not necessary."

"It's not necessary," said Converse as Leifhelm sat in a chair nearest the balcony doors. Joel would sit when he felt the moment was right, not before.

"You took extraordinary measures at the airport to avoid us," continued Hitler's youngest field marshal.

"I was followed from Copenhagen."

"Very observant of you. You understand no harm was intended."

"I didn't understand anything. I just didn't like it. I didn't know what effect Paris would have on my arrival in Bonn, what it meant to you."

"What Paris meant?" asked Leifhelm rhetorically. "Paris meant that a man, an attorney using a false name, said some very alarming things to a most distinguished and brilliant statesman. This attorney, who called himself Simon, said he was flying to Bonn to see me. On his way and I'm sure with provocation he kills a man, which tells us something, he's guise ruthless and very capable. But that is all we know, we would like to know more. Where he goes, whom he meets. In our position, would you have done otherwise?"

It was the moment to sit down. "I would have done it better."

"Perhaps if we'd known how resourceful you were, we might have been less obvious. Incidentally, what happened in Paris? What did that man do to provoke you?"

"He tried to stop me from leaving."

"Those were not his orders."

"Then he grossly misunderstood them. I've a few bruises on my chest and neck to prove it. I'm not in the habit of physically defending myself, and I certainly had no intention of killing him. In fact, I didn't know I had. It was an accident purely in self-defence."

"Obviously. Who would want such complications?"

"Exactly," agreed Converse bluntly. "'As soon as I can rearrange my last hours in Paris so as to eliminate any mention of my seeing General Bertholdier, I'll return and explain what happened to the police."

"As the adage goes, that may be easier said than done. You were seen talking together at L'Etalon Blanc. Undoubtedly, the general was recognised later when he came to the

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hotel; he's a celebrated man. No, I think you'd be wiser to let us handle it. We can, you know."

Joel looked hard at the German, his eyes cold yet questioning. "I admit there are risks doing it my way. I don't like them and neither would my client. On the other hand, I can't go around being hated by the police."

"The hunt will be called off. It will be necessary for you to remain out of sight for a few days, but by then new instructions will be issued from Paris. Your name will disappear from the Interpol lists, you'll no longer be sought."

"I'll want assurances, guarantees."

"What better could you have than my word? I tell you nothing when I tell you that we could have far more to lose than you."

Converse controlled his astonishment. Leifhelm had just told him a great deal, whether he knew it or not. The German had as much as admitted he was part of a covert organisation that could not take any chance of exposure. It was the first concrete evidence Joel had heard. Somehow it was too easy. Or were these elders of Aquitaine simply frightened old men?

"I'll concede that," said Converse, crossing his legs. "Well, General, you found me before I found you, but then, as we agreed, my movements are restricted. Where do we go from here?"

"Precisely where you wanted to go, Mr. Converse. When you were in Paris, you spoke of Bonn, Tel Aviv, Johannesburg. You knew whom to reach in Paris and whom to look for in Bonn. That impresses us greatly; we must assume you know more."

"I've spent months in detailed research on behalf of my client, of course."

"But who are you? Where do you come from?"

Joel felt a sharp, sickening ache in his chest. He had felt it many times before it was his physical response to imminent danger and very real fear. "I am who I want people to think I am, General Leifhelm. I'm sure you can understand that."

"I see," said the German, watching him closely. "A sworn companion of the prevailing winds, but with the power beneath to carry you to your own

destination."

"That's a little heavy, but I guess it says it. As to where I come from, I'm sure you know that by now."

Five hours. More than enough time to put the puppets in place. A killing in New York; it had to be dealt with.

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"Only bits and pieces, Mr. Converse. And even if we knew more, how could we be certain it's true? What people think you are you may not be."

"Are you, General?"

"Ausgezeichnet!" said Leifhelm, slapping his knee and laughing. It was a genuine laugh, the man's waxen face creasing with humor. "You are a fine lawyer, mein Herr. You answer as they say in English a pointed question with another question that is both an answer and an indictment"

"Under the circumstances, it's merely the truth. Nothing more. "

'also modest. Very commendable, very attractive."

Joel uncrossed his legs, then crossed them again impatiently. "I don't like compliments, General. I don't trust them under the circumstances. You were saying before about where I wanted to go, about Bonn, Tel Aviv, and Johannesburg. What did you mean?"

' Only that we have complied with your wishes," said Leifhelm, spreading his hands in front of him. "Rather than your making such tedious trips, we have asked our representatives in Tel Aviv and Johannesburg, as well as Bertholdier, of course, to fly to Bonn for a conference. With you, Mr. Converse. "

He had done it! thought Joel. They were frightened panicked was perhaps the better description. Despite the pounding and the pain in his chest, he spoke slowly, quietly. "I appreciate your consideration, but in all frankness, my client isn't ready for a summit. He wanted to understand the parts before he looked further at the whole. The spokes support the wheel, sir. I was to report how strong they were how strong they appeared to me."

"Oh, yes, your client. Who is he, Mr. Converse?"

"I'm sure General Bertholdier told you I'm not at liberty to say."

"You were in San Francisco, California "

"Where a great deal of my research was done,"

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interrupted Joel. "It's not where my client lives. Although I readily admit there's a man in San Francisco Palo Alto, to be exact whom I'd like very much to be my client."

"Yes, yes, I see." Leifhelm put the ends of his fingers together as he continued, "Am I to understand that you reject the conference here in Bonn?"

Converse had taken a thousand such questions in opening

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gambits with attorneys seeking accommodations between corporate adversaries. Both parties wanted the same thing; it was simply a question of flattening out the responsibility so that no one party would be the petitioner.

"Well, you've gone to a lot of trouble," Joel began. "And as long as it's understood that I have the option of speaking to each man individually should I wish to do so, I can't see any harm." Converse permitted himself a strained smile, as he had done a thousand times. "In the interests of my client of course."

"Of course," said the German. "Tomorrow say, four o'clock in the afternoon. I'll send a car for you. I assure you I set an excellent table."

"A table?"

"Dinner, naturally. After we have our talk." Leifhelm rose from the chair. '61 wouldn't think of your coming to Bonn and forgoing the experience. I'm known for my dinner parties, Mr. Converse. And if it concerns you, make whatever security arrangements you like. A platoon of personal guards, if you wish. You'll be perfectly safe. Mein Haus ist dein Haus. "

"I don't speak German."

"Actually, it's an old Spanish saying. Mi casa, su casa. 'My house is your house.' Your comfort and well-being are my most urgent concerns."

"Mine, too," said Joel, rising. "I wouldn't think of having anyone accompany me, or follow me. It'd be counterproductive. Of course, I'll inform my client as to my whereabouts telling him approximately when he can expect my subsequent call. He'll be anxious to hear from me."

"I should think so." Leifhelm and Converse walked to the door; the German turned and once more offered his hand. "Until tomorrow, then. And may I again suggest while you're here that you be careful, at least for several days."

"I understand."

The puppets in New York. The killing that had to do with the first of two obstacles, two sharp, sickening aches ... his chat.

"By the way," said Joel, releasing the field marshal's hand. "There was a news item on the BBC this morning that interested me so much that I phoned an associate. A man was killed in New York, a judge. They say it was a revenge killing,

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a contract put out by organised. Did you happen to hear anything about it?"

"Id" asked Leithelm, his blond-white eyebrows raised, his warlike lips parted. "It seems people are killed by the dozens every day in New York, judges included, I presume. Why should I know anything about it? The answer, obviously, is no."

"I just wondered. Thank you."

"But . . . but you. You must have a . . ."

"Yes, General?"

"Why does this judge interest you? Why did you think I would know him?"

Converse smiled, but without a trace of humor. "I won't be telling you anything when I tell you he was our mutual adversary enemy, if you like."

"Our? You really must explain yourself!"

"As you and as I said, I am what I want people to think I am. This man knew the truth. I'm on leave of absence from my firm, working confidentially for a personal client. He tried to stop me, tried to get the senior partner to cancel my leave and call me back."

"By giving him reasons?"

"No, just veiled threats of corruption and impropriety. He wouldn't go any further; he's on the bench and couldn't back it up; his own conduct would be suspect. My employer is completely ignorant angry as hell and confused but I've calmed him down. It's a closed issue; the less it's explored, the better for us all." Joel opened the door for Leifhelm. "Till tomorrow " He paused for a brief moment, loathing the man standing in front of him but showing only respect in his eyes. "Field Marshal," he added.

"Gate Nacht," said Erich Leifhelm, nodding his head sharply once in military acknowledgment.

Converse persuaded the switchboard operator to

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send someone into the dining room for the
American, Commander Fitzpatrick. The task of
finding the naval officer was not easy, for he was not
in the dining room or the bar but outside on the
Spanrsche Terrasse having a drink with friends,
watching the Rhine at twilight.

"What goddamned friends?" demanded Joel over
the phone.

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'just a couple I met out there. He's a nice
guy an executive type, pretty much into his
seventies, I think."

"And she?" asked Converse, his lawyer's antenna
struck by a signal.

"Maybe thirty, forty years younger," replied
Connal with less elaboration.

"Get up here, sailor!"

Fitzpatrick leaned forward on the couch, his
elbows on his knees, his expression a mixture of
concern and astonishment as he looked over at Joel,
who was smoking a cigarette in front of the open
balcony doors. "Let me run this again," he said
warily. "You want me to stop someone from getting
your service record?"

"Not all of it, just part of it."

"Who the hell do you think I am?"

"You did it for Avery for Press. You can do it
for me. You have to!"

"That's backwards. I opened those files for him,
I didn't keep them closed."

"Either way it's control. You've got access; you've
got a

"I'm here, not there. I can't scissor something
out you don't like ten thousand miles away. Be
reasonable!"

"Somebody can, somebody has to! It's only a
short segment, and it's got to be at the end. The
final interview."

"An interview?" said Connal, startled, getting to
his feet. "In a service record? You mean some kind
of operational report? Because if you do, it
wouldn't be "

"Not a report," interrupted Converse, shaking his
head. "The discharge my discharge interview. That
stuff Press Halliday quoted to me."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute!" Fitzpatrick held

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up his hands. "Are you referring to the remarks
made at your discharge hearing?"

"Yes, that's it. The hearing!"

"Well, relax. They're not part of your service
record, or anyone else's."

"Halliday had them Avery had them! I just told
you, he quoted my words verbatim!" Joel walked to
a table where there was an ashtray; he crushed out
his cigarette. "If they're not part of the record, how
did he get them? How did you get them for him?"

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"That's different," said Connal, obviously
remembering as he spoke. "You were a POW, and a
lot of those hearings were put under a debriefing
classification, and I do mean classified. Even after all
these years, many of those sessions are still touchy.
A lot of things were talked about that no one to this
day wants made public for everyone's good, not just
the military's."

"But you got them! I heard my own words, goddamn
ill"

"Yes, I got them," admitted the Navy lawyer
without enthusiasm. "I got the transcript, and I'd be
busted to seaman third class if anyone knew about it.
You see, I believed Press. He swore to me he needed
it, needed everything. He couldn't make any
mistakes."

"How did you do it? You weren't even in San
Diego at the time, that's what you said!"

"By calling the vaults and using my legal-release
number to have a photostat made. I said it was a
Four Zero emergency and I'd take responsibility. The
next morning when the authorization came in by
pouch for countersignature, I had the chief legal
officer at the base sign it with a lot of other things. It
simply got buried in the paper work."

"But how did you know about it in the first place?"

"Selected POW records have flags on their
discharge sheets."

"Clarification, please?"

"Just what I said, flags. Small blue seals that
denote additional information still held under tight
security. No flags, everything's clean; but if there is
one, that means there's something else. I told Press,
and he said he had to have whatever it was, so I
went after it."

"Then anyone else could, too."

"No, not anyone. You need an officer with a
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legal-release number, and there aren't that many of us. Also there's a minimum forty-eight-hour delay so the material can be vetted. That's almost always in the area of weapons and technology data that still might be classified."

"Forty~i'<h~" Converse swallowed as he tried to count the hours since Paris, since the first moment his name had surfaced. "There's still times" he said, his voice taut, his words clipped. "If you can do it there's still time. And if you can, I'll tell you everything I know because you'll deserve it. No one will deserve it more."

"Spell it out."

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Joel turned aimlessly, shaking his head. "That's funny. I said the same thing to Avery. I said 'Spell it out, Avery.' . . . Sorry, his name was Press." Converse turned back to the Navy lawyer, a military lawyer with a mystifying military privilege called a legal-release number. "Listen to me and hear me clearly. A few minutes ago something happened that I wasn't sure would or could happen something your brother-in-law was killed to prevent. Tomorrow at four o'clock in the afternoon I'm going to walk into the midst of that group of men who've come together to promote a kind of violence that'll stun this world, toppling governments, allowing these same men to step in and fill the voids. They'll run things their way, shape the laws their way. One big Supreme Court, each chair owned by a fanatic with specific convictions as to who and what has value and who and what doesn't, and those who don't can go to hell, no appeals on the agenda.... I'm going to meet them Pace-to-face! I'm going to talk with them, hear their words! I admit I'm the most amateurish fox you've ever heard of in a chicken coop only, in this case it's a vultures' nest, and I mean the type that swoops down and tears the flesh off your back with one pass. But I've got something going for me: I'm one hell of a good lawyer, and I'll learn things they won't know I've learned. Maybe enough to piece together a couple of cases that will blow it all apart blow them apart. I told you before that I rejected your deadline. I still reject it, but now it doesn't seem so out of the question. Certainly not two days, but perhaps not ten! You see, I thought I was going to have to fly to Tel Aviv, then Johannesburg. Prime everyone, frighten them. Now I don't have to! We've already done it! They're coming to me because they're the ones who are frightened now! They don't know what to think, and that means they've panicked." Converse paused, sweat forming on his hairline; then he added, "I don't have to tell you what a good lawyer can do with panicked hostile witnesses. The materials he can collect for evidence."

"Your plea's accepted, counselor," said Fitzpatrick, not without awe. "You're convincing."

Now, tell me why my intercession can help? What does it accomplish?"

"I want those men to think I'm one of them! I can live with everything they can put together about me I'm not proud of it all; I've made my compromises but I can't live with that transcript of my discharge! Don't you see? It's what Avery Press understood! I understand now. He knew me

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nearly twenty-five years ago, and when I think back we were actually pretty damned good friends. And no matter what happened to us individually, he was banking on the fact that I hadn't really changed that much, not in the deeper things. By the time we reach the voting age we're pretty well set, all of us. The real changes come later, much later, dictated by such things as acceptance or rejection and the state of our wallets the prices we pay for our convictions, or to support our talents, defending success or explaining failure. That transcript confirmed what Halliday believed, at least enough to make him want to meet me, talk with me, and finally to recruit me. Only, he did it finally by dying as I held his head. I couldn't walk away after that."

Connal Fitzpatrick was silent as he walked out on the balcony. He leaned over and gripped the railing as Converse watched him. Then he stood up, raised both his hands, and pulled back the sleeve of his left wrist. "It's twelve-fifteen in San Diego. No one in legal goes to lunch before one o'clock; the Coronado's bar doesn't begin to jump until then."

"Can you do it?"

"I can try," said the naval officer, crossing through the French doors toward the telephone. "No, damn it, if you've got your times straight, I can do better than try, I can issue an order. That's what rank's all about."

The first five minutes were excruciating for Joel. There were delays on all overseas calls, but somehow the hi-, trim, or quadri-lingual Fitzpatrick, speaking urgently, unctuously, in German, managed to get through, the word dringend repeated frequently.

"Lieutenant Senior Grade Remington, David. Legal Division, SAND PAC. This is an emergency, sailor, Commander Fitzpatrick calling. Break in if the lines are occupied." Connal covered the mouthpiece and turned to Converse. "If you'll open my suitcase, there's a bottle of bourbon in the middle."

"I'll open your suitcase, Commander."

"Remington?... Hello, David, it's Connal.... Yes, thanks very much, I'll tell Meagen.... No, I'm not in

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San Francisco, don't call me there. But something's come up I want you to handle, something on my calendar that I didn't get to. For openers, it's a Four Zero emergency. I'll fill you in when I get back, but until I do you have to take care of it. Got a pencil? . . . There's a POW service record under the name of Converse, Joel, Lieutenant, one and a half stripes, Air Arm,

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pilot carrier-based, Vietnam duty. He was discharged in the sixties' Fitzpatrick looked down at Converse, who held up his right hand and three fingers of his left "nineteen sixty-eight, to be exact." Joel stepped forward, his spread right hand still raised, his left now showing only the index finger. "June of '68," added the Navy lawyer, nodding. "Point of separation our old hometown, San Diego. Have you got all that? Read it back to me, please, David."

Connal nodded sporadically, as he listened. "C-O-NV-E-R-S-E, that's right.... June, '68, Air Arm, pilot, Vietnam POW section, San Diego separation, that's it, you've got it. Now here's the wicket, David. This Converse's SR is flag status; the flag pertains to his discharge hearing, no weapons or high tech involved.... Listen carefully, David. It's my understanding that there may be a request pending accompanied by a legal-release code for the discharge transcript. Under no circumstances is that transcript to be released. The flag stays fixed and can't be removed by anyone without my authorization. And if the release has been processed it'll still be within the forty-eight-hour vet-delay. Kill it. Understood?"

Again Fitzpatrick listened, but instead of nodding, he shook his head. "No, not under any circumstances. I don't care if the secretaries of State, Defense, and the Navy all sign a joint petition on White House stationery, the answer is no. If anyone questions the decision, tell him I'm exercising my authority as Chief Legal Officer of SAND PAC. There's some goddamned article in the 'shoals' that says a station CLO can impound materials on the basis of conceivably privileged information relative to the security of the sector, et cetera, et cetera. I don't recall the time element seventy-two hours or five days or something like that but find that statute. You may need it."

Connal listened further, his brows creasing, his eyes straying to Joel. He spoke slowly as Converse felt the sickening ache again in his chest. "Where can you reach me . . . ?" said the naval officer, perplexed. Then suddenly he was no longer bewildered. "I take back what I said before, call Meagen in San Francisco. If I'm not with her and the kids, she'll know where to reach me.... Thanks again, David. Sweep your decks and get right on

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this, okay? Thanks . . . I'll tell Meg. ' Fitzpatrick
hung up the phone and exhaled audibly. "There," he
said, slouched in relief, pushing his hand through
his loose light-brown hair. "I'll phone Meagen and
give her this num

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her, tell her to say I've gone up to the Sonoma hills,
if Remington calls Press had some property there."

"Give her the telephone number," said Joel, "but
don't tell her anything else."

"Don't worry, she's got enough on her mind. '
The naval officer looked at Converse, frowning. "If
your hourly count is right, you've got your bme now."

"My count's all right. Is Lieutenant Remington?
I mean that only in the sense that he wouldn't let
anyone override your order, would he?"

"Don't mistake my officiousness where he's
concerned," replied Connal. "David isn't easily
pushed around. The reason I chose him and not one
of the four other senior lawyers in the department is
that he's got a reputation for being a suckler prick.
He'll find that statute and nail it to the forehead of
any four-striper who tries to countermand that order.
I like Remington; he's very useful. He scares the hell
out of people."

"We all have case partners like that. It's called
the good guy-bad guy routine."

"David fits. He's got an eye that keeps straying
to the right." Fitzpatrick suddenly stood erect, his
bearing military. "I thought you were going to get the
bourbon, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir, CommanderI" shot back Joel, heading
for Fitzpatrick's suitcase.

"And if I remember correctly, after you pour us
a drink you're going to tell me a story I want very
much to hear."

"Aye, aye, sir!" said Converse, lifting the suitcase
off the floor and putting it on the couch. "And if I
may suggest, sir," continued Joel, "a room-service
dinner might be in order. I'm sure the Commander
needs nourishment after his trying day at the wheel."

"Good thinking, Lieutenant. I'll phone down to
the Em pfang. "

"Before calling your bookie, may I also suggest
that you first call your sister?"

"Oh, Christ, I forgot!"

Chaim Abrahms walked down the dark street in
Tel Aviv his stocky frame draped in his usual safari

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jacket, boots beneath his khaki trousers, and a beret covering his nearly bald head. The beret was the only concession he made to the night's purpose; normally he enjoyed being recognised, accepting the adulation with well-rehearsed humility. In day

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light, his head uncovered and held erect, and wearing his familiar jacket, he would acknowledge the homage with a nod, his eyes boring in on his followers.

"First a Jew!" was the phrase with which he was always greeted, whether in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, in sections of Paris and most of New York.

The phrase had been born years ago when as a young terrorist for the Irgun he had been condemned to death in absentia by the British for the slaughter of a Palestinian village with the Arab corpses put on display for Nakama! He had then issued a cry heard around the world: "I am first a Jew a son of Abraham! All else follows, and rivers of blood will follow if the children of Abraham are denied!"

The British, in 1948, not caring to create another martyr commuted his sentence and gave him a large moshav. Yet the acreage of the settlement could not confine the militant sabre. Three wars had broken his agricultural shackles as well as unleashing his ferocity and his brilliance in the field. It was a brilliance developed and refined through the early years of racing with a fugitive, fragmented army, for which the tactics of surprise, shock, hit and melt away were constant, when being outmanned and outgunned were the accepted odds but only victory was the acceptable outcome. He later applied the strategies and the philosophy of those years to the ever-expanding war machine that became the Army, Navy and Air Force of a mighty Israel. Mars was in the heavens of Chaim Abraham's vision and, the prophets aside, the god of war was his strength, his reason for being. From Ramat Aviv to Har Hazeytim, from Rehovot to Masada of the Negev Nakama! was the cry. Retribution to the enemies of Abraham's children!

If only the Poles and the Czechs, the Hungarians and the Romanies, as well as the haughty Germans and the impossible Russians, had not immigrated to his country by such tens of thousands. They arrived and the complications came with them. Faction against faction, culture against culture, each group trying to prove it was more entitled to the name Jew than the others. It was all nonsense! They were there because they had to be; they had succumbed to Abraham's enemies permitted yes, permitted the slaughter of millions rather than rising as millions and slaughtering in return. Well, they found out what their civilised ways could bring them, and how much their Talmudic convolutions

could earn them. So

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they came to the Holy Land their Holy Land, so they proclaimed. Well, it wasn't theirs. Where were they when it was being clawed out of rock and arid desert by strong hands with primitive tools Biblical tools? Where were they when the hated Arab and the despised English first felt the wrath of the tribal Jew? They were in the capitals of Europe, in their banks and their fancy drawing rooms, making money and drinking expensive brandy out of crystal goblets. No, they came here because they had to; they came to the Holy Land of the sabre.

They brought with them money and dandy ways and elegant words and confusing arguments and influence and the guilt of the world. But it was the sabre who taught them how to fight. And it was a sabre who would bring all Israel into the orbit of a mighty new alliance.

Abrahms reached the intersection of Ibn Gabirol and Arlosoroff streets; the streetlamps were haloed, their light hazy. It was just as well; he should not be seen. He had another block to go, to an address on Jabotinsky, an unprepossessing apartment house where there was an undistinguished flat leased by a man who appeared to be no more than an unimportant bureaucrat. What few realised, however, was that this man, this specialist who operated sophisticated computer equipment with communications throughout most of the world, was intrinsic to the global operations of the Mossad, Israel's intelligence service, which many considered the finest on earth. He, too, was a sabre. He was one of them.

Abrahms spoke his name quietly into the mouthpiece above the mail slot in the outer lobby; he heard the click in the lock of the heavy door and walked inside. He began the climb up the three flights of steps that would take him to the flat.

'~Some wine, Chaim?"

"Whisky," was the curt reply.

"Always the same question and always the same answer," said the specialist. "I say 'Some wine, Chaim?' and you say one word. 'whisky,' you say. You would drink whisky at the Seder, if you could get away with it."

"I can and I do." Abrahms sat in a cracked leather chair looking around the plain, disheveled room with books everywhere, wondering, as he always did, why a man with such influence lived this way. It was rumored that the Mossad officer did not like company, and larger, more attractive quarters

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might invite it. "I gathered from your grunts and coughs over the telephone that you have what I need."

"Yes, I have it," said the specialist, bringing a glass of very good Scotch to his guest. "I have it, but I don't think you're going to like it."

"Why not?" asked Abrahms, drinking, his eyes alert over the rim of the glass and fixed on his host as the latter sat down opposite him.

"Basically because it's confusing, and what's confusing in this business is to be approached delicately. You are not a delicate man, Chaim Abrahms, forgive the indelicacy of my saying it. You tell me this Converse is your enemy, a would-be infiltrator, and I tell you I find nothing to support the conclusion. Before anything else, there must be a deep personal motive for a nonprofessional to engage in this kind of deception this kind of behavior, if you will. There has to be a driving compulsion to strike out at an image of a cause he loathes. Well, there is a motive, and there is an enemy for which he must have great hatred, but neither is compatible with what you suggest. The information, incidentally, is completely reliable. It comes from the Quang Dinh "

"What in hell is that?" interrupted the general.

"A specialised branch of North Vietnamese now, of course, Vietnamese intelligence."

"You have sources there?"

"We fed them for years nothing terribly vital, but sufficient to gain a few ears, and voices. There were things we had to know, weapons we had to understand; they could be turned against us."

"This Converse was in North Vietnam?"

"For several years as a prisoner of war; there's an extensive file on him. At first, his captors thought he could be used for propaganda, radio broadcasts, television imploring his brutal government to withdraw and stop the bombing, all the usual garbage. He spoke well, presented a good picture, and was obviously very American. Initially they televised him as a murderer from the skies, saved from the angry mobs by humane troops, then later while eating and exercising; you see, they were programming him for a violently sudden reversal. They thought he was a soft, privileged young man who could be broken rather easily to do their bidding in exchange for more comfortable treatment after having experienced a period of harsh deprivation. What they learned, however, was

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quite different. Under that soft shell the inner lining was made of hard metal, and the odd thing was that as the months went by it grew harder, until they realized they had created created was their word a hellhound of sorts, somehow forged in steel."

"Hellhound? was that their word, too?"

"No, they called him an ugly troublemaker, which, considering the source, is not without irony. The point is, they recognized the fact that they had created him. The harsher the treatment, the more volatile he became, the more resilient."

"Why not?" said Abrahms sharply. "He was angry. Prod a desert snake and watch him strike."

"I can assure you, Chaim, it is not the normal human response under such conditions. A man can go mad and strike in crazed fury, or he can become reclusive to the point of catatonia, or fall apart weeping, willing to compromise anything and everything for the smallest kindness. He did none of these things. His was a calculated and inventive series of responses drawing on his own inner resources to survive. He led two escapes the first lasting three days and the second five before the groups were recaptured. As the leader, he was placed in a cage in the Mekong River, but he devised a way to kill the water rats by grabbing them from beneath the surface like a shark. He was then thrown into solitary confinement, a pit in the ground twelve feet deep with barbed wire anchored across the top. It was from there, during a heavy rainstorm at night, that he clawed his way up, bent the wire back and escaped alone. He made his way south through the jungles and in the river streams for over a hundred miles until he reached the American lines. It was no easy feat. They created a savagely obsessed man who won his own personal war."

"Why didn't they simply kill him before that?"

"I wondered myself," said the specialist, "so I phoned my source in Hanoi, the one who provided the information. He said a strange thing, something quite profound in its way. He said he wasn't there, of course, but he thought it was probably respect."

"For an ugly troublemaker?"

"Captivity in war does odd things, Chaim, to both the captured and the captors. There are so many factors at work in a vicious game. Aggression, resistance, bravery, fear, and not the least curiosity, especially when the players

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come from such diverse cultures as the Occident and the Orient. An abnormal bond is often formed, as much from the weariness of the testing game as

The Aquitaine Progression from anything else, perhaps. It doesn't lessen the national animosities, but a subtle recognition sets in that tells these men, these players, that they are not really in the game by their own choosing. In-depth analyses further show us that it is the captors, not the captured, who first perceive this commonality. The latter are obsessed with freedom and survival, while the former begin to question their absolute authority over the lives and conditions of other men. They start to wonder what it would be like to be in the other player's shoes. It's all part of what the psychiatrists call the Stockholm syndrome."

"What in the name of God are you trying to say? You sound like one of those bores in the Knesset reading a position paper. A little of this, a little of that and a lot of wind!"

"You are definitely not delicate, Chaim. I'm trying to explain to you that while this Converse nurtured his hatreds and his obsessions, his captors wearied of the game, and as our source in Hanoi suggests, they grudgingly spared his life out of respect, before he made his final and successful escape."

To Abraham's bewilderment the specialist had apparently finished. "And?" said the sabre.

"Well, there it is. There is the motive and the enemy, but they are also your motive and your enemy arrived at from different routes, of course. Ultimately, you wish to smash insurgence wherever it erupts, curb the spread of Third World revolutions, especially Islamic, because you know they're being fostered by the Marxists read Soviets and are a direct threat to Israel. One way or another it's the global threat that's brought you all together, and in my judgment rightfully so. There is a time and a place for a military-industrial complex, and it is now. It must run the governments of the free world before that world is buried by its enemies."

Chaim Abrahms squinted and tried not to shout. "And?"

"Can't you see? This Converse is one of you. Everything supports it. He has the motive and an enemy he's seen in the harshest light. He is a highly regarded attorney who makes a great deal of money with a very conservative firm, and his clients are among the wealthiest corporations and conglomerates. Everything he's been and everything he stands for can only benefit from your efforts. The confusion lies in his unorthodox methods, and I can't explain them except to say that

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perhaps they are not unorthodox in the specialised work he does. Markets can plummet on rumors; concealment and diversion are surely respected.

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Regardless, he doesn't want to destroy you, he wants to join you."

The sabre put his glass down on the floor and struggled out of the chair. With his chin tucked into his breastbone and his hands clasped behind his back, Abrahms paced back and forth in silence. He stopped and looked down at the specialist.

"Suppose, just suppose," he said, ' the almighty Mossad has made a mistake, that there's something you didn't find."

"I would find that hard to accept."

"But it's a possibility!"

"In light of the information we've gathered, I doubt it. Why?"

"Because I have a sense of smell, that's why!"

The man from the Mossad kept his eyes on Abrahms, as if studying the soldier's face or thinking from a different viewpoint. "There is only one other possibility, Chaim. If this Converse is not who and what I've described, which would be contrary to all the data we've compiled, then he is an agent of his government."

"That's what I smell," said the sabre softly.

It was the specialist's turn to be silent. He breathed deeply, then responded. "I respect your nostrils, old friend. Not always your conduct but certainly your sense of smell. What do the others think?"

"Only that he's lying, that he's covering for others he may or may not know, who are using him as a scout, an 'infantry point' was the term used by Palo Alto."

The Mossad officer continued to stare at the sabre, but his eyes were no longer focused; he was seeing abstract, twisted patterns, convolutions few men would comprehend. They came from a lifetime of analysing seen and unseen, legitimate and racial enemies, parrying dagger thrusts with counterthrusts in the blackest darkness. "It's possible," he whispered, as if replying to an unspoken question heard only by himself. "Almost inconceivable, but possible."

"What is? That Washington is behind him?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"As an outrageous alternative I do not subscribe to, but the only one left that has the slightest plausibility. Simply put, he has too much information."

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"And?"

"Not Washington in the usual sense, not the government in the broader sense, but within a branch of the government a section that has heard whispers about an organisation cannot be sure. They believe that if there is such an organization, they must invade it to expose it. So they choose a man with the right history, the right memories, even the right profession to do the job. He might even believe everything he says."

The sabre was transfixed but impatient. "That has too many complications for me," he said bluntly.

'Try it my way first. Try to accept him; he may be genuine. He'll have to give you something concrete; you can force that. Then again he may not because he cannot."

"Andy"

"And if he can't, you'll know you're right. Then put as much distance between him and his sponsors as is humanly and brutally possible. He must become a pariah, a man hunted for crimes so insane his madness is unquestioned."

"Why not just kill him?"

"By all means, but not before he's been labeled so mad that no one will step forward to claim him. It will buy you the time you need. The final phase of Aquitaine is when? Three, four weeks away?"

"That's when it begins, yes."

The specialist got up from the chair and stood pensively in front of the soldier. "I repeat, first try to accept him, see if what I said before is true. But if that sense of smell of yours is provoked further, if there's the slightest possibility he has been willingly or unwillingly, wittingly or unwittingly, made a provocateur by men in Washington, then build your case against him and throw him to the wolves. Create that pariah as the North Vietnamese created a hellhound. Then kill him quickly, before anyone else reaches him."

"A sabre of the Mossad speaks?"

"As clearly as I can."

The young Army captain and the older civilian came out of the Pentagon from adjacent glass doors and glanced briefly at each other with no recognition. They walked separately down the short bank of steps and turned left on the cement path that led to the enormous parking lot; the Army officer was perhaps ten feet ahead of the civilian.

Upon reaching the

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huge asphalt area, each veered in a different direction toward his car. If these two men had been the subjects of photographic surveillance during the past fifty seconds, there was no indication whatsoever that they knew each other.

The green Buick coupe turned right in the middle of the block, going through the open chasm that was the entrance to the hotel's underground parking lot. At the bottom of the ramp the driver showed his room key to the attendant, who raised the yellow barrier and waved him along. There was an empty space in the third column of stationary automobiles. The Buick eased into it and the Army captain got out.

He circled through the revolving door and walked to a bank of elevators in the hotel's lower lobby. The panels of the second elevator opened, revealing two couples who had not intended to reach the underground level; they laughed as one of the men repeatedly pressed the lobby button. The officer, in turn, touched the button for the fourteenth floor. Sixty seconds later he walked out into the corridor toward the exit staircase. He was heading for the eleventh floor.

The blue Toyota station wagon came down the ramp, the driver's hand extended, a room key held out, the number visible. Inside the parking area the driver found an empty space and carefully steered the small station wagon into it.

The civilian stepped out and looked at his watch. Satisfied, he started toward the revolving door and the elevators. The second elevator was empty, and the civilian was tempted to press the button for the eleventh floor; he was tired and did not relish the thought of the additional walk. However there would be other occupants on the way up, so he held to the rules and placed his index finger over the button beside the number 9.

Standing in front of the hotel-room door the civilian raised his hand, rapped once, waited several beats, then rapped twice more. Seconds later the door was opened by the Army captain. Beyond him was a third man, also in uniform, the color and the insignia denoting a lieutenant, junior grade, in the Navy. He stood by a desk with a telephone on it.

"Glad you got here on time," said the Army officer. "The traffic was rotten. Our call should be coming through in a few minutes."

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The civilian entered, nodding to the Navy man as he spoke. 'What did you find out about

Fitzpatrick?" he asked.

"He's where he shouldn't be," replied the lieutenant.

"Can you bring him back?"

"I'm working on it, but I don't know where to begin. I'm a very low man on a very big totem pole."

"Aren't we all?" said the captain.

"Who'd have thought Halliday would have gone to him?" asked the naval officer, frustration in his voice. "Or if he was going to bring him in, why didn't he go to him first? Or tell him about us?"

"I can answer the last two questions," said the Army man. "He was protecting him from a Pentagon backlash. If we go down, his brother-in-law stays clean."

"And I can answer the first question," said the civilian. "Halliday went to Fitzpatrick because in the final analysis, he didn't trust us. Geneva proved he was right."

"Hoop" asked the captain defensively, but without apology. "We couldn't have prevented it."

"No, we couldn't," agreed the civilian. "But we couldn't do anything about it afterwards, either. That was part of the trust, and there was no way we could live up to it. We couldn't

The telephone rang. The lieutenant picked it up and listened. "It's Mykonos," he said.

PART TWO

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Connal Fitzpatrick sat opposite Joel at the room-service table drinking the last of his coffee. The dinner was finished the story completed, and all the questions the Navy lawyer could raise had been answered by Converse because he had given his word; he needed a complete ally.

"Except for a few identities and some dossier material," said Connal, "I don't know an awful lot more than I did before. Maybe I will when I see those Pentagon names. You say you don't know who supplied them?"

"No. Like Topsy, they're just there. Beale said a number of them are probably mistakes, but others aren't; they have to be linked to Delavane."

"They had to be supplied by someone too. There had to be reasons why they were listed."

"Beale called them 'decision makerst in military

procurements."

"Then I have to see them. I've dealt with those people."

"Yes. Not very often, but enough to know my way around."

"Why you?"

"Basically translating legal nuances from language to language where Navy tech was involved. I think I mentioned that I speak "

"You did," Joel broke in.

"Goddamn it!" cried Fitzpatrick, crushing his napkin in a fist.

"What's the matter?"

"Press knew I had dealings with those committees, with the technology and armaments boys! He even asked me about them. Who I saw, who I liked who I trusted. Jesus! Why didn't he come to me? Of all the people he knew, I was the logical one! I'm down the pike and his closest friend."

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"That's why he didn't come to you," said Converse.

"Stupid bastard!" Connal raised his eyes. "And I hope you hear that, Press. You might still be around to see Connal Two win the Bay Regatta."

"I think you really believe he might hear you."

Fitzpatrick looked across the table at Joel. "Yes, I do. You see, I believe, counselor. I know all the reasons why I shouldn't Press enumerated them to a fare-thee-well when we were in our cups but I believe. I answered him once with a quote from one of his laid-back Protestant forebears."

"What was that?" asked Joel, smiling kindly.

"'There's more faith in honest doubt than is held by all the archangels in the mind of God.'"

"It's very nice. I've never heard it before."

"Maybe I didn't get it right.... Joel, I've got to see those names"

"And I have to get my attache case, but I can't go myself."

"Then I'm elected," said the Navy man. "Do you think Leifhelm's right? You think he can really call off Interpol?"

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"I'm of two thoughts about it. For my immediate maneuverability I hope he can. But if he does, it'll scare the hell out of me."

"I'm on your side about that," agreed Connal, getting out of the chair. "I'll call the desk and get a taxi. Give me the key to the locker."

Converse reached into his pocket and pulled out the small, rounded key. "Leifhelm's seen you. He could have you followed; he did before."

"I'll be ten times more careful. If I see the same pair of headlights twice, I'll go to a Bierkeller. I know a few here."

Joel looked at his watch. "It's twenty minutes to ten. Do you think you could swing around to the university first?"

"Dowling?"

"He said he had someone he wanted me to meet. Just walk by him or them and say everything's under control, nothing else. I owe him that much."

"Suppose he tries to stop me?"

"Then pull out your ID and say it's high priority, or ultrasecret, or whatever bullshit security phrases that come to that very inventive mind of yours."

"Do I sense a touch of legal envy?"

"No, just recognition. I know where you're coming from. I've been there."

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* * *

Fitzpatrick walked slowly along the wide path on the south facade of the immense university building, once the great palace of the all-powerful archbishops of Cologne. The unimpeded moonlight swelled over the area, reflecting off the myriad rows of cathedral windows and lending a luminous dimension to the light stone walls of the majestic structure. Beyond the path the winding gardens of August possessed an eerie elegance circles of sleeping flowers, their beauty heightened by the moonlight. Connal was so struck by the tranquil loveliness of the nocturnal setting that he nearly forgot why he was there.

The reason was brought sharply back into focus when he saw a slender figure slouched alone on a bench. The man's legs were extended and crossed at the ankles, his head covered by a soft cloth hat, but not sufficiently to hide the flowing gray-blond hair that protruded slightly over his temples and the back of his neck. So this Caleb Dowling was an actor,

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thought the Navy lawyer, amused by the fact that Dowling had feigned shock when he realized Connal did not recognize him. But then, neither had Converse; they were obviously a minority in a world of television addicts. A college professor who had fulfilled the fantasies of youth, a risk-taker, according to Joel, who had won a battle against astronomical odds, was a nice thing to think about; the only sad note was the haunted life of his wife, whom he loved dearly. Also, a marine who had fought in the bloody mess that was Kwajalein was a man to be reckoned with.

Fitzpatrick walked over to the bench and sat down several feet away from Dowling. The actor glanced at him, then did a perfectly natural double take, his head snapping. "You9"

"I'm sorry about last night," said Connal. "I gather I wasn't very convincing."

"You lacked a certain finish, young fella. Where the hell is Converse?"

"Sorry again. He couldn't make it, but not to worry. Everything's A-okay and under control."

"Whose okay and whose control?" countered the actor, annoyed. "I told Joel to come here, not a cub-scout interlocutor."

"I resent that. I'm a lieutenant commander in the United States Navy and the chief legal officer at a major naval base. Mr. Converse accepted an assignment from us which has an

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element of personal risk for him and the highest priority of classification for us. Back off, Mr. Dowling. We appreciate and I speak for Converse as well as myself your interest and your generosity, but it's time for you to recede. For your own benefit, incidentally."

"What about Interpol? He killed a man."

"Who tried to kill him, " added Fitzpatrick quickly, a lawyer rejoining a negative statement by a witness on the stand. "That will be clarified internally and the charges dropped."

"You're pretty smooth, Commander," said Dowling, sitting up. "Better than you were last night this morning, actually."

"I was upset. I'd lost him and I had to find him. I had to deliver vital information."

The actor now crossed his legs at the knees and leaned back, his arm slung casually over the slatted rim of the bench. "So this thing Converse and you are involved with is a real hush-hush operation?"

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"It's highly classified, yes."

"And you and he being lawyers, it's got something to do with legal irregularities over here that somehow reach into the military, is that right?"

"In the broadest sense, again yes. I'm afraid I can't be any more specific. Converse mentioned that there was someone you wanted him to meet."

"Yes, there is. I said a couple of harsh things about him, but I take them back; he was doing his thing. He didn't know who the hell I was any more than you did. He's one smart man, tough but fair."

"I hope you understand that under the circumstances Converse can't comply with your request."

"You'll do," said Dowling calmly, removing his arm from the back of the bench.

Connal was suddenly alarmed. There was movement behind him in the shadowed moonlight; he whipped his head around, peering over his shoulder. Out of the protective darkness of the building from within the pitch-black cover of a doorway the figure of a man began walking across the dark green lawn. An arm thrown casually over the rim of the bench, then just as casually removed. Both movements had been signals" Identity confirmed; move in.

"What the hell have you done?" asked the Navy lawyer harshly.

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"Bringing you two bucks to your senses," replied Dowling. ".If my celebrated instincts are valid, I did the right thing. If they're wrong, I still did the right thing.,'

"w7lat?"

The man crossing the lawn entered the spill of clear moonlight. He was heavyset and wore a dark suit and tie; his scowling, late-middle-aged face and straight grey hair gave him the air of a prosperous businessman. It was clear that at the moment he was intensely angry.

Dowling spoke as he got up from the bench. "Commander, may I introduce the Honorable Walter Peregrine, United States ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany."

Lieutenant David Remington wiped his steel-rimmed glasses with a silicone-treated tissue, then threw the tissue into a wastebasket and got up from his desk. Returning the glasses to his face, he walked to a mirror secured to the back of his office

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door and checked his appearance. He smoothed his hair, shoved the knot of his tie in place, and looked down at the failing crease of his trousers. All things considered it was 1730 hours and he had been harassed at his desk since 0800 in the morning, including that crazy Four Zero emergency from Fitzpatrick he looked quite presentable. And anyway, Rear Admiral Hickman was not a stickler for spit and polish where the desk corps was concerned. He knew damn well that most of the legal execs would bolt in a minute for much higher paying jobs in the civilian sector if the dress and other disposable codes were taken too seriously. Well, David Remington wouldn't. Where the hell else could a man travel all over the world, housing a wife and three kids in some of the nicest quarters imaginable, with all the medical and dental bills paid for, and not have the terrible pressures of rising in private or corporate practice. His father had been an attorney for one of the biggest insurance companies in Hartford Connecticut, and his father had had ulcers at forty-three, a nervous breakdown at forty-eight, his first stroke at fifty-one, and a final, massive coronary at fifty-six; everyone had said he was so terrific at his job he might even be in line for the presidency. But then, people always said things like that when a man died in the line of corporate duty which men did too goddamned frequently.

None of that for David Remington, no sir! He was simply going to be one of the best lawyers in the U.S. Navy, serve

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his thirty years, get out at fifty-five with a generous pension, and become a well-paid legal-military consultant at fifty-six. At the precise age when his father died, he would start living very nicely, indeed. It was simply a matter of building a reputation as a man who knew more about naval and maritime law and who stuck to it than any other lawyer in the Navy. If he stepped on toes in his performance, so be it; it could only enhance that reputation. He didn't give a damn about being popular; he cared only about being right. And he never made a decision until he was certain of its correct legal position. Consultants like that were prized commodities in civilian practice.

Remington wondered why Admiral Hickman wanted to see him, especially at this hour when most of the desk corps had gone for the day. There was a court-martial pending that could become a sensitive issue. A black officer, an Annapolis graduate, had been caught selling cocaine off a destroyer berthed in the Philippines; that was probably it. Remington had pre-prepared the case for the judge advocate, who frankly did not care to prosecute; the amount was not that large, and others were certainly selling far more, and they were probably white. That was not the point, Remington had insisted. If there were others, they

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had not been caught, if there was evidence, it had not been found. The law was color-blind.

He would say the same thing to Hickman. The "stickler prick," a derisive nickname Remington knew was used behind his back, would stand firm. Well, at fifty-six the age at which his father had been killed by company policy a stickler prick would have all the comforts of an exclusive country club without paying the corporate price. Lieutenant Remington opened the door, walked out into the grey hallway, and started for the elevator that would take him to the office of the highest ranking man at the San Diego naval base.

"Sit down, Remington," said Rear Admiral Brian Hickman, shaking the lieutenant's hand and indicating a chair in front of the large desk. "I don't know about you, but this has been what I used to call at your age one fucked-up day. Sometimes I wish Congress wouldn't appropriate so damn much money down here. Everyone gets on such a high you'd think they'd smoked everything in Tijuana. They forget they're supposed to have architects before they start bribing the contractors."

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"Yes, sir, I know what you mean, sir," said Remington sitting down with proper deference as Hickman stood several feet to his left. The mere reference to Tijuana and drugs confirmed his suspicions; the admiral was about to launch into the everybody-does-it routine, which would lead to "why should the Navy stir up a racial controversy with something that took place in the Philippines?" well, he was prepared. The law naval law was color-blind.

"I'm going to have a well-deserved drink, Lieutenant," said Hickman, heading for a copper dry bar against the wall. "Can I get you something?"

"No, thank you, sir."

"Hey, look, Remington, I appreciate your staying late for this conference, I guess you'd call it, but I don't expect any version of corporate military behavior. Frankly, I'd feel foolish drinking by myself, and what we've got to talk about isn't so almighty important. I just want to ask you a couple of questions."

"Corporate behavior, sir? I'll have some white wine, if you have it, sir."

"I always have it," said the admiral with resignation. "It's usually for personnel who are about to get divorced."

"I'm happily married, sir."

"Glad to hear it. I'm on my third wife should

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have stuck with the first."

The drinks poured, the seating arrangements in order Hickman spoke from behind the desk, his tie loosened, his voice casual. But what he said evoked anything but casualness in David Remington.

"Who the hell is Joel Converse?" asked the admiral.

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

The admiral sighed, the sound indicating that he would begin again. "At twelve hundred hours twenty-one minutes today, you placed a CLO negative on all inquiries regarding a flag on one Lieutenant Joel Converse's service record. He was a pilot in the Vietnam action."

"I know what he was, sir," said Remington.

"And at fifteen hundred hours, two minutes," continued Hickman, looking at a note on his desk. "I get a teletype from the Fifth Naval District requesting that the flag be removed in their favor and the material released immediately. The basis for their request was as it always is national security." The admiral paused to sip his drink; he appeared to be in no

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hurry, simply weary. "I ordered my adjutant to call you and ask why you did it."

"And I answered him completely, sir," Remington broke in. "It was at the instructions of the chief legal officer SAND PAC, and I cited the specific regulation that states clearly that the CLO of a naval base can withhold files on the basis that his own inquiries can be compromised by the entrance of a third party. It's standard in civil law, sir. The Federal Bureau of Investigation rarely gives a local or metropolitan police force the information it's collected in an investigation for the simple reason that the investigation could be compromised by leaks or corrupt practices."

"And our chief legal officer, Lieutenant Commander Fitzpatrick, is currently carrying out an investigation of an officer who left the service eighteen years ago?"

"I don't know, sir," said Remington, his eyes noncommittal. "I only know those were his orders. They're in force for seventy-two hours. After that, you, of course, can sign the order of release. And the President, naturally, can do so anytime in a national emergency."

"I thought it was forty-eight hours," said Hickman.

"No, sir. The forty-eight hours is standard with the release of every flag regardless of who asks for

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it except, of course the President. It's called the
vet delay. Naval intelligence cross-checks with the
CIA, the NSA, and G-Two to make sure there's no
material being released that's still considered classi-
fied. That procedure has nothing to do with the
prerogatives of a chief legal officer."."

"You know your law, don't you?'"

"I believe as well as any attorney in the United
States Navy, sir."

"I seed' The admiral leaned back in his
upholstered swivel chair and placed his legs on the
corner of the desk. "Commander Fitzpatrick's off
the base, isn't he? Emergency leave, if I recall."

"Yes, sir. He's in San Francisco with his sister
and her children. Her husband was killed in a
robbery in Geneva, the funeral's tomorrow morning,
I believe."

"Yes, I read about it. Goddamned lousy.... But
you know where to reach him."

"I have the telephone number, yes, sir. Do you
want me to call him, Admiral? Apprise him of the
Fifth Naval request."

^'No, no," said Hickman, shaking his head. "Not at
a time

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like this. They can dry their mops at least until
tomorrow afternoon. I've got to assume they also
know the regulations if security's so damned
jeopardised, know where the Pentagon is and the
latest rumor out of Arlington is that they found out
where the White House is." The Admiral stopped,
frowned, and looked over at the lieutenant. "Sum
pose you didn't

..But I do sirn,,ow where to reach Fitzpatrick?,

"Yes, but suppose you didn't? And a legitimate
request was received below presidential
involvement, but still pretty damned urgent you
could release that flag, couldn't you?

"Theoretically, as next in authority, yes I could.
As long as I accepted the legal responsibility for my
judgment."

"The what?"

"That I believed the request was sufficiently
urgent to override the chief legal officer's prior
order, which granted him seventy-two hours for
whatever action he deemed necessary. He was
adamant, sir. Frankly, short of presidential inter-
venhon, I'm legally bound to uphold the CLO's
privilege."

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' I'd say morally) too," agreed Hickman.

"Morality has nothing to do with it, sir. It's a clear legal position. Now, shall I make that call, Admiral?"

'No, the hell with it." Hickman removed his feet from the desk. "I was just curious and, frankly, you've convinced me. Fitz wouldn't have given you the order unless he had a reason. The Fifth D can wait three days, unless those boys want to run up telephone bills to Washington."

"May I ask, sir, who specifically made the request?"

The admiral looked pointedly at Remington. "I'll tell you in three days. You see, I've got a man's privilege to uphold too. You'll know then anyway, because in Fitz's absence you'll have to countersign the transfer." Hickman finished his drink and the lieutenant understood. The conference was over.

Remington got up and returned the half-filled wineglass by the door; he stood at attention and spoke "Will that

"Yes, that's it," said the admiral, his gaze straying to the window and the ocean beyond.

The lieutenant saluted sharply as Hickman brought a casual hand to his forehead. The lawyer then did an about-face and started for the door.

"Remington?"

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"Yes, sir?" replied the lieutenant, turning.

"Who the hell is this Converse?"

"I don't know, sir. But Commander Fitzpatrick said the status of the flag was a Four Zero emergency."

'Jesus . "

Hickman picked up his phone and touched a combination of buttons on the console. Moments later he was speaking to a fellow ranking officer in the Fifth Naval District.

"I'm afraid you'll have to wait three days, Scanlon."

"Why is that?" asked the admiral named Scanlon.

"The CLO negative holds on the Converse flag as far as SAND PAC is concerned. If you want to go the D.C. route be my guest. We'll cooperate."

"I told you, Brian, my people don't want to go through Washington. You've had these things

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happen before. D.C. makes waves, and we don't want waves."

"Well then, why don't you tell me why you want the Converse flag? Who is he?"

"I'd tell you if I could, you know that. Frankly, I'm not all that clear on it myself, and what I do know I've sworn to keep secure."

"Then go to Washington, I'm standing behind my Chief Legal, who, incidentally, isn't even here."

"He isn't? But you talked to him."

"No, to his next in line, a lieutenant named Remington. He took the direct order from the CLO. Believe me, Remington won't budget. I gave him the chance and he covered himself with legalities. Around here he's known as a stickler prick."

"Did he say why the negative was put out?"

"He didn't have any idea. Why don't you call him yourself? He's probably still downstairs and maybe you can "

"You didn't use my name, did you?" interrupted Scanlon apparently agitated.

"No, you asked me not to, but he'll know it in three days. He'll have to sign the release and I'll have to tell him who requested it." Hickman paused, then without warning exploded. "What the hell is this all about, Admiral? Some pilot who was discharged over eighteen years ago is suddenly on everybody's most-wanted list. I get a departmental priority teletype from the big Fifth D and you follow it up with a personal call, playing the old Annapolis memory game, but you won't tell

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me anything. Then I find out my own CLO without my knowing about it has put a negative on this Converse flag and labeled it a Four Zero emergency status! Now, I know he's got personal problems and I won't bother him until tomorrow and I realize you've given your word to stay secure, but goddamn it, somebody had better start telling me something!"

There was no response from the other end of the line. But there was the sound of breathing; and it was tremulous.

"Scanlon!"

'What did you just say?" said the voice of the admiral thirty-six hundred miles away.

"I'm going to find out anyway "

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"No, the status. The status of the flag." Scanlon could barely be heard.

"Four-Zero emergency, that's what I said!"

The interruption was abrupt) there was only an echoing click. Admiral Scanlon had hung up the phone.

Walter Peregrine, United States ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany, confronted Fitzpatrick. "What's your name, Commander?"

"Fowler, sir," answered the Navy lawyer, glancing briefly but hard at Dowling. "Lieutenant Commander Avery Fowler, United States Navy." Again Connal looked at the actor, who stared at him through the moonlight.

"I understand there's some question about that," said Peregrine, his glare as hostile as Dowling's. "May I see your identification, please?"

"I'm not carrying identification, sir. It's the nature of my assignment not to do so, sir." Fitzpatrick's words were rapid, precise, his posture squared and erect.

"I want verification of your name, your rank, and your branch of service! Now!"

"The name I've given you is the name I was instructed to give should anyone beyond the scope of the assignment inquire."

"Whose instructions?" barked the diplomat.

"My superior officers, sir."

"Am I to infer that Fowler is not your correct name?"

"With respect, Mr. Ambassador. My name is Fowler, my rank is lieutenant commander, my branch of the service is the United States Navy."

"Where the hell do you think you are? Behind the lines,

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captured by the enemy? 'Name, rank, and serial number that's all I'm required to say under the rules of the Geneva Convention'!"

"It's all I'm permitted to say, sir."

"We'll damn well find out about that, Commander if you are a commander. Also about this Converse, who appears to be a very odd liar one minute the soul of propriety, the next a very strange man on the run."

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"Please try to understand, Mr. Ambassador, our assignment is classified. In no way does it involve diplomacy, nor will it impair your efforts as the chief American representative of our government. But it is classified. I will report this conversation to my superiors and you will undoubtedly hear from them. Now, if you gentlemen will forgive me, I'll be on my way."

"I don't think so, Commander or whoever you are. But if you are who you say, nothing's compromised. I'm not a damn fool. Nothing will be said to anyone on the embassy staff. Mr. Dowling insisted on that and I accepted the condition. You and I will be locked in a communications room with a phone on a scrambler and you're going to place a call to Washington. I didn't take this job at a loss of three-quarters of a million a year to find shoe clerks running an investigation of my own company without my knowing about it. If I want an outside audit, I'll damn well order it myself."

"I wish I could comply, sir; it sounds like a reasonable request. But I'm afraid I can't."

"I'm afraid you will!"

"Sorry."

"Do as he says, Commander," interjected Dowling. "As he told you, nothing's been said to anyone, and nothing will be. But Converse needs protection; he's a wanted man in a foreign country and he doesn't even speak the language. Take Ambassador Peregrine's offer. He'll keep his word."

"With respect, sirs, the answer is negative." Connal turned away and started up the wide path.

"Major!" shouted the ambassador, his voice furious. "Stop him! Stop that man!"

Fitzpatrick looked behind him; for reasons he could not explain to himself he saw what he never expected to see, and the instant he did, he knew he should have expected it. From out of the distant shadows of the immense, majestic building a man rushed forward, a man who was obviously a military

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aide to the ambassador a member of the embassy staff! Connal froze, Joel's words coming back to him. Those men you saw at the airport, the ones from the embassy . . . they're on the other side.

Under almost any other circumstances, Fitzpatrick would have remained where he was and weathered it out. He hadn't actually done anything wrong; there was nothing illegal, no laws broken of which he was cognizant, and no one could force him to discuss personal matters where no law had been

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violated. Then he realized how wrong he was! The
generals of George Marcus Delavane would force
him, could force him! He spun around and ran.

Suddenly gunfire erupted. Two earsplitting shots
above him! He dove to the ground and rolled into
the shadows of the bushes as a man's voice roared
over the stillness of the night and the sleeping
gardens.

"You goddamned son of a bitch! What do you
think you're doing!"

There were further shouts, a further barrage of
obscenities, and the sounds of struggle filled the
quiet enclave of the university.

"You don't kid a man! Besides, you bastard, there
could be other people! Don't say a word, Mr.
Ambassador!"

Connal scrambled across the graveled path and
spread apart the bordering foliage. In the clear
moonlight of the distant bench, the actor Caleb
Dowling the former marine from Kwajalein stood
over the body of the major who had run out of the
shadow, his boot on the supine man's throat, his
hand grasping the man's extended arm to wrench the
weapon free.

"You are one dumb son of a bitch, Major! Or,
goddamn you, maybe you're something else!"

Fitzpatrick got to his knees, then to his feet, and,
crouching, raced into the receding darkness of the
wide path toward the exit.

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"I didn't have any choice!" said Connal. He had
dropped the attache case on the couch and was
sitting in an adjacent chair, leaning forward, still
shaking.

"Calm down; try to relax." Converse walked to
the elegant antique hunt table against the wall
where there was a large silver tray with whisky, ice
and glasses. Joel had learned to make use of room
service in English. 'You need a drink,' he said,
pouring Fitzpatrick's bourbon.

Do I ever! I've never been shot at. You have.
Christ, is that what it's like?"

"That's what it's like. You can't believe it. It's
unreal, just mind-blowing sounds that can't really
have anything to do with you, until until. you see
the evidence for yourself. It's real, it's meant for
you, and you're sick. There's no swelling music, no
brass horns, just vomit." Converse brought the naval
officer his drink.

"You're omitting something," said Connal, taking

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the glass and looking up at Joel.

"No, I'm not. Let's think about tonight. If you heard Dowling right, the ambassador won't say anything around the embassy "

"I remember," interrupted Fitzpatrick, taking several swallows of the bourbon, his eyes still on Converse. "It was in one of the other flags. During your second escape a man got killed; it was sundown. You reached him when it happened, and the flag said you went crazy for a couple of minutes. Somehow, according to this guy a sergeant, I think you circled around in the jungle, caught the North Vietnamese, killed him with his own knife and got his repeating rifle. Then you blew away three other Viets in the area."

Joel held his place in front of the Navy lawyer. He answered the younger man, his voice quiet, his look angry. "I hate descriptions like that," he said flatly. ' It raises all the im

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ages I loathe.... Let me tell you the way it was like it was, counselor. A kid, no more than nineteen, had to relieve himself, and although we stuck together he had the dignity to go ten or fifteen feet away to take care of his private functions, using leaves because squeezable toilet paper wasn't available. The maniac I won't use the word 'soldier' who killed him waited for the precise moment, then fired off a burst that cut that kid's face apart. When I reached him, half of that face in my hands, I heard the cackle, the obscene laughter of an obscene man who personified for me everything I found despicable whether North Vietnamese or American. If you want to know the truth, whatever I did I did against both because both were guilty, all of us turned into animals, myself included. Those other three men, those enemies, those uniformed robots, probably with wives and children back in villages somewhere up north, had no idea I got behind them. I shot them in the back, counselor. What would Johnny Ringo say about that? Or John Wayne?"

Connal was silent as Joel walked over to the hunt table to pour himself a whisky. The Navy lawyer drank, then spoke. "A few hours ago you said you knew where I was coming from because you'd been there. Well, I haven't been where you were, but I'm beginning to see where you're coming from. You really hate everything that Aquitaine stands for, don't you? Especially those running it."

Converse turned. "With everything that's in me," he said. "That's why we've got to talk about tonight."

"I told you, I had no choice. You said the embassy people I saw at the airport were with

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Delavane. I couldn't take the chance."

"I know. Now we're both running, hunted by our own people and protected by the men we want to trap. We've got to think, Commander."

The telephone rang twice abrasively. Fitzpatrick leaped from the chair, his initial reaction one of shock. Joel watched him, calming him with his look. "Sorry," said Connal. "I'm still edgy. I'll get it; I'll be all right." The Navy lawyer crossed to the phone and picked it up. "7a?" He listened for several seconds, covered the mouthpiece and looked at Converse. "It's the overseas operator. San Francisco. It's Meagen."

"Which means Remington," said Joel, his throat suddenly dry, his pulse accelerating.

"Meagen? Yes, I'm here. What is it?" Fitzpatrick stared

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straight ahead as his sister talked; he nodded frequently, the muscles of his jaw working as he concentrated. "Oh, Christ! . . . No, it's all right. I mean it, everything's okay. Do you have the number?" Connal looked down at the small telephone table; there was a message pad but no pencil. He glanced over at Joel, who had already started for the desk and a hotel pen. Fitzpatrick held out his hand, took the pen and wrote out a series of numbers. Converse stood aside, conscious that he was barely breathing, his fingers gripping the glass. "Thanks, Meagen. I know it's a hell of a time for you; you don't need this but if you have to call again, make it station-to-station, okay? . . . I will, Meg, I give you my word. Good-bye." The Navy lawyer hung up, his hand for a moment remaining on the telephone.

"Remington called, didn't he?" said Joel.

"Yes."

'What happened?'

"Someone tried to get the flag on your service record released," said Fitzpatrick, turning, looking at Converse. "It's okay. Remington stopped it."

"Who was it?"

"I don't know, I'll have to reach David. Meagen doesn't have any idea what a flag is, much less who you are. The message was only that 'a release was sought for the flag,' but he stopped it."

"Then everything's all right."

"That's what I said, but it's not."

"Clarification, goddamn it!"

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"There's a time limit on how long my order stands. It's only a day or two after the vetting process "

"Which is forty-eight hours," interrupted Joel.

"Yes, I'm sure of that; it's after that. You see, you thought this would happen, but frankly I didn't. Whoever's asking for that flag isn't small potatoes. You could walk out of that meeting and a few hours later your new associates could have that stuff in their hands. Converse the Delavane-hater. Is he now the Delavane-hunter?"

"Call Remington." Joel went to the French doors, opened them, and walked out on the small balcony. Drifting wisps of clouds filtered the moonlight, and far to the east there were Hashes of heat lightning reminding Converse of the silent artillery fire he and the other escaping prisoners would see in the hills, knowing it was sanctuary but unreachable. He could

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hear Fitzpatrick inside; from the sound of his voice he was getting a line through to San Diego. Joel reached into a pocket for his cigarettes; he lighted one. Whether it was the bright glow of the flame that illuminated the movement he did not know, but he looked in the direction of that movement. Two balconies away, about thirty feet to his right, a man stood watching him. The figure was a silhouette in the dim light; he nodded and went back inside. Was the man simply another guest who had coincidentally gone outside for a breath of air? Or had Aquitaine posted a guard? Converse could hear the Navy lawyer talking conversationally; he turned and walked back into the room.

Connal was seated in the chair on the other side of the table. He held the phone to his ear with his left hand; his right held the pen above the message pad. He made a note, then said quickly, "wait a minute. You say Hickman told you to let it ride but he wouldn't tell you who specifically made the request? . . . I see. All right, David, thanks very much. Are you going out tonight? . . . So if I need you I can reach you at this number.... Yes, I know, it's these damn phones up in Sonoma. One heavy rain in the hills and you're lucky to get a line, forget a clear one. Thanks again, David. Good-bye." Fitzpatrick hung up the phone and looked strangely, almost guiltily, at Joel. Instead of speaking, he shook his head, breathing out and frowning.

'What is it? What's the matter?"

"You'd better get everything you can at that meeting tomorrow. Or is it today?"

"It's past midnight. It's today. why?"

"Because twenty-four hours later that flag will be released to a section in the Fifth Naval District that's Norfolk, and it's powerful. They'll know everything you don't want them to know about you. The time limit is seventy-two hours."

"Get an extension!"

Connal stood up, helplessness in his expression. "On what basis?"

"What else? National security."

"I'd have to spell out the reasons, you know that."

"I don't know that. Extensions are granted for all sorts of contingencies. You need more time to prepare. A source or a witness has been postponed illness or an injury. Or per

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sonal matters goddamn it, your brother-in-law's funeral, your sister's grief--they've delayed your progress!"

"Forget it, Joel. If I tried that, they'd tie you in with Press and good-bye Charlie. They killed him, remember?"

"No," said Converse firmly. "It's the other way around. It separates us further."

"What are you talking about?"

"I've thought about this, tried to put myself in Avery's shoes. He knew his every move was being watched, his telephone probably tapped. He said the geography, the Comm Tech-Bern merger, the breakfast, Geneva itself, everything had to be logical; it couldn't be any other way. At the end of that breakfast he said if I agreed we'd talk later."

"So?"

"He knew we'd be seen together it was unavoidable and I think he was going to give me the words to say if someone in Aquitaine asked me about him. He was going to turn everything around and give me the push I needed to reach these men."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Avery was going to stamp me with the label I had to wear to get inside Delavane's network. We'll never know, but I have an idea he was going to tell me to say that he, A. Preston Halliday, suspected me of being one of them, that he had inserted himself in the Comm Tech-Bern merger to threaten me with exposure, to stop me."

"Wait a minute." Connal shook his head. "Press didn't know what you were going to do or how you

were going to do it."

"There was only one way to do it, he knew that! He also knew I'd reach the same conclusion once I understood the particulars. The only way to stop Delavane and his field marshals is to infiltrate Aquitaine. Why do you think all that money was put up front? I don't need it and he knew he couldn't buy me. But he knew it could be used would have to be used to get inside and start talking, start gathering evidence.... Call Remington again. Tell him to prepare an extension."

"It's not Remington, it's the commander of SAND PAC an admiral named Hickman. David said I could expect a call from him tomorrow. I'll have to figure that one out and phone Meagen back. Hickman's uptight; he wants to know who you are and why all the interest."

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'How well do you know this Hickman?'

'Fairly well. I was with him in New London and Galveston. He requested me as his CLO in San Diego; that's what gave me the stripe.'

Converse studied Fitzpatrick's face, then without saying anything he turned and walked to the open balcony doors. Connal did not interrupt; he understood. He had seen too many attorneys, himself included, struck by a thought they had to define for themselves, an idea upon which a case might hinge. Joel turned around slowly, haltingly, the dim, abstract shadows of a possibility coming into focus.

"Do it," he began. "Do what I think your brother-in-law might have done. Finish what he might have said but never got a chance to say it. Assume he and I had that meeting after the merger conference. Give me the springboard I need."

"As you would say, clarification, please, counselor."

"Present Hickman with a scenario as it might have been written by A. Preston Halliday. Tell him that flag's got to remain in place because you have reason to believe I was connected with your brother-in-law's murder. Explain that before Halliday flew to Geneva he came to see you as he did and told you he was meeting me, an opposing attorney he suspected of being involved with corrupt export licensing, a legal front for some boardroom profiteers. Say he said he was going to confront me. Preston Halliday had a history of causes."

"Not for the past ten or twelve years, he didn't," corrected Fitzpatrick. "He joined the establishment with a vengeance and with a healthy respect for the dollar."

"It's the history that counts. He knew that; it was

one of the reasons he came to me. Say you're convinced he did confront me, and since millions are made out of that business you think I methodically had him removed, covering myself by being there when he died. I have a certain reputation for being methodical."

Connal lowered his head and ran his hand through his hair, then walked in thought toward the hunt table. He stopped, raised his gaze to one of the racehorse prints and turned back to Converse. "Do you know what you're asking me to do?"

"Yes. Give me the springboard that'll catapult me right in the middle of those would-be Genghis khans. To do it you'll have to go further with Hickman. Because you're so person

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ally involved and so goddamned angry which again is the truth tell him to explain your position to whoever wants the flag released. It's a nonmilitary matter, so you're taking what you know to the civilian authorities."

"I understand all that," said Fitzpatrick. "Everything I say is the truth, as I saw it when I flew over here to find you. Except that I reverse the targets. Instead of being the one who can help me, you're now the one I want nailed."

"Right on, counselor. And I'm met by a welcoming committee at Leifhelm's estate."

"Then I guess you don't see."

"What?"

"You're asking me to go on record implicating you in first-degree murder. I'll be branding you as a killer. Once I say it, I can't take the words back."

"I know that. Do it."

George Marcus Delavane twisted his torso in his chair behind the desk in front of the strangely colored fragmented map on the wall. It was not a controlled movement; it was an action in search of control. Delavane did not care for obstructions and one was being explained to him now by an admiral in the Fifth Naval District.

"The status of the Hag is Four Zero," said Scanlon. "To get it released we'd have to go through Pentagon procedures, and I don't have to tell you what that means. Two senior officers, one from naval intelligence, plus a supporting signature from the National Security Agency; all would have to appear on the request sheet, the level of the inquiry stated, thus escalating the request to a sector demand. Now, General, we can do all this, but we run the risk "

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"I know the risk," interrupted Delavane. "The signatures are the risk, the identities a risk. Why the Four Zero? Who placed it and why?"

"The chief legal officer of SAND PAC. I checked him out. He's a lieutenant commander named Fitzpatrick, and there's nothing in his record to give us any indication as to why he did it."

"I'll tell you why," said the warlord of Saigon. "He's hiding something. He's protecting this Converse."

"Why would a chief legal officer in the Navy protect a civilian under these circumstances? There's no connection."

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Furthermore, why would he exercise a Four Zero condition? It only calls attention to his action."

"It also clamps a lid down on that flag." Delavane paused, then continued before the admiral could interrupt. "This Fitzpatrick," he said. "You've checked the master list?"

"He's not one of us."

"Has he ever been considered? Or approached?"

"I haven't had time to find out." There was the sound of a buzzer, not part of the line over which the two men spoke. Scanlon could be heard punching a button, his voice clear, officious. "Yes?" Silence followed, and seconds later the admiral returned to Palo Alto. "It's Hickman again."

"Maybe he has something for us. Call me back."

"Hickman wouldn't give us anything if he had the slightest idea we existed," said Scanlon. In a few weeks, he'll be one of the first to go. If it were up to me he'd be shot."

"~Call me back," said George Marcus Delavane, looking at the map of the new Aquitaine on the wall.

Chaim Abrahms sat at the kitchen table in his small stone Mediterranean villa in Tzahala, a suburb of Tel Aviv favored by the retired military and those with sufficient income or influence to live there. The windows were open and the breezes from the garden stirred the oppressive summer's night air. There was air conditioning in two other rooms and ceiling fans in three more, but Chaim liked the kitchen. In the old days he and his men would sit in primitive kitchens and plan raids; in the Negev, ammunition was often passed about while desert chicken boiled on a wood stove. The kitchen was the soul of the house. It gave warmth and sustenance to the body, clearing the mind for tactics as long as the women

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left after performing their chores and did not interrupt the men with their incessant trivialities. His wife was asleep upstairs; so be it. He had little to say to her anymore, or she to him; she could not help him now. And if she could, she would not. They had lost a son in Lebanon, her son she said, a teacher, a scholar, not a soldier, not a killer by choice. Too many sons were lost on both sides, she said. Old men, she said, old men infected the young with their hatreds and used Biblical legends to justify death in the pursuit of questionable real estate. Death, she cried. Death before talk that might avert it! She had forgotten the early days; too many forgot too quickly. Chaim Abrahms did not forget, nor would he ever.

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And his sense of smell was as acute as ever. This lawyer, this Converse, this talk! It was all too clever, it had the stench of cold, analytical minds, not the heat of believers. The Mossad specialist was the best, but even the Mossad made mistakes. The specialist looked for a motive, as if one could dissect the human brain and say this action caused that reaction, this punishment that commitment to vengeance. Too damned clever! A believer was fueled by the heat of his convictions. They were his only motive, and they did not call for clever manipulations.

Chaim knew he was a plainspoken man, a direct man, but it was not because he was unintelligent or lacked subtle perceptions; his prowess on the battlefield proved otherwise. He was direct because he knew what he wanted, and it was a waste of time to pretend and be clever. In all the years he had lived with his convictions he had never met a fellow believer who allowed himself to waste time.

This Converse knew enough to reach Bertholdier in Paris. He showed how much more he knew when he mentioned Leifhelm in Bonn and specifically named the cities of Tel Aviv and Johannesburg. What more did he have to prove? Why should he prove it if his belief was there? Why did he not plead his case with his first connection and not waste time? . . . No, this lawyer, this Converse, was from somewhere else. The Mossad specialist said the motive was there for affiliation. He was wrong. The red-hot heat of the believer was not there. Only cleverness, only talk.

And the specialist had not dismissed Chaim's sense of smell. As well he should not, as the two sabres had fought together for years, as often as not against the Europeans and their conniving ways those immigrants who held up the Old Testament as if they had written it, calling the true inhabitants of Israel uneducated ruffians or clowns. The Mossad specialist respected his sabre brother, it was in his look, that respect. No one could dismiss the instincts of Chaim Abrahms son of Abraham, archangel of darkness to the enemies of Abraham's

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children. Thank God his wife was asleep.

It was time to call Palo Alto.

My general, my friend."

Shalom, Chaim," said the warlord of Saigon. Are you on your way to Bonn?"

I'm leaving in the morning we're leaving. Van Headmer is in the air now. He'll arrive at Ben Gurion at

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eight-thirty, and together we'll take the ten o'clock flight to Frankfurt, where Leifhelm's pilot will meet us with the Cessna."

"Good. You can talk. '

"We must talk now," said the Israeli. "What more have you learned about this Converse?"

"He becomes more of an enigma, Chaim."

"I smell a fraud."

"So do I, but perhaps not the fraud I thought. You know what my assessment was. I thought he was no more than an infantry point, someone being used by more knowledgeable men Lucas Anstett among them to learn far more than they knew or heard rumors about. I don't discount a degree of minor leaks; they're to be anticipated and managed, scoffed at as paranoia."

"Get to the point, Marcus," said the impatient Abrahms who always called Delavane by his middle name. He considered it a Hebrew name, in spite of the fact that Delavane's father had insisted on it for his first son in honor of the Roman Caesar the philosopher Marcus Aurelius, a proselytiser of moderation.

' Three things happened today," continued the former general in Palo Alto. "The first infuriated me because I could not understand it, and frankly disturbed me because it portended a far greater penetration than I thought possible from a sector I thought impossible."

"What was it?" the Israeli broke in.

"A firm prohibition was placed on getting part of Converse's service record."

"Yes!" cried Abrahms, in his voice the sound of Triumph.

"What?"

"Go on, Marcus! I'll tell you when you're finished. What was the second calamity?"

"Not a calamity, Chaim. An explanation so blatantly offered it can't be turned aside. Leifhelm called me and said Converse himself brought up Anstett's death, claiming to be relieved, but saying little else except that Anstett was his enemy that was the word he used."

"So instructed!" Abrahm's voice reverberated around the kitchen. "What was the third gift, my general?"

"The most bewildering as well as enlightening and, Chaim, do not shout into the phone. You are not at one of your stadium rallies or provoking the Knesset."

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"I am in the field, Marcus. Right now! Please continue my friend."

"The man who clamped the lid down on Converse's military record is a naval officer who was the brother-in-law of Preston Halliday."

"Geneva! Yes!"

"Stop that!"

"My apologies, my dear friend. It's just all so perfect!"

"Whatever you have in mind," said Delavane 'may be negated by the man's reason. This naval officer, this brother-in-law, believes Converse engineered Halliday's murder."

"Of course! Perfect!"

"You will keep your voice down!" The cry of the cat on a frozen lake was heard.

"Again my deepest and most sincere apologies, my general. Was that all this naval officer said?"

"No, he made it clear to the commander of his base in San Diego that Halliday had come to him and told him he was meeting a man in Geneva he believed was involved with illegal exports to illegal destinations. An attorney for profiteers in armaments. He intended to confront this man, this international lawyer named Converse, and threaten to expose him. What do we have?"

"A fraud!"

"But on whose side, sabre? The volume of your voice doesn't convince me."

"Be convinced! I'm right. This Converse is the

desert scorpions"

"What does that mean?"

"Don't you see? The Mossad seesI"

"The Mossad?"

"Yes! I talked with our specialist and he senses what I smell he admits the possibility! I grant you, my general, my honored warrior, that he has information that led him to think this Converse might be genuine, that he wanted truly to be with us, but when I said I smelled bad meat, he granted one other, exceptional possibility. Converse may or may not be programmed, but he could be an agent for his government!"

"A provocateur?"

"Who knows, Marcus? But the pattern is so perfect. First, a prohibition is placed on his military record it will tell us something, we know that. Then he responds in the negative about the death of an enemy not his, but ours, and claims

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he was his enemy too so simple, so instructable. Finally, it is insinuated that this Converse was the killer in Geneva so orderly, so precisely to his advantage. We are dealing with very analytical minds that watch every move in the chess game, and match every pawn with a king."

"Yet everything you say can be reversed. He could be " "He can't be!" cried Abrahams.

"Why, Chaim? Tell me why?"

"There is no heat, noire in him! It is not the way of a believer! We are not clever, we are adamant!"

George Marcus Delavane said nothing for several moments, and the Israeli knew better than to speak. He waited until the quiet cold voice came back on the line. "Have your meeting tomorrow, General. Listen to him and be courteous; play the game he plays. But he must not leave that house until I give the order. He may never leave it."

"Shalom, my friend."

"Shalom, Chaim."

14

Valerie approached the glass doors of her studio identical with the doors of her balcony upstairs and looked out at the calm, sun-washed waters of Cape Ann. She thought briefly of the boat that had dropped anchor so frighteningly in front of her house several nights ago. It had not been back;

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whatever had happened was past, leaving questions
but no answers. If she closed her eyes she could still
see the figure of a man crawling up out of the cabin
light, and the glow of the cigarette, and she still
wondered what that man was doing, what he was
thinking. Then she remembered the sight of the two
men in the early light, framed by the dark rims of her
binoculars staring back at her with far more pow-
erful lenses. Were they novices finding a safe harbor?
Amateurs navigating the dark waters of a coastline at
night? Questions, no answers.

Whatever, it was past. A brief, disturbing interlude
that

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gave rise to black imaginings demons in search of
logic, as Joel would say.

She tossed her long, dark hair aside and
returned to her easel, picking up a brush and
putting the final dabs of burnt umber beneath the
shadowed sand dunes of wild grass. She stepped
back, studied her work, and swore to herself for the
fifth time that the oil painting was finished. It was
another seascape; she never tired of them, and
fortunately she was beginning to get a fair share of
the market. Of course there were those painters in
the Boston-Boothbay axis who claimed she had
virtually cornered the market, but that was rubbish.
Indeed her prices had risen satisfactorily as a result
of the critical approval accorded her two showings
at the Copley Galleries, but the truth was that she
could hardly afford to live where she lived and the
way she lived without at least a part of Joel's check
every month.

Then again, not too many artists had a house on
the beach with an attached twenty-by-thirty-foot
studio enclosed by full-length glass doors and with
a ceiling that was literally one entire skylight. The
rest of the house, the original house, on the
northern border of Cape Ann was more
rambling-quaint than functional. The initial
architecture was early-coastconfusion, with lots of
heavy bleached wood and curliques, a balustraded
second-story balcony, and outsized bay windows in
the front room that were charming to look at and
look out but leaked fiercely when the winter winds
came off the ocean. No amount of putty or sashing
compound seemed to work; nature was extracting a
price for observing her beauty.

Still, it was Val's dream house, the one she had
promised herself years ago she would someday be
able to afford. She had come back from the Ecole
des Beaux Arts in Paris prepared to assault New
York's art world via the Greenwich vil-
lage-Woodstock route only to have stark reality alter
her plans. The family circumstances had always been
sufficiently healthy for her to live comfortably, albeit
not lavishly, throughout three years in college and

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two more in Paris. Her father was a passably good if excessively enthusiastic amateur painter who always complained that he had not taken the risks and gone totally into the fine arts rather than architecture. As a result, he supported his only child both morally and financially, in a very real sense living through her progress and devoted to her determination. And her mother slightly mad, always loving, always supportive in anything and every

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thing would take terrible photographs of Val's crudest work and send the pictures back to her sister and cousins in Germany, writing outrageous lies that spoke of museums and galleries and insane commissions.

"The crazy Berliner in," her father would say fondly in his heavy Gallic accent. "You should have seen her during the war. She frightened us all to death! We half expected she would return to headquarters some night with a drunken Goebbels or a doped-up Goring in tow, then tell us if we wanted Hitler to give her the word!"

Her father had been the Free French liaison between the Allies and the German underground in Berlin. A rather stiff Parisian autocrat who happened to speak German had been assigned to the cell in the Charlottenburg, which coordinated all the activities of Berlin's underground. He frequently said that he had more trouble with the wild Fraulein with the impetuous ideas than he had avoiding the Nazis. Nevertheless they married each other two months after the armistice. In Berlin. Where neither his family would talk to hers, nor hers to his. "We had two small orchestras," her mother would say. "One played pure, beautiful Viennese Schnitzel, the other some white cream sauce with deer droppings."

Whether family animosities had anything to do with it neither ever said, but the Parisian and the Berliner in immigrated to St. Louis, Missouri, in the United States of America, where the Berliner in had distant relations.

The stark reality. Nine years ago, after she had settled in New York from Paris, a frightened, tearful father had flown in to see her and had told Val a terrible truth. His beloved crazy Berliner in had been ill for years; it was cancer and it was about to kill her. In desperation, he had spent nearly all the money he had, including unpaid second and third mortgages on the rambling house in Bellefontaine, to stem the disease. Among the profiteers were clinics in Mexico; there was nothing else he could say. He could only weep, and his losses had nothing to do with his tears. And she could only hold her father and ask him why he had not told her before.

"It was not your battle, ma chérie. It was ours.

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Since Berlin, it was always we two. We fought then together; we fight now as always as one."

Her mother died six days later, and six months after that her father lit a Gauloise on the screened-in porch and mercifully fell asleep, not to wake up. Valerie could not cry. It was

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a shock but not a tragedy. Wherever he was he wanted to be there.

So Valerie Charpentier looked for a job, a paying job that did not rely on the sales of an unknown artist. What astonished her was not that employment was so easy to find, but that it had very little to do with the thick portfolio of sketches and line drawings she presented. The second advertising agency she applied to seemed more interested in the fact that she spoke both German and French fluently. It was the time of corporate takeovers, of multinational alliances where profits could be made on both sides of the Atlantic by the same single entities. Valerie Charpentier, artist-in-residence inside, became a company hack on the outside. Someone who could draw and sketch rapidly and make presentations and speak the languages and she hated it. Still, it was a remarkable living for a woman who had anticipated a period of years before her name on a canvas would mean something.

Then a man came into her life who made whatever affairs she had had totally forgettable. A nice man, a decent man even an exciting man who had his own problems but did not talk about them, would not talk about them, and that should have given her a clue. Joel, her Joel, effusive one moment, withdrawn the next, but always with that shield, that facade of quick humor which was often as biting as it was amusing. For a while they had been good for each other. Both were ambitious for entirely different reasons she for the independence that came with recognition, he for the wasted years he could never reclaim and each acted as a buffer when the other faced disappointment or delay. But it all began to fall apart. The reasons were painfully clear to her but not to him. He became mesmerized by his own progress by his own determination, to the exclusion of everything else, starting with her. He never raised his voice or made demands, but the words were ice and the demands were increasingly there. If there was a specific point when she recognized the downhill slide, it was a Friday night in November. The agency had wanted her to fly to West Berlin; a Telefunken account required some fast personal service and she was elected to calm the churning waters. She had been packing when Joel came home from work. He had walked into the bedroom of their apartment and asked her what she was doing, where she was going. When she told him, he had

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said, ' You can't. We're expected at Brooks' house
in Larchmont tomorrow night. Tal

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hot and Simon'll be there too. I m sure they'll talk
international. You've got to be there."

She had looked at him, at the quiet desperation
in his eyes. She did not go to Germany. It was the
turning point; the downhill race had begun, and
within a brief few months she knew it was quickening
to its finish. She quit the agency, giving up authority
for the dog days of free-lancing, hoping the extra
time she had to devote to him might help. It did not;
he seemed to resent any overt act of sacrifice, no
matter how hard she tried to conceal it. His periods
of withdrawal multiplied, and in a way she felt sorry
for him. His furies were driving him and it was
obvious that he disliked what was happening; he
disliked what he was but could not help himself. He
was on his way to a burnout and she could not help
him, either.

If there had been another woman, she could have
fought, staking out her claim and fiercely insisting on
the right to compete, but there was no one else, only
himself and his compulsions. Finally, she realized she
could not penetrate his shield; he had nothing left
for anyone else emotionally. That was what she had
hurled at him: 'Emotional burn-out!" He had agreed
in that quiet, kind voice and the next day he was
gone.

So she took him. Four years, she demanded, the
exact amount of time he had taken from her. Those
four years of heady generosity were about to come to
an end, Val reflected, as she cleaned her brushes and
scraped the palette. In January they were over, the
last check, as always, posted by the fifteenth. Five
weeks ago, during lunch at the Ritz in Boston, Joel
had offered to continue the payments. He claimed he
was used to them and was making more in salary and
bonuses than he could spend soberly. The money was
no hardship, and besides it gave him a certain stature
among his peers and was a marvelous ploy to avoid
prolonged entanglements. She had declined,
borrowing words from her father or more likely her
mother, saying that things were far better than they
were. He had smiled that half-sad yet still infectious
smile and said, "If they turn out otherwise, I m here."

Coddamn him!

Poor Joel. Sad Joel. He was a good man caught
in the vortex of his own conflicts. And Val had gone
as far as she could go to go further was to deny her
own identity. She would not do that; she had not
done it.

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She placed her brushes in the tray and walked
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to the glass doors that looked over the dunes and
the ocean. He was out there, far away, still
somewhere in Europe. Valerie wondered if he
had given a thought to the day. It was the
anniversary of their marriage.

To summarize, Chaim Abrahms was molded in the
stress and chaos of fighting for daily survival. They
were years of never-ending violent skirmishes, of
outthinking and outliving enemies bent on killing
not only whole sabre settlements but the desert Jews'
aspirations for a homeland as well as political free-
dom and religious expression. It is not difficult to
understand where Abrahms came from and why he
is what he is, but it is frightening to think about
where he is going. He is a fanatic with no sense of
balance or compromise where other peoples with
identical aspirations are concerned. If a man has a
different stripe, whether of the same species or not,
he is the enemy. Armed force takes precedence
over negotiations in all matters, and even those in
Israel who plead for more moderate stands based
on totally secure borders are branded as traitors.
Abrahms is an imperialist who sees an
ever-expanding Israel as the ruling kingdom of the
entire Middle East. An appropriate ending to this
report is a comment he made after the well-known
statement issued by the Prime Minister during the
Lebanon invasion: "We covet not one inch of
Lebanon." Abrahms' reply in the field to his
troops the majority by no means sympathetic was
the following.

"Certainly not an inch! The whole damned
country! Then Gaza, the Golan, and the West Bank!
And why not Jordan, then Syria and Iraq! We have
the means and we have the will! We are the mighty
children of Abraham!"

He is Delavane's key in the volatile Middle East.

It was nearly noon, the overhead sun beating
down on the small balcony beyond the French
doors. The late-breakfast remnants had been
cleared away by room service; only a silver pot
remained on the hunt table. They had been
reading for hours since the first coffee was
brought to

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the suite at six-thirty. Converse put down the dossier,
and reached for his cigarettes on the table by the
armchair. It is not cliff cult to understand where
Abrahms came from . . . but it is frightening to think
about where he is going. Joel looked over at Connal
Fitzpatrick, who was seated on the couch, leaning
forward over the coffee table and reading a single
page while making notes on the telephone message
pad; the Bertholdier and LeifLelm dossiers were in
two neat piles on his left. The Navy lawyer had said
practically the same words to him, thought Converse,
lighting a cigarette. I'm beginning to see where you're

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coming from.... The inherent question put to Joel's legal mind was simple: where was he himself going? He hoped to hell he knew. Was he an inept gladiator marching into a Roman arena facing far stronger, better-armed and superior talent? Or were the demons from his own past turning him into his own sacrifice, leading him into the arena's hot sand where angry, half-starved cats waited, ready to pounce and tear him apart? So many questions, so many variables he was incapable of addressing. He only knew he could not turn back.

Fitzpatrick looked up. "What's the matter?" he asked, obviously aware that Converse was staring in his direction. "You worried about the admiral?"

"Who?"

"Hickman, San Diego."

"Among other things. In the clear light of day, you're sure he bought the extension?"

"No guarantees, but I told you he said he'll call me if any emergency heat came down. I'm damn sure he won't do anything before consulting me. If he tries to reach me, Meagen knows what to do and I'll lean harder. If need be, I'll claim point of personal privilege and demand a meeting with those unnamed people in the Fifth District, maybe go so far as to imply they could be part of Geneva. That'd be a full circle. We could end up with a standoff the release of that flag only with a full-scale investigation of the circumstances. Irony and standoff."

"You won't have a standoff if he's with them. He'll override you."

"If he was with them, he wouldn't have told Remington he was going to call me. He wouldn't have said anything; he'd have waited the extra day and let it go. I know him. He wasn't just nonplussed, he was mad. He stands by his people and he

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doesn't like outside pressures, especially Navy pressures. We're on hold, and as long as it's hold, the flag's in place. I told you, he's a lot angrier with Norfolk than with me. They won't even give him a reason; they claim they can't."

Converse nodded. "All right," he said. "Call it a case of nerves on my part. I just finished the Abrahms dossier. That maniac could blow up the whole Middle East all by himself and drag the rest of us in with him.... What did you think of Leifhelm and Bertholdier?"

"As far as the information goes, they're everything you said and then some. They're more than just influential ex-generals with fistfuls of

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money, they're powerful rallying symbols for what a lot of people think are justifiable extremes. That's as far as the information goes but the operative word for me is the information itself. Where did it come from?"

"That's a step back. It's there."

"It sure is, but how? You say Beale gave it to you, that Press used the phrase 'we' 'the ones we're after,' 'the tools we can give you,' 'the connections as we think they are.' "

"And we went over this," insisted Joel. "The man in San Francisco, the one he went to who provided the five hundred thousand and told him to build cases against these people legally, and together they'd turn them into plain and simple profiteers. It's the ultimate ridicule for superpatriots. It's sound reasoning, counselor, and that's the we."

"Press and this unknown man in San Francisco?"

"Yes."

"And they could pick up a phone and hire someone to put together these?" Fitzpatrick gestured at the two dossiers on his left.

"Why not? This is in the age of the computer. Nobody today lives on an unmapped island or in an undiscovered cave."

"These," said Connal, "are not computer printouts. They're well-researched, detailed, in-depth dossiers that take in the importance of political nuances and personal idiosyncrasies."

"You have a way with words, sailor. Yes, they are. A man who can forward half a million dollars to the right bank on an Aegean island can hire just about anyone he likes."

"He can't hire these."

"What does that mean?"

"Let me take a real step back," said the Navy lawyer, get

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tiny to his feet and reaching down for the single page he had been reading. "I won't reiterate the details of my relationship with Press because right now it hurts a little to think about it." Fitzpatrick paused, seeing the look in Converse's eyes that rejected this kind of sentimentality in their discussion. "Don't mistake me," he continued. "It's not his death, not the funeral; it's the other way around. It's not the Press Halliday I knew. You see, I don't think he told us the truth, either you or me."

"Then you know something I don't know," said Converse quietly.

"I know there's no man in San Francisco that even vaguely fits the description of the image he gave you. I've lived there all my life, including Berkeley and Stanford, just like Press. I knew everyone he knew, especially the wealthiest and the more exotic ones; we never held back on those with each other. I was legal worlds away, and he always filled me in if new ones came along. It was part of the fun for him."

"That's tenuous, counselor. I'm sure he kept certain associations to himself."

"Not those kinds," said Connal. "It wouldn't be like him. Not with me."

"Well, I "

"Now let me step forward," interrupted Fitzpatrick. "These dossiers I haven't seen them before, but I've seen hundreds like them, maybe a couple of thousand on their way to becoming full-fledged versions of them."

Joel sat up. "Please explain that, Commander."

"You just hit it, Lieutenant. The rank says it."

"Says what?"

"Those dossiers are the reworked, finished products of intelligence probes utilizing heavy shots of military data. They've been bounced around the community, each branch contributing its input from straight biographical data to past surveillances to psychiatric evaluation and put together by teams of specialists. Those were taken from way down in the government vaults and rewritten with current additions and conclusions, then shaped to appear as the work of an outside nongovernment authority. But they're not. They've got Classified, Top Secret, and Eyes Only written all over them."

Converse leaned forward. "That could be a subjective judgment based on limited familiarity. I've seen some very detailed, very in-depth reports put together by high-priced firms specializing in that sort of thing."

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"Describing precise military incidents during the time of war? Pinpointing bombing raids and specifying regiments and battalions and the current strategies employed? Detailing through interviews the internal conflicts of ranking enemy officers and the tactical reasons for shifting military personnel into civilian positions after the cessation of hostilities? No firm would have access to those materials."

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"They could be researched," said Joel, suddenly not convinced himself.

"Well, these couldn't," Connal broke in, holding up the page of typewritten names, his thumb on the lower two columns listing the "decision makers" from the Pentagon and the State Department. "Maybe five or six three from each side at maximum but not the rest. These are people above the ones I've dealt with, men who do their jobs under a variety of titles so they can't be reached bribed, blackmailed or threatened. When you said you had names, I assumed I'd recognize most of them, or at least half of them. I don't. I only know the departmental execs, upper-echelon personnel who have to go even higher, who obviously report to these people. Press couldn't have gotten these names himself or through others on the outside. He wouldn't know where to look and they wouldn't know where to look I wouldn't know.'

Converse rose. "Are you sure you know what you're talking about?"

"Yes. Someone probably more than one- deep in the Washington cellars provided these names just as he or they provided the material for those dossiers."

"Do you know what you're saying?"

Connal stood still and nodded. "It's not easy for me to say," he began grimly. "Press lied to us. He lied to you by what he said, and to me by what he didn't say. You're tied to a string and it goes right back to Washington. And I wasn't to know anything about it.'

"The puppet's in place.... " Joel spoke so softly he could barely be heard as he walked aimlessly across the room toward the bright sunlight streaming through the balcony doors.

"What?' asked Fitzpatrick.

"Nothing, just a phrase that kept running through my head when I heard about Anstett." Converse turned. "But if there's a string, why have they hidden it? why did Avery hide it? For what purpose?"

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The Navy lawyer remained motionless, his face without expression. ' I don't think I have to answer that. You answered it yourself yesterday afternoon when we were talking about me and don't kid yourself, Lieutenant, I knew exactly what you were saying. 'I'll give you a name now and then that may open a door . . . but that's all. Those were your words. Freely translated, you were telling yourself that the sailor you took on board might stumble on

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to something, but in case he was taken by the wrong people, they couldn't beat out of him what he didn't know."

Joel accepted the rebuke, not merely because it was justified, but because it made clear a larger truth, one he had not understood on Mykonos. Beale had told him that among those raising questions in Washington were military men who for one reason or another had not pursued their inquiries; they had kept silent. They had kept silent where they might be overheard, perhaps, but they had not totally kept their silence. They had talked in quiet voices until another quiet voice from San Francisco a man who knew whom to reach courtesy of a brother-in-law in San Diego made contact. They had talked together, and out of their secret conversations had come a plan. They needed an infiltrator, a man with the expertise who had a loathing they could fuel and, once fired, send out into the labyrinth.

The realisation was a shock, but oddly enough, Joel could not fault the strategy. He did not even fault the silence that remained after Preston Halliday's murder; loud accusing voices would have rendered that death meaningless. Instead, they had stayed quiet, knowing that their puppet had the tools to make his way through the maze of illegalities and do the job they could not do themselves. He understood that, too. But there was one thing Converse could not accept, and that was his own expendability as the puppet. He had tolerated being left unprotected under the conditions outlined by Avery Fowler-Preston Halliday, not under these. If he was on a string, he wanted the puppeteers to know he knew it. He also wanted the name of someone in Bonn he could call, someone who was a part of them. The old rules did not apply any longer, a new dimension had been added.

In four hours he would be driven through the iron gates of Erich Leifhelm's estate; he wanted someone on the outside, a man Fitzpatrick could reach if he did not come out by midnight. The demons were pressing hard, thought Joel. Still, he

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could not turn back. He was so close to trapping the warlord of Saigon, so close to making up for so much that had warped his life in ways no one would ever understand.... No, not no one, he reflected. One person did, and she had said she could not help him any longer. Nor had it been fair any longer to seek her help.

"What's your decision?" said Connal.

"Decision?" asked Joel, startled.

"You don't have to go this afternoon. Throw it all back! This belongs Stateside with the FBI in conjunction with the Central Intelligence Agency

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overseas. I'm appalled they didn't take that route."

Converse breathed the start of a reply, then stopped. It had to be clear, not only to Fitzpatrick but to himself. He thought he understood. He had seen the look of profound panic in Avery Fowler's eyes Preston Halliday's eyes and he had heard the cry in his voice. The lies were his strategy, but the look and the cry were his innermost feelings.

"Has it occurred to you, Commander, that they can't take that route? That, perhaps, we're not talking about men who can pick up a phone as you said before and put those wheels in motion? Or if they tried, they'd have their heads cut off, perhaps literally, with an official and a bullet in the back of their skulls? Let me add that I don't think they're afraid for themselves any more than I believe they chose the best man for the job, but I do think they came to a persuasive conclusion. They couldn't work from the inside because they didn't know whom they could trust."

"Christ, you're a cold son of a bitch."

"Ice, Commander. We're dealing with a paranoid fantasy called Aquitaine, and it's controlled by proven, committed, highly intelligent and resourceful men, who if they achieve what they've set out to do will appear as the voices of strength and reason in a world gone mad. They'll control that world our world because all other options will pale beside their stability. Stability, counselor, as opposed to chaos. What would you choose if you were an everyday nine-to-fiver with a wife and kids, and you could never be sure when you went home at night whether or not your house had been broken into, your wife raped, your kids strangled? You'd opt for tanks in the street."

"With justification," said the Navy lawyer, the two words spiraling quietly off into the air of the sunlit room.

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"Believe that, sailor. They're banking on it, and that's just what they're planning to do on an international scale. It's only a few days or a few weeks away whatever it is, wherever it is. If I can just get an inkling . . ." Converse turned and started for the door of his bedroom.

"Where are you going?" asked Connal.

"Beale's telephone number on Mykonos; it's in my briefcase. He's my only contact and I want to talk to him. I want him to know the puppet has just been granted some unexpected free will."

Three minutes later Joel stood at the table, the phone to his ear as the Greek operator in Athens routed his call to the island of Mykonos. Fitzpatrick

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sat on the couch, Chaim Abrahms' dossier in front of
him on the coffee table, his eyes on Converse.

"Are you getting through all right?" asked the
Navy lawyer.

"It's ringing now." The erratic, stabbing signals
kept repeating four, five, six times. On the seventh
the telephone in the Aegean was picked up.

"Herete?"

"Dr. Beale, please. Dr. Edward Beale."

"Tee tha thelete?"

"Beale. The owner of the house. Get him for me
please!" Joel turned to Fitzpatrick. "Do you speak
Greek?"

"No, but I've been thinking about taking it up."

"You do that." Converse listened again to the
male voice in Mykonos. Greek phrases were spoken
rapidly, none comprehensible. "Thank you!
Good-bye." Joel tapped the telephone bar several
times, hoping the overseas line was still open and the
English-speaking Greek operator was still there.
"Operator? Is this the operator in Athens? . . .
Good! I want to call another number on Mykonos,
the same billing in Bonn." Converse reached down
on the table for the instructions Preston Halliday had
given him in Geneva. "It's the Bank of Rhodes. The
number is . . ."

Moments later the waterfront banker, Kostas
Laskaris, was on the line. "Herete."

"Mr. Laskaris, this is Joel Converse. Do you
remember me?"

"Of course.... Mr. Converse?" The banker
sounded distant, somehow strange, as if wary or
bewildered.

"I've been trying to call Dr. Beale at the number you

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gave me, but all I get is a man who can't speak
English. I wondered if you could tell me where
Beale is."

A quiet expulsion of breath could be heard over
the phone. "I wondered," said Laskaris quietly. "The
man you reached was a police officer, Mr. Converse.
I had him placed there myself. A scholar has many
valuable things."

"Why? What do you mean?"

"Shortly after sunrise this morning Dr. Beale
took his boat out of the harbor, accompanied by

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another man. Several fishermen saw them. Two hours ago Dr. Beale's boat was found crashed on the rocks beyond the Stephanos. There was no one on board."

I killed him. with a scaling knife dropping his body over a cluster of sharks beyond the shoals of the Stephanos.

Joel hung up the phone. Halliday, Anstett, Beale, all of them gone all his contacts dead. He was a puppet on the loose, his strings gone haywire, leading only to shadows.

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Erich Leifhelm's warlike skin paled further as his eyes narrowed and his starched white lips parted. Then blood rushed to his head as he sat forward at the desk in his library and spoke into the telephone. "What was that name again, London?"

"Admiral Hickman. He's the "

"No," interrupted the German sharply. "The other one! The officer who has refused to release the information."

"Fitzpatrick, an Irish name. He's the ranking legal officer at the naval base in San Diego."

"A Lieutenant Commander Fitzpatrick?"

"Yes, how did you know?"

"Unglaublich! Diese Stum per!"

"Warum?" asked the Englishman. "In what sense?"

"He may be what you say he is in San Diego, Englander, but he is not in San Diego! He's here in Bonn!"

"Are you mad? No, of course, you're not. Are you certain ?"

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"He's with Converse! I spoke to him myself. The two are registered in his name at Das Rektorat! He is how we found Converse!"

'There was no attempt to conceal the name?"

"On the contrary, he used his papers to gain entrance!"

"How bloody third-rate," said London, bewildered. "Or how downright sure of himself," added the Britisher, his tone changing. "A signal? No one dares touch him?"

"Unsinn! It's not so."

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"Why not?"

"He spoke to Peregrine, the ambassador. Our man was there. Peregrine wanted to take him, wanted him brought forcibly to the embassy. There were complications; he got away."

"Our man wasn't very good, then."

"An obstruction. Some Schauspieler an actor. Peregrine will not discuss the incident. He says nothing."

"Which means no one will touch his naval officer from California," concluded London. "There's a very good reason."

"What is it?"

"He's the brother-in-law of Preston Halliday."

"Geneva! Mein Gott, they are into us!"

"Someone is, but not anyone with a great deal of information. I agreed with Palo Alto, who also agrees with our specialist in the Mossad with Abrahms, as well."

"The Jew? What does the Jew say? What does he say?"

"He claims this Converse is an agent flying blind out of Washington."

"What more do you need?"

"He is not to leave your house. Instructions will follow."

Stunned, Undersecretary of State Brewster Tolland hung up the phone, sank back in his chair, then shot forward and pressed the appropriate buttons on his console.

"Chesapeake," said the female voice. "Code, please?"

"Six thousand," said Tolland. "May I speak with Consular Operations, Station Eight, please?"

"Station Eight requires "

"Plantagenet," interrupted the Undersecretary.

"Right away, sir."

"What is it, Six thousand?"

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'Cut the horseshit, Harry, this is Brew. What have you got running in Bonn we don't know about?"

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"Off the top of my head, nothing."

"How far off the top is that?"

"No, it's straight. You're current on everything we're doing. There was an FRG review yesterday morning, and I'd remember if there was anything that excluded you."

"You might remember, but if I'm excluded I'm out."

"That's right, and I'd tell you as much if only to keep you out, you know that. What's your problem?"

"I just got off the scrambler with a very angry ambassador, who may just call a very old friend at Sixteen Hundred."

"Peregrine? What's his problem?"

"If it's not you, then someone's playing Cons Op. It's supposedly a covert investigation of the embassy his embassy somehow connected with the Navy Department."

"The Navy? That's crazy I mean dumb crazy! Bonn's a port?"

"Actually, I suppose it is."

"I never heard of the Bismarek or the Graf Spee steaming around the Rhine. No way, Brew. We don't have anything like that and we wouldn't have. Do you have any names?"

"Yes, one," replied Tolland, looking down at a pad with hastily scribbled notes on it. "An attorney named Joel Converse. Who is he, Harry?"

"For Christ's sake, I never heard of him. What's the naval angle?"

"Someone who claims to be the chief legal officer of a major Navy base with the rank of lieutenant commander."

"Claims to be?"

"Well, before that he passed himself off as a military attache working at the embassy."

"Somewhere the inmates broke out of a home."

"This isn't funny, Harry. Peregrine's no fool. He may be a vanity appointment, but he's damned good and he's damned smart. He says these people aren't only real but may know something he doesn't."

"What does he base that on?"

"First, the opinion of a man who's met this

Converse "

"Who?" interrupted Harry of Station Eight

"He won't say, just that he trusts him, trusts his judgment. This person with no name says Converse is a highly qualified, very troubled man, not a black hat."

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"A what?"

"That was the term Peregrine used. Obviously someone who's okay. "

"What else?"

"What Peregrine calls isolated odd behavior in his personnel ranks. He wouldn't elaborate; he says he'll discuss it with the Secretary or Sixteen Hundred if I can't satisfy him. He wants answers fast, and we don't want to rock the boat over there."

"I'll try to help," said Harry. "Maybe it's something from Langley or Arlington the bastards! I can run a check on the Navy's chief legals in an hour, and I'm sure the ABA can tell us who Converse is if he is. At least narrow him down if there's more than one."

"Get back to me. I haven't got much time and we don't want the White House raising its voice."

"The last thing ever," agreed the director of Consular Operations, the State Department's branch of foreign clandestine activities.

"Try that on for legal size!" shouted Rear Admiral Hickman, standing by the window, angrily addressing a rigid pale-faced David Remington. "And tell me with as few goddamned details as possible how it fits!"

"I find it impossible to believe, sir. I spoke with him yesterday at noon and then again last evening. He was in Sonoma!"

"So did I, Lieutenant. And whenever there was a scratching or an echo, what were the words? All that rain in the hills screwed up the telephone lines!"

"Those were the words, sir."

"He passed through Dusseldorf immigration two days ago! He's now in Bonn, Germany, with a man he swore to me had something to do with his brother-in-law's death. The same man he's protecting by putting a clamp on that flag. This Converse!"

"I don't know what to say, sir."

"Well, the State Department does and so do I.

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They're pushing through that vet-delay or whatever the hell you called it in your legalese."

"It's vetted material, sir. It simply means "

"I don't want to hear, Lieutenant," said Hickman, head

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ingback to his desk, adding under his breath. "Do you know how much you bastards cost me for the two divorces?"

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Never mind. I want that flag released. I brought Fitz on board here. I gave him his striper and the son of a bitch lied to me. He not only lied, he did it ten thousand miles away lying about where he was when he knew he shouldn't be there without my authorization. He knew it! . . . Do you have any objections, Lieutenant? Something you can put into a sentence or two that won't require my bringing in three other legals to translate?"

Lieutenant Remington, one of the finest lawyers in the United States Navy, knew when to put the engines in reverse. Legal ethics had been violated by misinformation, the course was clear. Aggressive retreat with full boilers or nuclear power, he supposed, although he did not really know. "I'll personally accelerate the vet-delay, Admiral. As the officer responsible for the secondary CLO statute, I'll make it clear that the direct order is now subject to immediate cancellation. No such order can or should originate under questionable circumstances. Legally "

"That will be all, Lieutenant," said the Admiral, cutting off his subordinate and sitting down.

"Yes, sir."

"No, that isn't all!" continued Hickman, abruptly leaning forward. "How's that transcript released, and how soon can you expect it?"

"With State's input it'll only be a matter of hours, sir, noon or shortly afterwards, I'd guess. A classified teletype will be sent to those requesting the Hag. However, since SAND PAC has only placed a restriction and not a request "

"Request it, Lieutenant. Bring it up to me the minute it gets here and don't leave the base until it does."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

The deep-red Mercedes limousine weaved down the curving road inside the massive gates of Erich Leifhelm's estate. The late-afternoon orange sun

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filtered diagonally through the tall trees, which not only bordered the road but were everywhere beyond on both sides. The drive might have been restful had it not been for a sight that made the whole scene grotesque: racing alongside the car were at least a half-dozen giant Dobermans, not one of them making a

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sound. There was something unearthly about their running furiously in silence, black eyes flashing up at the windows, their jaws wide with rapid, erratic teeth bared, but no sound emerging from their throats. Somehow Converse knew that if he stepped out of the car without the proper commands being issued, the powerful dogs would tear him to pieces.

The limousine pulled into a long circular drive that fronted wide brown marble steps leading to an arched doorway, the heavy panels covered with dark bas-relief a remnant of some ancient pillaged cathedral. Standing on the lower step was a man with a silver whistle raised to his lips. Again there was no sound a human could hear, but suddenly the animals abandoned the car and ran to him, flanking him, facing forward on their haunches, jaws slack, bodies pulsating.

"Please wait, sir," said the chauffeur as he climbed out and ran around to Joel's door. "If you will step out, please, and take two paces away from the car. Only two paces, sir." The chauffeur now held in his hand a black object with a rounded metal tube extending from the front of the instrument, not unlike a miniaturised electric charcoal starter.

"What's that?" asked Converse.

"Protection, sir. For you, sir. The dogs, sir. They are trained to sense heavy metal."

Joel stood there as the German moved the electronic detector over his clothes, including his shoes, his inner thighs and the back of his waist. "Do you people really think I'd come out here with a gun?"

"I do not think, sir. I do as I am told."

'How original," mumbled Converse as he watched the man on the marble step raise the silver whistle again to his lips. As one, the phalanx of Dobermans suddenly leaped forward. In panic, Joel grabbed the chauffeur, spinning the German in front of him. There was no resistance; the man simply turned his head and grinned as the dogs veered to the right and raced around the circular drive into the approach road cut out of the forest.

"Don't apologize, mein Herr, " said the chauffeur. "It happens often."

"I wasn't going to apologise," said Converse flatly as he released the man. "I was going to break your neck." The German moved away, and Joel remained motionless, stunned by

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his own words. He had not spoken words like that in over eighteen years.

"This way, sir." said the man on the steps, his accent oddly yet distinctly British.

Inside, the great hall was lined with medieval banners hanging down from an interior balcony. The hall led into an immense sitting room, the motif again medieval, made comfortable by soft leather chairs and couches, gaily fringed lamps and silver services everywhere on thin polished tables. The room was also made ugly by the profusion of protruding animals' heads on the upper walls; large cats, elephants and boar looked down in defiant anger. It was a field marshal's lair.

It was not, however, the furnishings that absorbed Converse's attention but the sight of the four men who stood beside four separate chairs facing him.

He knew Bertholdier and LeifLelm; they stood beside each other on the right. It was the two on the left he stared at. The medium-sized, stocky man with the fringe of close-cropped hair on a balding head and wearing a rumpled safari jacket, the ever-present boots below his khaki trousers, could be no one but Chaim Abrahms. His pouched, angry face with its slits of glaring eyes was the face of an avenger. The very tall man with the gaunt, aquiline features and the straight grey hair was General Jan van Headmer, the Slayer of Soweto. Joel had read the Van Headmer dossier quickly; fortunately it was the briefest, the final summary saying it all.

In essence, Van Headmer is a Cape Town aristocrat, an Afrikaner who has never really accepted the British, to say nothing of the tribal blacks. His convictions are rooted in a reality that for him is unshakable. His forebears carved out a savage land under savage conditions and at a great loss of life brutally taken by savages. His thinking is unalterably that of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. He will not accept the sociological and political in

roads made by the more educated Bantus because he will never consider them anything more than bush primitives. When he orders austere deprivations and mass executions, he thinks he is dealing only with subhuman animals. It is this thinking that led him to be jailed along with Prime Minister Verwoerd and the racist Vorster during World War II. He con

curred wholeheartedly with the Nazi concept of su

perior races. His close association with Chaim Abrahms is the single difference between him and the Nazis, and not a contradiction for him. The sabres carved a land out of a primitive Palestine; their history parallels his country's, and both men take pride in their strength and respective accomplishments. Van Headmer, incidentally, is one of the most charming men one could meet. On the surface he is cultured, extremely courteous and always willing to listen. Underneath, he is an unfeeling killer, and he is Delavane's key figure in South Africa with its vast resources.

"Mein Haus ist dein Haus," said LeifLelm, walking toward Joel, his hand outstretched.

Converse stepped forward to accept the German's hand. Their hands clasped. "That was an odd greeting outside for such a warm sentiment," said Joel, abruptly releasing Leifhelm's hand and turning to Bertholdier. "Good to see you again, General. My apologies for the unfortunate incident in Paris the other night. I don't mean to speak lightly of a man's life, but in those few split seconds I didn't think he had much regard for mine."

Joel's boldness had the desired effect. Bertholdier stared at him, momentarily unsure of what to say. And Converse was aware that the other three men were watching him intently without question struck by his audacity, in both manners and words.

"To be sure, monsieur," said the Frenchman, pointlessly but with composure. "As you know, the man disregarded his orders."

"Really? I was told he misunderstood them."

"It is the same!" The sharp, heavily accented voice came from behind.

Joel turned around. "Is it?" he asked coldly.

"In the field, yes," said Chaim Abrahms. "Either one is an error, and errors are paid for with lives. The man paid with his."

"May I introduce General Abrahms?" Leifhelm broke in touching Converse's elbow and leading him to the Israeli.

"General Abrahms, it's a privilege," said Joel with convincing sincerity as they shook hands. "Like everyone here,

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your rhetoric has been excessive at times."

The Israeli's face reddened as soft laughter filled the large room. Suddenly Van Headmer stepped forward, and Converse's eyes were drawn to the strong face, the brows frowning, muscles taut.

"You are addressing one of my closest associates, sir," he said; the rebuke was unmistakable. Then a thin smile creased his gaunt, chiseled face. "And I could not have said it better myself. A pleasure to know you, young man." The Afrikaner's hand was stretched toward Joel, who accepted it amid the subdued laughter.

"I am insulted!" cried Abrahms, his thick eyebrows raised, his head bobbing in mock despair. "By talkers I'm insulted! Frankly, Mr. Converse, they agree with you because none of them has had a woman in a quarter of a century. They may tell you otherwise others may tell you otherwise but believe me they hire whores to play cards with them or read stories into their old grey ears just to fool their friends!" The laughter grew louder, and the Israeli, now playing to an audience, went on, leaning forward and pretending to speak sotto voce to Joel. "But you see, I hire the whores to tell me the truth while I shut up them! They tell me these fancy talkers nod off by nine o'clock, whining for warm milk. With the Ovaltine, if it's possible!"

"My dear sabre," said Leifhelm, talking through his laughter, "you read your own romantic fiction too assiduously."

"You see what I mean, Converse?" asked Abrahms shrugging, palms extended. "You hear that? 'Assiduously. Now you know why the Germans lost the war. They forever spoke so dramatically of the Blitzkrieg and the Angriff: e, but actually they were talking assiduously about what to do next!"

"They should have given you a commission, Chaim," said Bertholdier, enjoying himself. "You could have changed your name, called Rommel and von Runstedt Jews and taken over both fronts."

"The High Command could have done worse," agreed the Israeli.

"I wonder, though," continued the Frenchman, "if you would have stopped there? Hitler was a fine orator, as you are

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a fine orator. Perhaps you would have claimed that he, too, was a Jew and moved into the chancellery."

"Oh, I have it on good authority that he was a Jew. But from a very bad family. Even we have them; of course, they're all from Europe."

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The laughter grew again and then rapidly began to subside. Joel took the cue. "Sometimes I speak too frankly, General," he said. "I should learn better, but, believe me, no insult was intended. I have nothing but admiration for your stated positions, your policies."

"And that's precisely what we shall discuss," said Erich Leifhelm, drawing everyone's attention. "Positions, policies, overall philosophy, if you will. We will stay as far away from specifics as we can, although a few will undoubtedly intrude. However, it is our approach to the larger abstractions that count. Come, Mr. Converse, have a chair. Let us begin our conference, the first of many, I trust."

Rear Admiral Hickman slowly put down the transcript on his desk, and looked aimlessly past his propped-up feet out the window at the ocean under a grey sky. He crossed his arms, lowered his head and frowned. He was as bewildered now as he had been when he first read the transcript, as convinced now as he was then that Remington's conclusions conclusion, really was off the mark. But then the legal officer was too young to have any real knowledge of the events as they had actually happened; no one who had not been there could really understand. Too many others did; it was the reason for the flag, but it made no sense to apply that reasoning to this Converse eighteen years later. It was exhuming a corpse that had died from a fever, whether the shell of a man lived on or not. It had to be something else.

Hickman looked at his watch, unfolded his arms and removed his feet from the edge of the table. It was three-ten in Norfolk; he reached for the telephone.

"Hello, Brian," said Rear Admiral Scanlon of the Fifth Naval District. "I want you to know how much we appreciate SAND PAC's help in this thing."

"SAND PAC's?" asked Hickman, bemused that no credit was given to the State Department.

"All right, Admiral, your help. I owe you one, old Hicky."

"Start paying by dropping that name."

"Hey, come on, don't you remember the hockey games?"

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You'd come racing up the ice and the whole cadet corps would shout: 'Here comes Hicky! Here comes Hicky!' "

"May I unblock my ears now?"

"I'm just trying to thank you, pal."

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"That's just it, I'm not sure for what? Have you read the transcript?"

"Naturally."

"What the hell's there?"

Well," answered Scanlon tentatively. "I read it pretty quickly. It's been an awful day and, frankly, I just passed it on. What do you think is there? Between you and me, I'd like to know, because I barely had time to skim through it."

What do I think is there? Absolutely nothing. Oh, sure, we kept Hags on stuff like that back then because the White House passed the order to put a lid on officially recorded criticism and we all went along. Also we were pretty sick and tired of it ourselves. But there's nothing in that transcript that hasn't been heard before, or that has any value for anyone but military historians a hundred years from now as a very small footnote."

Swell," said Scanlon, even more tentatively, "this Converse had some pretty harsh things to say about Command-Saigon."

About Mad Marcus? Christ, I said worse during the Force-Tonkin conferences and my CO did me ten times better. We ferried in those kids up and down the coast when all they were ready for was a day at the beach with hot dogs and Ferris wheels.... I don't get it. You and my legal zero in on the same thing, and I think it's old hat and discredited. Mad Marcus is a relic."

Your who?"

My legal exec. I told you about him, Remington."

Oh, yes. The stickler prick."

He picked up on the Saigon thing too. 'That's it,' he said. It's in those remarks. It's Delavane.' He wasn't around to know Delavane was fair game for every antiwar group in the country. Hell, we gave him the name Mad Marcus. No, it's not Delavane, it's something else. Perhaps it's in those escapes, specifically Converse's last escape. Maybe there's some MIA input we don't know about."

Well," repeated the admiral in Norfolk for the third time, but now far less tentatively. You may have something there, but it doesn't concern us. Look, I'll be honest with you.

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I didn't want to say anything because I didn't want you to think you went to a lot of trouble for nothing, but the word I get is that the whole thing is a bust-negative."

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"Oh?" said Hickman, suddenly listening very carefully. "How so?"

"It's the wrong man. Apparently an overenthusiastic JG was doing some digging in the same time period, the same general circumstances. He saw the flag and drew six wrong conclusions. I hope he enjoys taking five A.M. muster."

"And that's it?" asked SAND PAC's admiral, controlling his astonishment.

"That's the feedback we get here. Whatever your CLO had in mind hasn't anything to do with our people."

Hickman could not believe what he was hearing. Of course Scanlon had not mentioned the State Department's efforts. He knew nothing about them! He was quickly putting as much distance between himself and the Converse flag as he could, lying because he had not been told. State was working quietly probably through Cons Op and Scanlon had no reason to think "old Hicky" knew a damn thing about Bonn or Converse or Connal Fitzpatrick's whereabouts. Or about a man named Preston Halliday who had been murdered in Geneva. What was happening? He would not find out from Scanlon. Nor did he care to.

"To hell with it, then. My CLO will be back in three or four days and maybe I'll learn something."

"Whatever it is, it's back in your sandbox, Admiral. My people had the wrong man."

"Your people couldn't navigate a row boat in the D.C. Reflecting Pool."

"Can't blame you for that, Hicky."

Hickman hung up the phone and resumed his standard position when in thought, gazing beyond his propped-up shoes at the ocean. The sun was trying to break through the overcast without much success.

He had never liked Scanlon for reasons too petty to examine. Except one; he knew Scanlon was a liar. What he had not known was that he was such a stupid liar.

Lieutenant David Remington was flattered by the call. The well-known four-striper had invited him to lunch not only invited him but had apologized for the lateness of the invitation and told him that it was perfectly understandable

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if it was inconvenient. Further, the captain wanted him to know that the call was of a personal nature, having nothing to do with naval business. The

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high-ranking officer, a resident of La Jolla, was in
port for only a few days and needed legal advice.
He had been told that Lieutenant Remington was
just about the best lawyer in the United States
Navy. Would the lieutenant accept?

Of course Remington had made it perfectly
clear that whatever advice he might offer would be
offered on the basis of amicus-amicae; no
remuneration could possibly be considered, as that
would be a violation of Statute . . .

'May I buy you lunch, Lieutenant, or do we have
to split the check?" the four-striper had
asked somewhat impatiently, thought Remington.

The restaurant was high in the hills above La
Jolla, an out-of-the-way roadside inn that apparently
catered to diners of the area and those from San
Diego and University City who did not care to be
seen together in the usual places. Remington had
not been too pleased; he would have preferred
being seen at the Coronado with the captain than
traveling ten miles north so as not to be seen in the
hills of La Jolla. Nevertheless, the four-striper had
been politely adamant) it was where he wanted to
meet. David had checked him out. The much
decorated captain not only was in line for
promotion but was considered a potential candidate
for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Remington would have
ridden a bicycle on the exposed Alaskan pipeline to
keep the appointment.

Which was exactly what he thought he was
doing, as he spun the steering wheel right, then left,
then right and right again as he made his way up
the steep narrow roads. It was important to keep in
mind, he thought, as he whipped the car to the left,
that personal advice was nevertheless professional
advice, and without payment of any sort whatsoever,
it constituted a debt that would one day be
acknowledged. And if a man was elevated to the
Joint Chiefs . . . Remington could not help it: in a
glow of self-importance he had let drop to a fellow
legal officer the one who had coined the name
"stickler prick" that he was lunching with a highly
regarded four-striper in La Jolla and might be late
returning to the office. Then to drive his point
home, he had asked his associate for directions.

Oh, my God! What was it? Oh, my God ~

At the apex of the hairpin curve was an enormous
black

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rig, thirty feet in length, and out of control. It
weaved right and left on the narrow incline, its speed
gathering with every foot, measured in racing yards,
a black behemoth swerving, crashing down on
everything in front of it, a wild beast gone mad!

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Remington whipped his head to his right as he spun the wheel to avoid impact. There were only thin trunks of young trees and saplings in late-summer bloom; below was a floral abyss. These were the last images he saw as the car careened on its side and began the plunge.

Far above on another hill a man kneeled, binoculars raised to his face as the explosion below confirmed the kill. His expression was one of neither joy nor sadness, merely acceptance. A mission had been accomplished. After all, it was war.

And Lieutenant David Remington, whose life was so ordered and orderly, who knew exactly where he was going and how in this world, who knew above all that he would never be trapped by the forces that had killed his father in the name of corporate policy, was put to death by the policy of a company he had never heard of. An enterprise called Aquitaine. He had seen the name Delavane.

Their view is that it's the proper evolution of current history, all other ideologies having failed.... The words spoken by Preston Halliday in Geneva kept repeating themselves in Converse's inner ear as he listened to the four voices of Aquitaine. The frightening thing was that they believed what they said without equivocation, morally and intellectually, their convictions rooted in observations going back decades, their arguments persuasive as they illuminated past global mistakes of judgment that resulted in horrible suffering and unnecessary loss of life.

The simple objective of their coming together allies and former enemies alike was to bring benevolent order to a world in chaos, to permit the industrial states to flourish for the good of all people, spreading the strengths and benefits of multinational trade to the impoverished, uncommitted Third World and, by so doing, secure its commitment. Only in this way, in this coming together, could Communism be stopped stopped and reversed until it collapsed under the sheer force of superior armed might and financial resources.

To bring all this about required a shift in values and prior

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ities. Industrial decisions everywhere must be coordinated to bring about the total strength of the free states. Government treasuries, multinational corporations and giant conglomerates must look to a stratum of interlocking committees, agree to be directed by these committees, to accept their decisions which would in effect be their respective governments' decisions each keeping the others apprised of its current agenda. What was this ultimate stratum of negotiators? Who would be the members of these committees that would in effect

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Speak for the free nations and set their policies

Throughout history only one class of people remained constant in its excellence, who when called upon in times of crisis performed far beyond human expectations even in defeat. The reasons for this segment's unique contributions in war and even in peace, though to a lesser degree were historically clear: these men were selfless. They belonged to a class trained to serve without thought of reward except for the recognition of excellence. Wealth was irrelevant because their needs were furnished and perquisites granted only through the outstanding performance of duty.

In the new order this class of people would not be subject to the corruptions of the marketplace. In reality it was unusually well equipped to deal with such corruptions, for it could not be touched by them. The mere presence of any illegally gained wealth within its ranks would instantly be recognized and condemned, resulting in courts-martial. This class of society, this novel branch of the human race, was not only incorruptible at the highest levels, it would be the ultimate savior of mankind as we know it today.

It was the military. The world over, even encompassing one's enemies. Together even as enemies they best understood the catastrophic results of weakness.

To be sure, certain minor liberties would perforce have to be withheld from the body politic, but these were small sacrifices for survival. Who could argue?

None of the four spokesmen for Aquitaine raised his voice. They were the quiet prophets of reason, each with his own history, his own identity allies and enemies together in a world gone mad.

Converse responded in the affirmative to everything that was said this was not difficult to do and asked abstract questions of philosophy, as he was expected to do. Even the court

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jester, Chaim Abrahms, became deeply serious and answered Converse's questions quietly

At one point Abrahms said, "You think we Jews are the only ones in the Diaspora, my friend? You are wrong. The whole human race is dispersed everywhere, all of us locking rams' horns and not knowing where to go. Certain rabbis claim we Jews shall not see salvation until the Messianic era, the time of divine redemption when a god will appear to show us the way to our own promised land. He was far too late arriving we could not wait for Him any longer. We created Israel. Do you see the lesson? We are here now the divine intervention on

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earth. And I even I, a man of accomplishment and ego will give up my life in silence so we may succeed.

Jacques-Louis Bertholdier: "You must understand, Mr. Converse, that Voltaire said it best in his *Discours sur l'homme*. Essentially he wrote that man attained his highest freedom only when he understood the parameters of his behavior. We will establish those parameters. Is anything more logical?

Erich Leilhelm: "Goethe said it perhaps better when he insisted that the romance of politics was best used to numb and quell the fears of the uninformed. In his definitive *Aus meinem Leben* he states clearly that all governing classes must be imbued above all with discipline. Where is it more prevalent?"

Jan van Headmer: "My own country, sir, is the living embodiment of the lesson. We took the beast out of the savage and formed a vast, productive nation. The beast returns and my nation is in turmoil."

And so it went for several hours. Quiet dissertations delivered thoughtfully, reflectively, passions apparent only in the deep sincerity of their convictions. Twice Joel was pressed to reveal the name of his client and twice he demurred, stating the legal position of confidentiality which could change in a matter of days, perhaps less.

"I'd have to offer my client something concrete. An approach, a strategy that would warrant his immediate involvement, his commitment, if you will."

"Why is that necessary at this juncture?" asked Bertholdier. "You've heard our reasoning. Certainly an approach can be discerned."

"All right, scratch approach. A strategy, then. Not the why but the how."

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"You ask for a plan?" said Abrahms. "On what basis?"

"Because you'll be asking for an investment surpassing anything in your experience."

"That's an extraordinary statement," interjected Van Headmer.

"He has extraordinary resources," replied Converse.

"Very well," said LeifLeim, glancing at each of his associates before he continued. Joel understood; permission was being sought based on prior discussions. It was granted "What would you say to the compromising of certain powerful individuals in specific governments?"

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"Blackmail?" asked Joel. "Extortion? It wouldn't work. There are too many checks and balances. A man's threatened the threat's discovered and he's out anyway. Then the purification rites set in, and where there was once weakness, suddenly there's a great deal of strength."

"That's an extremely narrow interpretation," said Bertholdier.

"You do not take into consideration the time element!)" cried Abrahms defiantly, for the first time raising his voice. "Accumulation, Converse! Rapid acceleration!"

Suddenly Joel was aware that the three other men were looking at the Israeli, but not simply watching him. In each pair of eyes was a warning. Abrahms shrugged. "It's merely

"Well taken," said Converse, without emphasis.

"I'm not even sure it applies," added the Israeli, compounding his error.

"Well, I'm sure it's time for dinner," said Leilhelm, removing his hand from the side of his chair. "I've boasted so much about my table to our guest that I admit to a shortness of breath concern, of course. I trust the chef has upheld my honor." As if answering a signal which Joel knew was the case the British manservant appeared beneath an archway at the far end of the room. "I am clairvoyant!" Leifhelm rose. "Come, come, my friends. Saddle of lamb a citron, a dish created by the gods for themselves and stolen by the irrepressible thief who rules my kitchen."

The dinner was indeed superb, each dish the result of an isolated effort to achieve perfection in both taste and presentation. Converse was no gourmet, his culinary education having been forced on him in expensive restaurants where his mind was only mildly distracted by the food, but he instinc

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tively knew when a dish was the best in its class. There was nothing second-rate about Leifhelm's table, including the table itself, an enormous solid mass of mahogany supported by two huge but delicately carved tripods resting on the intricate parquet floor. The deep-red velour walls in the high-ceilinged room were hung with oils of hunting scenes. The low candelabra in front of the silver-mirrored place mats did not obstruct a guest's view of the person opposite, a feat Joel wished could be mastered by most of the hostesses in New York, London and Geneva.

The talk veered away from the serious topics explored in the sitting room. It was as if a recess had been called, a diversion to ease the burdens of

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statesmanship. If that was the aim, it was eminently
successful, and it was the Afrikaner, Van Headmer,
who led the way. In his soft-spoken, charming way
(the dossier had been accurate the "unfeeling killer"
was charming) he described a safari he had taken
Chaim Abrahms on in the veldt

"Do you realize, gentlemen that I bought this
poor Hebrew his first jacket at Safarics' in
Johannesburg and there's never been a day when I
haven't regretted it. It's become our great general's
trademark! Of course, you know why he wears it. It
absorbs perspiration and requires very little washing
simply large applications of bay rum. This is a
different jacket, isn't it, great general?"

"Bleach, bleach, I tell my wife!" replied the sabre,
grimacing. "It takes out the smell of the godless slave
traders!"

"Talking of slaves, let me tell you," said the
Afrikaner warming to his story with a glass of wine,
changed with each new course.

The story of Chaim Abrahms' first and only safari
was worthy of good vaudeville. Apparently the Israeli
had been stalking a male lion for hours with his gun
bearer, a Bantu he constantly abused, not realizing
the black understood and spoke English as well as
he. Abrahms had zeroed in each of his four rifles
prior to the hunt, but whenever he had the lion in
his sights, he missed. This supposedly superb
marksman, this celebrated general with the rifle-eye
of a hawk, could not hit eight feet of flesh a hundred
yards away. At the end of the day an exhausted
Chaim Abrahms, using broken English and a
multiplicity of hand gestures, bribed the gun bearer
not to tell the rest of the safari of his misses. The
hunter and the Bantu returned to camp, the hunter
lamenting the nonexis

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fence of cats and the stupidity of gun bearers. The
native went to Van Headmer's tent, and as the
Afrikaner told it in perfectly-mimicked Anglicized
Bantu, said the following: 'I liked the lion more
than the Jew, sir. I altered his sights, sir, but appar-
ently I will be forgiven my indiscretion, sir. Among
other enticements, he has offered to have me
bar-mitzvahed."

The diners collapsed in laughter Abrahms, to
his credit, loudest of all. Obviously, he had heard
the story before and relished the telling. It occurred
to Joel that only the most secure could listen to
such telling tales about themselves and respond with
genuine laughter. The Israeli was a rock in the
firmament of his convictions and could easily
tolerate a laugh on himself. That, too, was
frightening.

The British servant intruded, walking silently on

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the hard wood floor and spoke into Erich
Leifhelm's ear.

"Forgive me, please," said the German, rising to take the call. "A nervous broker in Munich who consistently picks up rumors from Riyadh. A sheik goes to the toilet and he hears thunder from the east."

The ebullient conversation went on without a break in the flow, the three men of Aquitaine behaving like old comrades sincerely trying to make a stranger feel welcome. This, too, was frightening. Where were the fanatics who wanted to destroy governments, ruthlessly grabbing control and shackling whole societies, channeling the body politic into their vision of the military state? These were men of intellect. They spoke of Voltaire and Goethe, and had compassion for suffering and pain and unnecessary loss of life. They had humor and could even laugh at themselves while speaking calmly of sacrificing their own lives for the betterment of a world gone mad. But Joel understood their true nature. These were interlopers assuming the mantels of statesmen. What had Leifhelm said, quoting Goethe? "The romance of politics was best used to numb and quell the fears of the uninformed."

Frightening.

Leifhelm returned, followed by the British servant carrying two open bottles of wine. If the call from Munich had brought unfavorable news, the German gave no indication of it. His spirits were as before, his waxen smile at the ready and his enthusiasm for the next course unbridled. "And now, my friends, the lamb d citron medallions of ambrosia and, hyperbole aside, actually rather good. Also, in honor of our guest we have a bonus this evening. My astute English friend and

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companion was in Siegburg the other day and ran across several bottles of Beerenauslese, '71. What could be a more fitting tribute?"

The men of Aquitaine glanced at one another, then Bertholdier spoke. "Certainly a find, Erich. It's one of the more acceptable German varieties."

"The '82 Klausberg Riesling in Johannesburg promises to be among the finest in years," said Van Headmer.

"I doubt it will rival the Richon-le-Zion Carmel," added the Israeli.

"You are all impossible!"

A behatted chef rolled in a silver service cart, uncovered the saddle of lamb and, under appreciative looks, proceeded to carve and serve.

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The Englishman presented the various side dishes to each diner, then poured the wine.

Erich Leifhelm raised his glass, the flickering light of the candles reflecting off the carved crystal and the edges of the silver-mirrored place mats. To our guest and his unknown client, both of whom we trust will soon be in our fold."

Converse nodded his head and drank.

He took the glass from his lips, and was suddenly aware that the four men of Aquitaine were staring at him, their own glasses still on the table. None had drunk the wine.

Leifhelm spoke again, his voice nasal, cold, a fury held in check by an intellect in control. "General Delavane was the enemy, our enemy! Men like that can't be allowed anymore, can't you understand!' Those were the words, were they not, Mr. Converse?"

WhatP"Joel heard his voice but was not sure it was his. The flames of the candles suddenly erupted, fire filled his eyes and the burning in his throat became an unbearable pain. He grabbed his neck as he struggled out of the chair, hurling it back, he heard the crash, but only as a succession of echoes. He was falling. The pain surged into his stomach; it was intolerable; he clutched his groin, frantically trying to suppress the pain. Then he felt the chill of a hard surface and somehow knew he was writhing wildly on the floor while being held in check by powerful arms.

"The gun. Step back. Hold him." The voice, too, was a series of echoes, though sharply enunciated in a searing British accent. "Now. Fire!"

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The telephone rang, jolting Connal Fitzpatrick out of a deep sleep. He had fallen back on the couch, the Van Headmer dossier in his hand, both feet still planted on the floor. Shaking his head and rapidly blinking and widening his eyes, he tried to orient himself. Where was he? What time it? The phone rang again, now a prolonged, shattering sound. He lurched off the couch, his breathing erratic, his exhaustion too complete to shake off in a few seconds. He had not really slept since California; his body and mind could barely function. He grabbed the phone, nearly dropping it as he momentarily lost his balance.

"Yes... hello!"

"Commander Fitzpatrick, if you please," said a male voice in a clipped British accent.

"This is he."

"Philip Dunstone here, Commander. I'm calling for Mr Converse. He wanted me to tell you that the conference is goings - well, far better than he thought possible."

"Dunstone. Major Philip Dunstone. I'm senior aide to General Berkeley-Greene."

"Berkeley-Greene?"

"Yes, Commander. Mr. Converse said to tell you that along with the others he's decided to accept General Leifhelm's hospitality for the night. He'll be in touch with you first thing in the morning."

'Let me talk to him. Now."

"I'm afraid that's not possible. They've all gone out on the motor launch for a spin downriver. Frankly, they're a secretive lot, aren't they? Actually, I'm not permitted to attend their discussions any more than you are."

"I'm not settling for this, Major!"

"Really, Commander, I'm simply relaying a message."

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. . . Oh yes, Mr. Converse did mention that if you were concerned I should also tell you that if the admiral called, you were to thank him and give him his regards."

Fitzpatrick stared at the wall. Converse would not bring up the Hickman business unless he was sending a message. The request made no sense to anyone but the two of them. Everything was all right. Also there could be several reasons why Joel did not care to talk directly on the phone. Among them, thought Connal resentfully, was probably the fact that he didn't trust his "aide" to say the proper words in the event their conversation was being overheard.

'AII right, Major . . . what was the name again? Dunstone?"

'That's right, Philip Dunstone. Senior aide to General Berkeley-Greene. "

"Leave word for Mr. Converse that I'll expect to hear from him by eight o'clock."

"Isn't that a little harsh, old boy? It's nearly two A.M. now. The breakfast buffet usually starts about nine-thirty out here."

"Nine o'clock, then," said Fitzpatrick firmly.

"I'll tell him myself, Commander. Oh, one final

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thing. Mr. Converse asked me to apologize for his not having reached you by midnight. They've really been at it hammer and tongs in there."

That was it, thought Connal. Everything was under control. Joel certainly would not have made that remark otherwise. "Thanks, Major, and by the way, I'm sorry I was rude. I was asleep and tried to get it together too fast."

"Lucky chap. You can head back to the pillows while I stand watch. Next time you can take my place."

"If the food's good, you're on."

"It's not, really. A lot of pansy cooking, to tell you the truth. Good night, Commander."

"Good night, Major."

Relieved, Fitzpatrick hung up the phone. He looked over at the couch, thinking briefly of going back to the dossiers but decided against it. He felt hollow all over, hollow legs, hollow chest, a hollow ache in his head. He needed sleep badly.

He gathered up the papers and took them into Converse's room. He placed them in the attache case, locked it and turned the combination tumblers. Carrying the case, he went back into the sitting room, checked the door, turned off the lights and headed for his own bedroom. He threw the case

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on the bed and removed his shoes, then his trousers, but that was as far as he got. He collapsed on the pillows, somehow managing to wrap part of the bedspread around him. The darkness was welcome.

"That was hardly necessary," said Erich Leifhelm to the Englishman, as the latter replaced the phone. "'Pansy cooking' is not the way I would describe my table."

"He undoubtedly would," said the man who had called himself Philip Dunstone. "Let's check the patient."

The two walked out of the library and down the hall to a bedroom. Inside were the three other men of Aquitaine along with a fourth, his black bag and the exposed hypodermic needles denoting a physician. On the bed was Joel Converse, his eyes wide and grasslike, saliva oozing from the sides of his mouth, his head moving back and forth as if in a trance, unintelligible sounds emerging from his lips.

The doctor glanced up and spoke. "There's nothing more he can give us because there is more," said the physician. "The chemicals don't lie. Quite

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simply, he's a blind sent out by men in Washington, but he has no idea who they are. He didn't even know they existed until this naval officer convinced him they had to exist. His only referrals were Anstett and Beale."

"Both dead," interrupted Van Headmer. "Anstett is public, and I can vouch for Beale. My employee on Santorini flew into Mykonos and confirmed the kill. There can be no trace incidentally. The Greek is back on the chalk cliffs selling laces and inflated whisky in his taverna."

"Prepare him for his odyssey," said Chaim Abrahms, looking down at Converse. "As our specialist in the Mossad put it so clearly, distance is now the necessary requirement. A vast separation between this American and those who would send him out."

Fitzpatrick stirred as the bright morning sunlight from the windows pierced the darkness and expanding shades of white forced his eyelids open. He stretched, his shoulder digging into a hard corner of the attache case, the rest of him constricted by the bedspread, which was tangled about his legs. He kicked it off and hung his arms on both sides of the bed, breathing deeply, feeling the relaxed swelling of his chest. He swung his left hand above his head, twisted his wrist

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and looked at his watch. It was nine-twenty; he had slept for seven and a half hours, but the uninterrupted sleep seemed much longer. He got out of bed and took several steps; his balance was steady, his mind clearing. He looked at his watch again, remembering. The major named Dunstone had said breakfast at Leifhelm's estate was served from nine-thirty on and if the conference had moved to a boat on the river at 2:00 A.M. Converse probably would not call before ten o'clock.

Connal walked into the bathroom; there was a phone on the wall by the toilet if he was wrong about the call. A shave followed by a hot and cold shower and he would be fully himself again.

Eighteen minutes later Fitzpatrick walked back into the bedroom, a towel around his waist, his skin still smarting from the harsh sprays of water. He crossed to his open suitcase on a luggage rack and took out his miniaturised radio, placed it on the bureau and, deciding against the Armed Forces band, dialed in what was left of a German newscast. There were the usual threats of strikes in the industrial south, as well as charges and countercharges hurled around the Bundestag, but nothing earthshaking. He selected comfortable clothes lightweight slacks, a blue oxford shirt and his cord jacket. He got dressed and walked out into the sitting room toward the phone, he would call

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room service for a small breakfast and a great deal of coffee.

He stopped. Something was wrong. What was it? The pillows on the couch were still rumpled, a glass half filled with stale whisky still on the coffee table, as were pencils and a blank telephone message pad. The balcony doors were closed, the curtains drawn, and across the room the silver ice bucket remained in the center of the silver tray on the antique hunt table. Everything was as he had last seen it, yet there was something.... The door! The door to Converse's bedroom was shut. Had he closed it? No, he had not!

He walked rapidly over and opened the door. He studied the room, conscious of the fact that he had stopped breathing. It was immaculate cleaned and smoothed to a fare-thee-well. The suitcase was gone; the few articles Converse had left on the bureau were no longer there. Connal rushed to the closet and yanked it open. It was empty. He went into the bathroom; it was spotless, new soap in the receptacles, the glasses wrapped in clinging paper ready for incoming guests. He walked out of the bathroom stunned.

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There was not the slightest sign that anyone except a maid had been in that bedroom for days.

He ran out to the sitting room and the telephone. Seconds later the manager was on the line; it was the same man Connal had spoken with yesterday. "Yes, indeed, your businessman was even more eccentric than you described, Commander. He checked out at three-thirty this morning, paying all the bills, incidentally."

"He was here?"

Of course."

You saw him?"

Not personally. I don't come on duty until eight o'clock. He spoke with the night manager and settled your account before going up to pack."

"How could your man know it was him? He never saw him before!"

Really, Commander, he identified himself as your associate and paid the bill. He also had his key; he left it at the desk."

Fitzpatrick paused, astonished, then spoke harshly. The room was cleaned! Was that also done at three-thirty this morning? "

No, main Herr, at seven o'clock. By the first housekeeping shift."

But not the outer room?"

The commotion might have disturbed you. Frankly Commander, that suite must be prepared for an early-afternoon arrival. I'm sure the staff felt it would not bother you if they got a head start on the task. Obviously, it

Early afternoons I'm here!"

And welcome to stay until twelve noon, the bill has been paid. Your friend has departed and the suite has been reserved."

And I don't suppose you have another room."

'I'm afraid there's nothing available, Commander."

Connal slammed down the phone. Really, Commander . . . Those same words had been spoken by another over the same telephone at two o'clock in the morning. There were three directories in a wicker rack by the table, he pulled out the one for Bonn and found the number

"Guten Morgen. Hier bei General Leifhelm. "

"Herrn Major Dunstone, bitts. "

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"Wer2"

"Dunstone,~' he said, then continued in German, "He's a guest. Philip Dunstone. He's the senior aide to to a General Berkeley-Greene. They're English."

"English? There are no Englishmen here, sir. There's no one here that is to say, there are no guests."

"He was there last night! They both were. I spoke with Major Dunstone."

"The general had a small dinner party for a few friends but no English people, sir."

"Look, I'm trying to reach a man named Converse."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Converse. He was here, sir."

"Was?"

"I believe he left."

"Where's Leifhelm?" shouted Connal.

There was a pause before the German replied coldly "Who should I say is calling General Leifhelm?"

"Fitzpatrick. Lieutenant Commander Fitzpatricki"

"I believe he's in the dining room. If you'll stay on the telephone." The line was put on hold; the suspended silence was unnerving.

finally there was a click and Leifhelm's voice reverberated over the phone. "Good morning, Commander. Bonn has provided a lovely day, no? The Seven Mountains are as clear as in a picture postcard. I believe you can see them "

"Where's Converse?" interrupted the Navy lawyer.

"I would assume at Das Rektorat."

"He was supposed to be staying at your place."

"No such arrangements were made. They were neither requested nor offered. He left rather late, but he did leave Commander. My car drove him back."

"That's not what I was told! A Major Dunstone called me around two this morning "

"I believe Mr. Converse left shortly before then.... who did you say called?"

"Dunstone. A Major Philip Dunstone. He's English. He said he was the senior aide to General Berkeley-Greene."

"I don't know this Major Dunstone, there was no such person here. However, I'm familiar with just about every general officer in the British Army and I've never heard of anyone named Berkeley-Greene."

"Stow it, Leifhelm!"

"I beg your pardon."

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"I spoke to Dunstone! He he said the right words. He said Converse was staying at your place with the others!"

"I think you should have spoken directly with Herr Converse, because there was no Major Dunstone or General Berkeley-Greene at my home last night. Perhaps you should check with the British embassy; certainly they d know if these people were in Bonn. Perhaps you heard the words incorrectly; perhaps they met later at a cafe."

"I couldn't speak to him! Dunstone said you were out on the river in a boat." Fitzpatrick's breath was now coming in short gasps.

"Now, that's ridiculous, Commander. It's true I keep a small launch for guests, but it's a well-known fact that I am not partial to the water." The general paused, adding with a short laugh. "The great field marshal gets seasick in a flatboat six feet from

shore."

"You're lying!"

"I resent that, sir. Especially about the water. I never feared the Russian front, only the Black Sea. And if we had invaded England, I assure you I would have crossed the Channel in a plane." The German was toying with him; he was enjoying himself.

"You know exactly what I mean!" Connal shouted again. "They said Converse checked out of here at three-thirty this morning! I say he never came back!"

"And I say this conversation is pointless. If you are truly alarmed, call me back when you can be civil. I have friends in the Staatspolizei." Again a click; the German had hung up.

As Fitzpatrick replaced the phone another thought suddenly struck him. Frightened, he walked quickly into the bedroom, his eyes instantly zeroing in on the attache case. It was partly under the pillow; oh God, he had been in such a sound sleep! He yanked the case out and examined it. Breathing again, he saw that it was the same case, the combination locks secure; no amount of pressure on the small brass buttons would release the plates. He lifted the case and shook it; the weight and the sounds were proof that the papers were inside and intact, proof also that Converse had not returned to the inn and checked out. All other considerations aside and regardless of whatever emergencies that might have arisen, he would never have left without the dossiers and the list of names.

Connal carried the case back into the sitting room trying

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to collect his thoughts, putting them in alphabetical sequence so as to impose some kind of order. A: He had to assume that the flag on Joel's service record had been lifted or the damaging information unearthed in some other way and that Converse was now being held by LeifLeim and the contingent from Aquitaine that had flown in from Paris, Tel Aviv and Johannesburg. B: They would not kill him until they had used every means possible to find out what he knew which was far less than they imagined and could take several days. C: The LeifLeim estate, according to his dossier, was a fortress; thus the chances of going in and bringing Converse out were nil. D: Fitzpatrick knew he could not appeal to the American embassy. To begin with, Walter Peregrine would place him under territory arrest and those doing the arresting might put a bullet in his head. One had tried. E: He could not risk seeking help from Hickman in San Diego, which under different circumstances might be a logical course of action.

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Everything in the admiral's makeup ruled out any connection with Aquitaine; he was a fiercely independent officer whose conversations were laced with barbed remarks about the Pentagon's policies and mentality. But if that flag had been officially released whether with his consent or over his objections Hickman would have no choice but to call him back to the base for a full inquiry. Any contact at all could result in the immediate cancellation of his leave, but if there was no contact and no way to reach him, the order, obviously, could not be given.

Connal sat down on the couch, the attache case at his feet, and picked up a pencil; he wrote out two words on the telephone message pad: Call Meagen. He would tell his sister to say that after Press's funeral he had left for parts unknown without explanation. It was consistent with what he had said to the admiral, that he was taking his information to "the authoribes" investigating Preston Halliday's death.

F: He could go to the Bonn police and tell them the truth. He had every reason to believe that an American colleague was being held against his will inside the gates of General Erich Leifhelm's estate. Then, of course, the inevitable question would arise: why didn't the Lieutenant Commander contact the American embassy? The unspoken would be just below the surface: General Leifhelm was a prominent figure, and such a serious charge should have diplomatic support. The embassy again. Strike out. Then again, if Leifhelm said

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he had "friends" in the Staatspolizei, he probably owned key men in the Bonn Police. If he was alarmed, Converse could be moved. Or killed. G: . . . was insane, thought the Navy lawyer as a legal phrase crept slowly into his consciousness, suddenly taking on a blurred viability. Trade-o~: It was a daily occurrence in pretrial examinations, both civilian and military. We'll drop this if you accept that we'll stay out of this area if you stay out of that one. Standard practice. Trade-off. Was it possible? Could it even be considered? It was crazy and it was desperate, but then nothing was sane, nothing held much hope. Since force was out of the question, could an exchange be made? LeifLelm for Converse. A general for a lieutenant.

Connal did not dare analyze; there were too many negatives. He had to act on instinct because there was nothing else left, nowhere he could turn that did not lead to a blank wall or a bullet. He got up from the couch, went to the table with the telephone and and reached for the directory on the floor. What he had in mind was insane, but he could not think about that. He found the name. Fishbein, rise. The illegitimate daughter of Hermann Goring.

The rendezvous was set: a back table at the
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Hansa-Keller cafe on the Kaiserplatz, the reservation in the name of Parnell. Fitzpatrick had had the presence of mind in California to pack a conservative civilian suit; he wore it now as the American attorney, Mr. Parnell, who was fluent in German and sent by his firm in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to make contact with one use Fishbein in Bonn, West Germany. He also had the presence of mind in Bonn, West Germany, to have managed a single room at the Schlosspark on the Venusbergweg and placed Converse's attache case where it would be safe for a considerable length of time, a trail left for Converse should everything blow apart. A trail he would recognize if Joel was alive and able to hunt.

Connal arrived ten minutes early, not merely to secure the table but to familiarise himself with the surroundings and silently practice his approach. He had done the same thing many times before, walking into military courtrooms before a trial, testing the chairs, the height of the tables, the scan of vision of the tribunal on the dais. It all helped.

He knew it was she when the woman arrived and spoke to the mau^tre d' at his lectern. She was tall and heavy, not

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obese but fleshy in a statuesque way, conscious of her mature sensuality but smart enough not to parade it. She was dressed in a light-grey summer suit, the jacket buttoned above her generous breasts, a wide white collar demurely angled over the fabric. Her face, too, was full but not soft, the high cheekbones lending an appearance of character that might not otherwise have been there, her hair was dark and shoulder-length, with slight streaks of premature gray. She was escorted to the table by the dining room's captain. Fitzpatrick rose as she approached.

"Guten Tag, Frau Fishhein, " he said, extending his hand. "Bitte, setzen Sie sich. "

' It's not necessary for you to speak German, Herr Parnell," said the woman, releasing his hand and sliding into the chair under the guidance of the captain, who bowed and left. "I make my living as a translator."

"Whatever you feel most comfortable with," said Connal.

"I think under the circumstances I should prefer English, and spoken softly, if you please. Now, what is this incredible thing you alluded to over the telephone, Mr. Parnell?"

"Quite simply an inheritance, Mrs. Fishbein," replied Fitzpatrick, his expression sincere, his eyes steady. "If a few technical questions can be settled, and I'm sure they can be, as a rightful legatee you

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will receive a substantial sum of money."

"From someone in America I never knew?"

"He knew your father."

"I did not," said use fishbein quickly, her eyes darting about at the adjacent tables. "Who is this man?"

"He was a member of your father's staff during the war," answered Connal, lowering his voice still further. "With your father's help certain contacts in Holland he got out of Germany before the Nuremberg trials with a great deal of money. He came to the United States by way of London, his funds intact, and started a business in the Midwest. It became enormously successful. He died recently, leaving sealed instructions with my firm, his attorneys."

"But why me?"

"A debt. Without your father's influence and assistance our client would probably have withered for years in jail instead of flourishing as he did in America. As far as anyone was concerned, he was a Dutch immigrant from the Netherlands whose family business was destroyed in the war and who

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sought his future in America. That future included considerable real estate holdings and a very successful meat-packing plant all in the process of being sold. Your inheritance is in excess of two million American dollars. Would you care for an aperitif, Mrs. Fishbein?"

The woman could not at first reply. Her eyes had grown wide, her full jaw slackened, her stare was trancelike. "I believe I will, Herr Parnell," she said in a monotone, finding her voice. "A large whisky, if you please."

Fitzpatrick signaled the waiter, ordered drinks and tried several times to make idle conversation, commenting on the beautiful weather and asking what sites he should see while in Bonn. It was no use. Ilse Fishbein was as close to being in a catatonic state as Connal could imagine. She had gripped his wrist, clutching it in silence with extremely strong fingers, her lips parted, her eyes two blank glass orbs. The drinks came, the waiter left, and still she would not let go of him. Instead, she drank somewhat awkwardly, lifting the glass with her left hand.

'~what are these questions to be settled? Ask anything, demand anything. Do you have a place to stay? Things are so crowded in Bonn."

"You're very kind; yes, I do. Try to understand,
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Mrs. Fishbein, this is an extremely sensitive matter for my firm. As you can well imagine, it's not the sort of legal work American attorneys are too happy with, and, frankly, had our client not made certain provisos connecting the successful completion of this aspect of his last will and testament to the full execution of other aspects, we might have "

'The questions! What are the questions?"

Fitzpatrick paused before answering, the thoughtful lawyer permitting the interruption but still intent on making his point. 'everything will be handled confidentially, the probate court operating in camera "

'~With photographs?"

'fin private, Mrs. Fishbein. For the good of the community, in exchange for specific state and local taxes that might not be paid in the event of confiscation. You see, the higher courts might decide the entire estate is open to question."

"Yes, the questions! What are they?"

"Really quite simple. I've prepared certain statements, which you will sign and to which I can swear to your signature. They establish your bloodline. Then there is a short de

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position required substantiating the claim. We need only one, but it must be given by a former high-ranking member of the German forces, preferably a man whose name is recognizable, whom the recent history books or war accounts establish as a working colleague of your natural father. Of course, it would be advantageous to have someone known to the American military in the event the judge decides to call the Pentagon and ask who is this fellow?' "

"I know the man!" whispered Mrs. Fishbein. "He was a field marshal, a brilliant General!"

"Who is he?" asked the Navy lawyer, then instantly shrugging, dispensing with the question of identity as irrelevant. "Never mind. Just tell me why you think he's the right man, this field marshal."

"He is greatly respected, although not everyone agrees with him. He was one of the grossmachtigen young commanders, once decorated by my father himself for his brilliant"

"But would anyone in the American military establishment know him?"

"Mein Gott! He worked for the Allies in Berlin and Vienna after the war!"

"Yes?"

"And at SHAPE Headquarters in Brussels!"

Yes, thought Connal, we're talking about the same man "Fine," said Fitzpatrick casually but seriously. "Don't bother giving me his name. It doesn't matter, and I probably wouldn't know it anyway. Can you reach him quickly?"

"In minutes! He's here in Bonn."

"Splendid. I should catch the plane back to Milwaukee by tomorrow noon."

"You will come to his house and he will dictate what you need to his secretary."

"I'm sorry I can't do that. The deposition must be countersigned by a notary. I understand you have the same rules over here -- and why not, you invented them and the Schlosspark Hotel has both typing and notary services. Say this evening, or perhaps early in the morning? I should be more than happy to send a taxi for your friend. I don't want this to cost him a pfennig. Any expenses he incurs my firm will be happy to repay."

use Fishbein giggled a slightly hysterical giggle. "You do not know my friend, mein Herr."

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"I'm sure we'll get along. Now, how about lunch?"

"I have to go to the toilet," said the German woman, her eyes glassy again. As she rose, Connal rising with her, she whispered, "Mein Gott! Zwei Millionen Dollar!"

"He does not even care to know your name!" cried Ilse Fishbein into the phone. "He's from a place called Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and is offering me two million dollars American!"

"He did not ask who I was?"

"He said it didn't matter! He probably wouldn't know you, in any event. Can you imagine? He offered to send a taxi for you! He said you should not spend a penny!"

"It's true Goring was excessively generous during the last weeks," mused Leimelm. "Of course, he was more often drugged than not, and those who supplied him with narcotics which were difficult to obtain, were rewarded with the whereabouts of priceless art treasures. The one who later smuggled him the poisoned suppositories still lives like a Roman emperor in Luxembourg."

"So you see, it's true! Goring did these things!"

"Rarely knowing what he was doing, however," agreed the general reluctantly. "This is really most unusual and very inconvenient, Ilse. Did this man show you any documents, any proof of his assignment?"

"Naturally!" lied Fishbein, close to panic, picking remembered words out of the air. "There was a formal page of legal statements and a . . . deposition all to be handled by the courts confidentially! In private! You see, there is a question of taxes, which would not be paid if the estate was confiscated "

"I've heard it all before, Ilse," Leifhelm broke in wearily. "There are no statutes for so-called war criminals and expatriated funds. So the hypocrites choke on their hypocritical rules the instant they cost money, and abandon them."

"You are always so perceptive, my general, and I have always been so loyal. I've never refused you a single request whether it was professional in nature or far more intimate. Please. Two million American! It will take but ten or fifteen minutes!"

"You've been like a good niece, I can't deny it, Ilse. And there is no way anyone could know about you in other matters.... Very well, this evening then. I'm dining at the Stei

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genberger at nine o'clock. I'll stop at the Schlosspark at eight-fifteen or thereabouts. You can buy me a gift with your shall we say ill-conceived new riches."

"I'll meet you in the lobby."

"My driver will accompany me."

"Ach, bring twenty men!"

"He's worth twenty-five," Leifhelm said.

Fitzpatrick sat in the chair in the small conference room on the second floor of the hotel and examined the gun, the manual of instructions on his lap. He tried to match what the clerk had told him to the diagrams and instructions, and was satisfied that he knew enough. There were basic similarities to the standard Navy issue Colt .45, the only handgun he was familiar with, and the technical information was extraneous to his needs. The weapon he had purchased was a Heckler & Koch PGS auto pistol, about six inches long its caliber nine millimeters, and with a nine-shell magazine clip. The instructions emphasized such points as "polygonal rifling" and "sliding roller lock functions"; he let the manual slip to the floor, and practiced removing the clip and slapping it back into place. He could load the weapon, aim it and fire it; those were

all that was necessary and he trusted the last would not be necessary.

He glanced at his watch) it was almost eight o'clock. He shoved the automatic into his belt, reached down for the instructions and stood up, looking around the room, mentally checking off the movements and the locations he had designated for himself. As he had expected, the Fishbein woman had told him Leifhelm would be accompanied by someone, a "driver" in this case, and it could be assumed the man had other functions. If so, he would have no chance to perform them.

The room one of twenty-odd conference rooms in the hotel that he had reserved under the name of a fictitious company was not large, but there were structural arrangements that could be put to advantage. The usual rectangular table was in the center, three chairs on each side and two at the ends, one with a telephone. There were additional chairs against the walls for stenographers and observers all this was normal. However, in the center of the left wall was a doorway that led to a very small room apparently used for private conversations. Inside was another telephone, which when off the

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hook caused a button on the first telephone on the conference table to light up; confidentiality had its limits in Bonn. The hallway door opened onto a small foyer, thus prohibiting those entering from scanning the room while standing in the corridor.

Connal folded the Heckler & Koch instructions, put them in his jacket pocket, and walked over to the table to survey his set pieces. He had gone to an office-supply store and purchased the appropriate items. On the far end of the table by the telephone which was placed perpendicular to the edge, the buttons in clear view were several file folders next to an open briefcase (from a distance its dark plastic looked like expensive leather). Scattered about were papers, pencils and a yellow legal pad, the top pages looped over. The setting was familiar to anyone who had ever had an appointment with an attorney, said learned counsel having put his astute observations down on paper prior to the conference.

Fitzpatrick retraced his steps to the chair, moved it forward several feet, and crossed to the door of the small side room. He had turned on the lights two table lamps flanking a short couch) he went to the one above the telephone and turned it off. He then walked back to the open door and stood between it and the wall, peering through the narrow vertical space broken up by upper and lower hinges. He had a clear view of the foyer's entrance; three people would pass into the conference room and he would come out.

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There was a knock on the hallway door the rapid, impatient tapping of an heiress unable to control herself. He had told the Fishbein woman the location of the room, but nothing else. No name or number, and in her anxiety she had not asked about either. Fitzpatrick went to the telephone table in the small room, lifted the phone out of its cradle and placed it on its side. He returned to his position behind the door, angling himself so as to look through the crack, his body in the shadows. He took the pistol from his belt, held it in front of him and shouted in a friendly voice, loud enough to be heard outside in the hotel corridor. "Bitte, kommen Sie herein! Die Tare ist offer. Ich telefoniere gerade!"

The sound of the door as it opened preceded Ilse Fishbein as she walked rapidly into the room, her eyes directed at the conference table. She was followed by Erich Leifhelm, who glanced about and then turned slightly, nodding his head. A third man in the uniform of a chauffeur came into view, his

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hand in the pocket of his black jacket. Connal then heard the second sound he needed to hear. The hallway door was slammed shut.

He yanked back the small door and quickly stepped around it, the gun extended, aimed directly at the chauffeur.

"You!" he cried in German. "Take your hand out of your pocket! Slowly!" The woman gasped, then opened her mouth to scream. Fitzpatrick interrupted harshly. "Be quiet! As your friend will tell you, I haven't anything to lose. I can kill the three of you and be out of the country in an hour, leaving the police to look for a Mr. Parnell who doesn't exist."

The chauffeur, the muscles of his jaw rippling, removed his hand from his pocket, his fingers rigid. Leifhelm stared in anger and fear at Connal's gun, his face no longer ashen but flushed. "You dare?"

"I dare, Field Marshal," said Fitzpatrick. "Just as you dared forty years ago to rape a young kid and make damned sure that she and her whole family never walked out of the camps. You bet your ass I dare, and if I were you, I wouldn't give me the slightest cause to be any angrier than I am." Connal spoke to the woman. "You. Inside that briefcase on the table are eight strands of rope. Start with the driver. Bind his hands and feet; I'll tell you how. Now! Quickly!"

Four minutes later the chauffeur and Leifhelm sat in two conference chairs, their ankles and wrists bound, the driver's weapon removed from his pocket. Connal checked the ropes the knots having been tied under his instructions. Everything was secure; the more one writhed, the tighter the knots would

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become. He ordered the panicked Fishbein woman into a third chair; he lashed her hands to the arms and her feet to the legs.

Rising, Connal picked up the automatic from the table and approached Leifhelm, who was sitting in the chair next to the lighted telephone. "Now," he said, the gun pointed at the German's head. "As soon as I hang up the phone in the other room we're going to make a call from here." He walked quickly into the small side room, hung up the telephone, and returned. He sat down next to the bound Leifhelm and took a scrap of paper out of the open briefcase. On it was written the phone number of the general's estate on the Rhine beyond Bad Godesberg.

"What do you think you'll accomplish?" asked Leifhelm.

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"Trade-off," replied Fitzpatrick, the barrel of the gun pressed against the German's temple. "You for Converse."

"Mein Gott!" whispered Ilse Fishbein as the chauffeur writhed, his hands straining against the ropes, which were now biting into his wrists.

"You believe anyone will listen to you, much less carry out your orders?"

"They will if they want to see you alive again. You know I'm right, General. This gun isn't so loud I made sure of that. I can turn on the radio and kill you and be on a plane out of Germany before you're found. This room is reserved for the night with instructions that we're not to be disturbed for any reason whatsoever." Connal shifted the weapon to his left hand, picked up the telephone, and dialed the number written on the scrap of paper.

"Guten Tag. Hier bet General LeifAelm."

"Put someone in authority on this phone," said the Navy lawyer in perfect German. "I have a gun less than a foot away from General Leifhelm's head and I'll kill him right now unless you do as I say."

There were muffled shouts over the line as a hand was held against the mouthpiece. In seconds a crisp British accent was speaking slowly, deliberately in English.

"Who is this and what do you want?"

"Well, what do you know? This sounds like Major Philip Dunstone that was the name, wasn't it? You don't sound half so friendly as you did last night."

"Don't do anything rash, Commander. You'll regret

it."

"And don't you do anything stupid, or Leifhelm will regret it sooner than that is, until he can't regret anything any longer. You've got one hour to get Converse to the airport and inside the Lufthansa security gate. He has a reservation on the ten o'clock flight to Washington, D.C., by way of Frankfurt. I've made arrangements. I'll be calling a number in a room where he'll be taken and I'll expect to talk with him. After I do, I'll leave here and call you on another phone, telling you where your employer is. Just get Converse to that security gate. One hour, Major!" Fitzpatrick shoved the phone in front of Leifhelm's face, and pressed the barrel of the gun into the German's temple.

"Do as he says," said the General, choking on the words.

The minutes went by slowly, stretching into a quarter of an hour, then thirty, the silence finally broken by Leifhelm.

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"So you found her," he said, gesturing his head at use Fishbein, who trembled as tears streaked down her full cheeks.

"Just as we found out about Munich forty years ago, and a hell of a lot of other things. You're all on your way to that great big war room in the sky, Field Marshal, so don't worry about whether I'll go back on my word to your English butler. I wouldn't miss seeing you bastards paraded for everyone to see what you really are. People like you give the military everywhere a goddamned rotten name."

There was a slight commotion from the hallway beyond the door. Connal looked up, raising the gun and holding it directly at Leifhelm's head.

"Was ist?" said the German, shrugging.

"Seine Bewegung!"

From the hotel corridor came the strains of a melody sung by several male voices more off key than on. Another conference in one of the other rooms had broken up, obviously as much from the excessive intake of alcohol as from the completion of a business agenda. Raucous laughter pierced a refrain as harmony was unsuccessfully attempted. Fitzpatrick relaxed, lowering the automatic; no one on the outside knew the name or number of the room.

"You say men like me give your profession which is my profession as well a seriously bad name," said Leifhelm. "Has it occurred to you, Commander, that we might elevate that profession to one of indispensable greatness in a

world that needs us badly?"

"Needs us?" asked Connal. "We need the world first and not your kind of world. You tried it once and blew it, don't you remember?"

"That was one nation led by a madman trying to impose his imprimatur over the globe. This is many nations with one class of self-abnegating professionals coming together for the good of all."

"Whose definition? Yours? You're a funny fellow, General. Somehow I question your benevolent tendencies."

"Indiscretions of a deprived youth whose name and rightful opportunities were stolen from him should not be held against the man a half-century later."

"Deprived or depraved? I think you made up for lost time pretty quickly and as brutally as you could. I don't like your remedies."

"You have no vision."

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"Thanks be to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph it's not yours." The singing out in the corridor faded briefly, then swelled again, more discordant and louder than before. "Maybe that's some of your old Dachau playboys having a beer bust."

Leifhelm shrugged.

Suddenly the door burst open, crashing into the wall as three men raced in, spits filling the air as silenced guns fired hands jerking back and forth, the surface of the table chewed up, splinters of wood flying everywhere. Fitzpatrick felt the repeated stabs of intense pain in his arm as the automatic was blown out of his grip. He looked down and saw the blood drenching the fabric of his right sleeve. Though in shock he glanced about him. Ilse Fishbein was dead, her bleeding skull shattered by a fusillade of bullets; the chauffeur was smiling obscenely. The door was closed as if nothing had happened.

"Stumper," Leifhelm said as one of the invaders cut the ropes around his wrists. "I used that term only yesterday, Commander, but I did not know how right I was. Did you think a single telephone call could not be traced to a single room? It was all too coincidentally symmetrical. Converse is ours and suddenly this poor whore comes into immense riches American riches. I grant you it was entirely possible such bequests are made frequently by sausage-soaked idiots who don't realize the harm they do, but the timing was too perfect, too amateurish."

"You're one son of a bitch." Connal shut his eyes, trying to force the pain out of his mind, unable to move his fingers

"Why, Commander," said the general, getting out of the chair, "do I sense the bravado of fear? Do you think I'm going to have you killed?"

"You sense it. I won't give you any more than that."

"You're quite wrong. Considering the nature of your military leave, you can be of minor but unique service to us. One more statistic to disrupt a pattern. You'll be our guest, Commander, but not in Germany proper. You are going on a trip."

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Converse slowly opened his eyes, a dead, iron weight on his lids and nausea in his throat blurred darkness everywhere and a terrible stinging at his side, on his arm, flesh separated from flesh, stretched and inflamed. Blindly he tried to touch the offending spot, then gasping, pulled back in pain. Somewhere light was creeping around the dark space above him, picking its way through moving obstructions, peering into the shadows. Objects slowly came into focus the metal rim of the cot next to his face, two wooden chairs opposite each other at a small table in the distance, a door also in the distance, but farther away and shut . . . then another door, this one open, a white sink with a pair of dull-metal faucets on the left in a far-away cubicle. The light? It was still moving, now dancing, flickering. Where was it?

He found it: high in the wall on either side of the closed door were two rectangular windows, the short curtains billowing in the breeze. The windows were open, but oddly not open, not clear, the spaces interrupted. Joel raised his head, supporting himself on his forearm and squinted, trying to see more clearly. He focused on the interruptions behind the swelling curtains thin black metal shafts vertically connecting the window frames. They were bars. He was in a cell.

He fell back on the cot, swallowing repeatedly to lessen the burning in his throat, and moved his arm in circles trying to lessen the pain of the . . . wound? Yes, a wound, a gunshot! The realization jarred his memory; a dinner party had turned into a battleground filled with hysteria. Blinding lights and sudden jolts of pain had been accompanied by strident voices bombarding him, incessant echoes pounding in his ears as he tried desperately to repel the piercing assaults. Then there had been moments of calm, the drone of a single voice in the mists. Converse closed his eyes, pressing his lids tightly together with all his strength as another realization struck him

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and disturbed him deeply. That voice in the swirling mists was his voice; he had been drugged, and he knew he had given up secrets.

He had been drugged before, a number of times in the North Vietnamese camps, and as always there was the sickening feeling of numbed outrage. His mind had been stripped and violated, his voice made to perform obscenities against the last vestiges of his will.

And, again as always, there was the empty hole in his stomach, a vacuum that ran deep and produced only weakness. He felt starved and probably was. The chemicals usually induced vomiting as the intestines rejected the unnatural substance. It was strange, he reflected, opening his eyes and following the moving shafts of light, but those memories from years ago evoked the same self-protective instincts that had helped him then so many years ago. He could not waste energy; he had to conserve what strength he had. Regain new strength. Otherwise there was nothing but the numbed outrage and neither his mind nor his body could do anything about it.

There was a sound across the room! Then another and another after that! The grating sound of sliding metal told him that a bolt was being released; the sharp sound of a key followed by the twisting of a knob meant that the door in the far distant wall was about to be opened. It was, and a blinding burst of sunlight filled the cell. Converse shielded his eyes peering between his fingers. The blurred, frazzled silhouette of a man stood in the doorway carrying a flat object. The figure walked in and Joel, blinking, saw it was the chauffeur who had electronically searched him in the driveway.

The uniformed driver crossed to the table and deftly lowered the flat object; it was a tray, its contents covered by a cloth. It was only then that Converse's attention was drawn back to the sunlit doorway. Outside, milling about in anxious contempt was the pack of Dobermans, their shining black eyes continually shifting toward the door, their lips curled teeth bared in unending quiet snarls.

"GutenMorgen, main Herr," said Leifhelm's chauffeur, then shifting to English, 'Another beautiful day on the northern Rhine, no?'

"It's bright out there, if that's what you mean," replied Joel, his hand still cupping his eyes. "I suppose I should be grateful to be able to notice after last night."

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"Last night?" The German paused, then added quietly, "It was two nights ago, Amerikaner. You've been here for the past thirty-three hours."

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"Thirty?" Converse pushed himself up and swung his legs over the side of the cot. Instantly he was overcome by dizziness too much strength had been drained. Oh Christ! Don't waste movement. They'll be back. The bastards! "You bastards," he said out loud but without any real emotion. Then for the first time he realized he was shirtless, and noticed the bandage on his left arm between his elbow and his shoulder. It covered the gunshot wound. "Did somebody miss my head?" he asked.

"I'm told you inflicted the injury yourself. You tried to kill General Leifhelm but shot yourself when the others were taking your gun away."

"I tried to kill? With my nonexistent gun? The one you made sure I didn't have?"

"You were too clever for me, mein Herr."

"What happens now?"

"Now? Now you eat. I have instructions from the doctor. You begin with the Hafergrlitze how do you say? the porridge."

"Hot mush or cereal," said Joel. "With skimmed or powdered milk. Then some kind of soft-boiled eggs taken with pills. And if it all goes down, a little ground meat, and if that stays down, a few spoonfuls of crushed turnips or potatoes or squash. whatever's available."

"How do you know this?" asked the uniformed man, genuinely surprised.

"It's a basic diet," said Converse cynically. "Variations with the territory and the supplies. I once had some comparatively good meals.... You're planning to put me under again."

The German shrugged. "I do what I'm told. I bring you food. Here, let me help you."

Joel looked up as the chauffeur approached the cot. "Under other circumstances I'd spit in your goddamned face. But if I did I wouldn't have that slight, slight possibility of spitting in it some other time. You may help me. Be careful of my arm."

"You are a very strange man, main Herr."

"And you're all perfectly normal citizens catching the early train to Larchmont so you can put down ten martinis before going to the PTA meeting."

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"Was ist? I know of no such meeting. '

'They're keeping it secret; they don't want you to know. If I were you, I'd get out of town before

they make you president."

"Mich? President?"

"Just help me to the chair, like a good ale Aryan boy, will you?"

"Hah, you are being amusing, ja?"

"Probably not," said Converse, easing into the wooden chair. 'it's a terrible habit I wish I could break.' He looked up at the bewildered German. "You see, I keep trying," he said in utter seriousness.

Three more days passed, his only visitor the chauffeur accompanied by the sullen, high-strung pack of Dobermans. His well-searched suitcase was given to him, scissors and a nail file removed from the traveling kit his electric razor intact. It was their way of telling him that his presence had been removed from Bonn, leaving him to painfully speculate about the life or death of Connal Fitzpatrick. Yet there was an inconsistency and, as such, the basis for hope. No allusions were made to his attache case, either with visual evidence the page of a dossier, perhaps or through his brief exchanges with Leifhelm's driver. The generals of Aquitaine were men of immense egos; if they had those materials in their possession, they would have let him know it.

As to his conversations with the chauffeur, they were limited to questions on his part and disciplined pleasantries on the German's part, no answers at all at least, none that made any sense:

"How long is this going to go on? When am I going to see someone other than you?"

"There is no one here, sir, except the staff. General Leifhelm is away in Essen, I believe. Our instructions are to feed you well and restore your health."

Incommunicado. He was in solitary.

But the food was not like that given to prisoners anywhere else. Roasts of beef and lamb, chops, poultry and fresh fish; vegetables that unquestionably had come directly from a nearby garden. And wine which at first Joel was reluctant to drink, but when he did, even he knew it was superior.

On the second day, as much to keep from thinking as from anything else, he had begun to perform mild exer

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cises as he had done so many years ago. By the third day he had actually worked up a sweat during
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a running-in-place session, a healthy sweat, telling him the drugs had left his body. The wound on his arm was still there, but he thought about it less and less. Curiously, it was not serious.

On the fourth day questions and reflections were no longer good enough. Confinement and the maddening frustration of having no answers forced him to turn elsewhere, to the practical, to the most necessary consideration facing him. Escape. Regardless of the outcome the attempt had to be made. Whatever plans Delavane and his disciples in Aquitaine had for him, they obviously included parading a drugless man more than likely a dead man with no narcotics in his system. Otherwise they would have killed him at once, disposing of his body in any number of untraceable ways. He had done it before. Could he do it again?

He was not rotting in a rat-infested cell and there was no terrible gunfire in the distant darkness, but it was far more important that he succeed now than it ever was eighteen years ago. And there was an extraordinary irony: eighteen years ago he had wanted to break out and tell whoever would listen to him about a madman in Saigon who sent countless children to their deaths or worse, who left those children to suffer broken minds and hollow feelings for the rest of their lives. Now he had to tell the world about that same madman.

He had to get out. He had to tell the world what he knew.

Converse stood on the wooden chair, the short curtain pulled back, and peered between the black metal bars outside. His cabin, or cottage, or jailhouse, whatever it was, seemed to have been lowered from above onto a clearing in the forest. There was a wall of tall trees and thick foliage as far as he could see in either direction, a dirt path angling to the right beneath the window. The clearing itself extended no more than twenty feet in front of the structure before the dense greenery began; he presumed it was the same on all sides. It was from the other window to the left of the door except that there was no path below, only a short, coarse stubble of brown grass. The two front windows were the only views he had. The rest of this isolated jailhouse consisted of unbroken walls and a small ceiling vent in the bathroom but no other openings.

All he could be certain of, since the chauffeur and the

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dogs and the warm meals were proof he was still within the grounds of Leifhelm's estate, was that the river could not be far away. He could not see it, but it was there and it gave him hope more than hope, a sense of morbid exhilaration rooted in his

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memory. Once before the waters of a river had been his friend, his guide, ultimately the lifeline that had taken him through the worst of his journey. A tributary of the Huong Khe south of Duc Tho had rushed him silently at night under bridges and past patrols and the encampments of three battalions. The waters of the Rhine, like the currents of the Huong Khe years ago, would be his way out.

The multiple sounds of animal feet pounding the earth preceded the streaking dark coats of the Dobermans as they raced belong the window, instantly stopping and crowding angrily in front of the door. The chauffeur was on his way with a breakfast no prisoner in isolation should expect. Joel climbed off the chair and quickly carried it back to the table, setting it in place and going to his cot. He sat down, kicked off his shoes, and lay back on the pillow, his legs stretched out over the rumpled blanket.

The bolt was slid back, the key inserted and the heavy knob turned; the door opened. As he did every time he entered, the German pushed the center of the door with his right hand as he supported the tray with his left. However this morning he was gripping a bulging object in his right hand, the blinding sunlight obscuring it for Converse. The man walked in and, more awkwardly than usual, placed the tray on the table.

' I have a pleasant surprise for you, main Herr. I spoke with General Leifhelm on the telephone last night and he asked about you. I told him you were recovering splendidly and that I had changed the bandage on your unfortunate injury. Then it occurred to him that you had nothing to read and he was very upset. So an hour ago I drove into Bonn and purchased three days of the International Herald Tribune. " The driver placed the rolled-up newspapers next to the tray on the table.

But it was not the issues of the Herald Tribune that Joel stared at. It was the German's neck and the upper outside pocket of his uniform jacket. For looped around that neck and angled over to that pocket was a thin silver chain, with the protruding top of a tubular silver whistle clearly visible against the dark fabric. Converse shifted his eyes to the door;

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the Dobermans were sitting on their haunches, each breathing noisily and salivating, but, to all intents and purposes, immobile. Converse remembered his arrival at the general's monumental lair and the strange Englishman who had controlled the dogs with a silver whistle.

'Tell Leifhelm I appreciate the reading material, but I'd be even more grateful if I could get out of this place for a few minutes. "

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'la, with a plane ticket to the beaches in the south of France, rein?"

"For Christ's sake, just to take a walk and stretch my legs what's the matter? Can't you and that drooling band of mas tiffs handle one unarmed man getting a little air? . . . No you're probably too frightened to try." Joel paused, then added in an insulting mock-German accent. "'I do vot I am tort.

The driver's smile faded. "The other evening you said you would not apologise but instead break my neck. That was a joke. Do you understand? A joke I find so amusing I can laugh at it."

"Hey, come on," said Converse, changing his tone as he swung his legs off the cot and sat up. "You're ten years younger than I am and twenty times stronger. I felt insulted and reacted stupidly, but if you think I'd raise a hand against you you're out of your mind. I m sorry. You've been decent to me and I was stupid again."

"la, you were stupid," said the German without rancor "But also you were right. I do as I am told. And why not? It is a privilege to take orders from General Leifhelm. He has Been gut to me."

"Have you been with him long?"

"Since Brussels. I was a sergeant in the Federal Republic's border patrols. He heard about my problem and took an interest in my case. I was transferred to the Brabant garrison and made his chauffeur."

"What was your problem? I'm a lawyer, you know."

Dhde charge was that I strangled a man with my "

'ha. He was trying to put a knife in my stomach and lower. He said I took advantage of his daughter. I took no advantage; it was not necessary. She was a whore it was in the clothes she wore, the way she walked es ist klar! The father was a pig!"

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Joel looked at the man, at the clouded malevolence in his eyes. "I can understand General Leifhelm's sympathies," he said.

"Now you know why I do as I am told."

"Clearly."

He is calling for his messages at noon. I shall ask him about your walking. You understand that one word from me and the Dobermans will rip your body from its bones."

"Nice puppies," said Converse, addressing the

pack of dogs outside.

Noon came and the privilege was granted. The walk was to take place after lunch when the driver returned to remove the tray. He returned, and after several severe warnings Joel ventured outside, the Dobermans crowding around him black nostrils flared, white teeth glistening, bluish-red tongues flattened out in anticipation. Converse looked around; for the first time he saw that the small house was made of thick, solid stone. The unique squad began its constitutional up the path, Joel growing bolder as the dogs lost a degree of interest in him under the harsh admonitions of the German's commands. They began racing ahead and regrouping in circles, snapping at one another but always whipping their heads back or across at their master and his prisoner. Converse walked faster.

"I used to jog a lot back home," he lied.

"Was ist? 'Jog'?"

"Run. It's good for the circulation."

"You run now, main Herr, you will have no circulation. The Dobermans will see to it."

"I've heard of people getting coronaries from jogging too," said Joel, slowing down, but not reducing the speed with which his eyes darted in all directions. The sun was directly overhead; it was no help in determining direction.

The dirt path was like a marked single line in an intricate network of hidden trails. It was bordered by thick foliage, more often than not roofed by low-hanging branches, then breaking open into short stretches of wild grass that might or might not lead to other paths. They reached a fork, the leg to the right curving sharply into a tunnel of greenery. The dogs instinctively raced into it but were stopped by the chauffeur, who shouted commands in German. The Dobermans spun around, bouncing off each other, and returned to the fork, then raced into the wider path on the left. It was an in

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cline and they started up a steep hill, the trees shorter and less full, the bramble bush wilder, coarser, lower to the ground. Wind, thought Converse. A valley wind; a wind whipping up from a trough, a long narrow slice in the earth, the kind of wind a pilot of a small plane avoided at the first sign of weather. A river.

It was there. To his left; they were traveling east. The Rhine was below, perhaps a mile beyond the lower line of tall trees. He had seen enough. He began breathing audibly. The exhilaration inside him was intense; he could have walked for miles. He was back on the banks of the Huong Khe, the dark

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watery lifeline that would take him away from the
Mekong cages and the cells and the chemicals. He
had done it before he was going to do it again!

"Okay, Field Marshal," he said to Leifhelm's
driver, looking at the silver whistle in the German's
pocket. "I'm not in as good shape as I thought I was.
This is a mountain! Don't you have any flat pastures
or grazing fields?"

"I do as I am told, mein Herr, " replied the man,
grinning. "Those are nearer the main house. This is
where you must walk."

"This is where I say thank you and no thank you.
Take me back to my little grass shack and I'll play
you a simple

"I do not understand."

"I'm bushed and I haven't finished the
newspapers. Seriously, I want to thank you. I really
needed the air."

"Sehr gut You are a pleasant fellow."

"You have no idea, good ale Aryan boy."

"Ach, so amusing. Die Juden sind in Israel, rein?
Better than in Cermany."

Nate Simon would love you. He'd take your case
for nothing just to blow it No, he wouldn't. He'd
probably give you the best defense you ever had."

Converse stood on the wooden chair under the
window to the left of the door. All he had to hear
and see was the sound and the sight of the dogs;
after that he had twenty or thirty seconds. The
faucets in the bathroom were turned on, the door
open; there was sufficient time to run across the
room, flush the toilet, close the door and return to
the chair. But he would not be standing on it.
Instead, it would be gripped in his hands, laterally.
The sun was descending rapidly; in an

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hour it would be dark. Darkness had been his friend
before as the waters of a river had been his friend.
They had to be his friends again. They had to be!

The sounds came first racing paws and nasal
explosions then the sight of gleaming dark coats of
animal fur rushing in circles in front of the
jailhouse. Joel ran to the bathroom, concentrating
on the seconds as he waited for the sliding of the
bolt. It came; he flushed the toilet, then closed the
bathroom door and raced back to the chair. He
raised it and stood in place, his legs and feet locked
to the floor. The door was opened several
inches only seconds now then the German's right
hand pushed it back.

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"Herr Converse? Wo sind . . . Bach, die Toilette. "

The chauffeur walked in with the tray, and Joel swung the chair with all his strength into the German's head. The driver arched back off his feet, tray and dishes crashing to the floor. He was stunned, nothing more. Converse kicked the door shut and brought the heavy chair repeatedly down on the chauffeur's skull until the man went limp, blood and saliva pouring down his eyes and face.

The phalanx of dogs had lurched as one at the suddenly closed door and began to bark maniacally while clawing at the wood.

Joel grabbed the silver chain, slipped it over the unconscious German's head and pulled the silver whistle out of the pocket. There were four tiny holes on the tube; each meant something. He pulled the remaining chair to the window at the right of the door, climbed up and put the whistle to his lips. He covered the first hole and blew into the mouthpiece. There was no sound, but it had an effect.

The Dobermans went mad! They began to attack the door in suicidal assaults. He removed his finger, placed it over the second hole and blew.

The dogs were confused; they circled around each other snapping, yelping, snarling, but still they would not take their concentration off the door. He tried the third tiny hole and blew into the whistle with all the breath he had.

Suddenly, the dogs stopped all movement, their tapered close-cropped ears upright, shifting they were waiting for a second signal. He blew again, again with all the breath that was in him. It was the sound they were waiting for, and again, as one, the pack raced to the right beneath the window,

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pounding to some other place where they were meant to be by command.

Converse leaped down from the chair and knelt by the unconscious German. He went rapidly through the driver's pockets, taking his billfold and all the money he had, as well as his wristwatch and his gun. For an instant Joel looked at the weapon, loathing the memories it evoked. He shoved it under his belt and went to the door.

Outside, he pulled the heavy door shut, heard the click of the lock and slid the bolt in place. He ran up the dirt path estimating the distance to the fork where the right leg was verboten and the left led to the steep hill and the sight of the Rhine below. It was actually no more than two hundred yards away, but the winding curves and the thick bordering

The Aquitaine Progression foliage made it seem longer. If he remembered accurately and on the walk back he was like a pilot without instruments relying on sightings there was a flat stretch of about eighty feet below the fork.

He reached it, the same flat area, the same diverging paths up ahead. He ran faster.

Voices! Angry, questioning? Not far away and coming nearer! He dove into the brush to his right, rolling over the needle-like bushes until he could barely see through the foliage. Two men walked rapidly into his limited view, talking loudly, as if arguing but somehow not with each other.

"Was haben die Hunde?"

"Die sollten bat Heinrich sein!"

Joel had no idea what they were saying; he only knew as they passed him that they were heading for the isolated cabin. He also knew that they would not spend much time trying to raise anyone inside before they took more direct methods. And once they did, all the alarms in Leifhelm's fortress would be activated. Time was measured for him in minutes and he had a great deal of ground to cover. He crept cautiously out of the brush on his hands and feet. The Germans were out of sight, beyond a rounding curve. He got up and raced for the fork and the steep hill to the left.

The three guards at the immense iron gate that was the entrance to Leifhelm's estate were bewildered. The pack of Dobermans were circling around impatiently in the out grass, obviously confused.

"Why are they here?" asked one man.

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"It makes no sense!" replied a second.

"Heinrich has let them loose, but why?" said the third.

"Nobody tells us anything," muttered the first guard, shrugging. "If we don't hear something in the next few minutes, we should call."

"I don't like this!" shouted the second guard. "I'm calling right now!"

The first guard walked into the gatehouse and picked up the telephone.

Converse ran up the steep hill, his breath short, his lips dry, his heartbeat thundering in his chest. There it was! The river! He started running down, gathering speed, the wind whipping his face, stinging him. It was exhilarating. He was back! He was racing through the sudden, open clearings of another jungle, no fellow prisoners to worry about, only the outrage within himself

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to prod him, to make him break through the barriers
and somehow, somewhere, strike back at those who had
stripped him naked and raped an innocence
and goddamn it turned him into an animal! A
reasonably pleasant human being had been turned into
a half-man with more hatreds than a person should live
with. He would get back at them all, all enemies, all
animals!

He reached the bottom of the open slope of gnarled
grass

and bush, the trees and intertwining underbrush
once more

a wall to be penetrated. But he had his bearings; no
matter
how dense the woods, he simply had to keep the last
rays of
the sun on his left, heading due north, and he would
reach
the river.

Rapid explosions made him spin around. Five
gunshots followed one upon the other in the distance. It
was easy to imagine the target: a circle of wood around
the cylinder of a lock in the door of an isolated cabin in
the forest. His jailhouse was being assaulted, entrance
gained. The minutes were growing shorter.

And then two distinctly different sounds pierced the
twilight, interwoven in dissonance. The first was a series
of short, staccato bursts of a high-pitched siren. The
second, between and under the repeated blasts, was the
hysterical yelping of running dogs. The alarms had been
set off; scraps of discarded clothing and slept-on sheets
would be pressed onto inflamed nostrils and the
Dobermans would come after him, no quarter

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considered no cornered prey only animal teeth
ripping human flesh a satisfactory reward.

Converse plunged into the wall of green and ran
as fast as he could, dodging, crouching, lurching
from one side to the other, his arms outstretched, his
hands working furiously against the strong, supple
impediment of the woods. His face and body were
repeatedly whipped by slashing branches and
obstinate limbs, his feet continually tripped by fallen
debris and exposed roots. He stumbled more times
than he could count, each time bringing an instant of
silence that emphasized the sound of the dogs
somewhere between the fork and the hill and the
lower forest. They were no farther away, perhaps
nearer. They were nearer, they had entered the
woods. All around him were the echoes of their
hysteria, punctuated by howling yelps of frustration
as one or another or several were caught in the
tangled ground cover, straining and roaring to be
free to join the pursuit.

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The water! He could see the water through the trees. Sweat was now rolling down his face, the salt blinding his eyes and stinging the scrapes on his neck and chin. His hands were bleeding from the sharp nettles and the coarse bark everywhere.

He fell, his foot plunging into a hole burrowed by some riverbank animal, his ankle twisted and in pain.

He got up, pulling at his leg, freeing his foot, and, limping badly, tried to resume running. The Dobermans were gaining, the yelping and the harsh barking louder and more furious; they had picked up his direct scent, the trail of undried sweat maddening them, preparing them for the kill.

The riverbank! It was filled with soft mud and floating debris, a webbing of nature's garbage caught in a cavity, whirling slowly, waiting for a strong current to pull it all away. Joel grabbed the handle of the chauffeur's gun, not to pull it out but to secure it as he limped down the bank to look for the quickest way into the water.

He heard nothing until the instant when a massive roar came out of the shadows and the huge body of an animal flew through the air over the riverbank directly at him. The monstrous face of the dog was contorted with fury, the eyes on fire, the enormous jaw widest all teeth and a gaping, shining black mouth. Converse fell to his knees as the Doberman whipped past his right shoulder, ripping his shirt with its upper eye teeth and flipping over on its back in the mud. The

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momentary defeat was more than the animal could stand. It writhed furiously, rolling over, snarling, then rising on its hind legs, lunged up from the mud for Joel's groin.

The gun was in his hand. Converse fired, blowing off the top of the attack dog's head; blood and tissue sprayed the shadows, and the slack, shining jaws fell into his crotch.

The rest of the pack was now racing toward the bank, accompanied by ear-shattering crescendos of animal cries. Joel threw himself into the water and swam as rapidly as he could away from the shoreline; the weapon was an impediment but he knew he could not let it go.

Years ago centuries ago he had desperately needed a weapon, knowing it could be the difference between survival and death, and forgive days none could be had. But on that fifth day he had found one on the banks of the Huong Khe. He had }boated half underwater past a squad on patrol, and found the point ten minutes later downriver too far from the scout's unit to be logical a man perha ps thinking angry thoughts that made him walk faster, or bored

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with his job and wanting a few moments to be by himself and out of it all. Whichever, it made no difference to that soldier. Converse had killed him with a rock from the river and had taken his gun. He had fired that gun twice, twice saving his life before he reached an advance unit south of Phu Loc.

As he pushed against the shoreline currents of the Rhine, Joel suddenly remembered. This was the fifth day of his imprisonment in Leifhelm's compound no jungle cell, to be sure, but no less a prison camp. He had done it! And on the fifth day a weapon was his! There were omens wherever one wished to find them; he did not believe in omens, but for the moment he accepted the possibility.

He was in the shadows of the river now, the surrounding mountains blocking the dying sun. He paddled in place and turned. Back on shore, at the cavity in the bank that had been his plank to the water, the dogs were circling in confused anger, snarling, yelping, as several ventured down to sniff their slain leader, each urinating as it did so territory and status were being established. The beams of powerful flashlights suddenly broke through the trees. Converse swam farther out; he had survived searchlights in the Mekong. He had no fear of them now; he had been there here and he knew when he had won.

He let the outer currents carry him east along the river.

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Somewhere there would be other lights, lights that would lead him to shelter and a telephone. He had to get everything in place and build his brief quickly, but he could do it. Yet the attorney in him told him that a man with a bandaged gunshot wound in soaked clothing and speaking a foreign language in the streets was no match for the disciples of George Marcus Delavane; they would find him. So it would have to be done another way with whatever artifices he could muster. He had to get to a telephone. He had to place an overseas call. He could do it; he would do it! The Huong Khe faded; the Rhine was now his lifeline.

Swimming breaststroke, the gun still gripped in his hand, his arm smarting in the water, he saw the lights of a village in the distance.

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Valerie frowned as she listened on the phone in her studio, the spiraling cord outstretched as she reached over and placed a brush in the track of her easel. Her eyes scanned the sunlit dunes outside the glass doors, but her mind was on the words she was hearing, words that implied things without saying them. "Larry, what's wrong with you?" she interrupted, unable to hold herself in check any longer. "Joel's not

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just an employee or a junior partner, he's your friend
! You sound like you're trying to build a case against
him. What's that term you all use? . . .
Circumstantial, that's it. He was here, he was there;
someone said this and somebody else said that."

"I'm trying to understand, Val," protested Talbot,
who had called from his office in New York. "You've
got to try to understand too. There's a great deal I
can't tell you because I've been instructed by people
whose offices I have to respect to say very little or
preferably nothing at all. I'm bending those
instructions because Joel is my friend and I want to
help."

"All right, let's go back," said Valerie. "What
exactly were you leading up to?"

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'I know it's none of my damned business and I
wouldn't ask it if I didn't think I had to '

"111 accept that," agreed Val. "Now, what is it?"

"Well, I know you and Joel had your problems,"
continued the senior partner of Talbot, Brooks and
Simon, as though he were referring to an
inconsequential spat between children. "But there
are problems and there are problems."

"Larry," interrupted Val again. "There were
problems. We're divorced. That means the problems
were serious.'

"Was physical abuse one of them?" asked Talbot
quickly in a low voice, the words obviously
repugnant to him.

Valerie was stunned; it was a question she
would never have expected. "What?"

You know what I mean. In fits of anger did he
strike you? Cause you bodily harm?"

'You're not in a courtroom, and the answer is
no, of course not. I might have welcomed it at
least the anger.'

1 beg your pardon?"

"Nothing," said Valerie, recovering from her
astonishment. ' I don't know what prompted you to
ask, but it couldn't be further from the truth. Joel
had far more effective ways to deflate my ego than
hitting me. Among them, dear Larry was his
dedication to the career of one Joel Converse in
Talbot, Brooks and Simon."

"I'm aware of that, my dear, and I'm sorry.
Those complaints are perennial in the divorce
courts and I'm not sure there's anything we can do
about them not in this day and age, perhaps not

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ever. But that's different. I'm talking about his black
moods we knew he had them."

"Do you know any rational person who doesn't?"
asked the former Mrs. Converse. "This isn't really
the best of all possible worlds, is it?"

"No, it isn't. But then Joel lived through a
period of time in a far worse world than most of us
will ever know or could imagine. I can't believe he
emerged from it without a scar or two "

Valerie paused, touched by the older man's
unadorned directness; it had its basis in concern.
"You're sweet Larry and I suspect you're right in
fact, I know it. So I think you should tell me more
than you have. The term physical abuse is what you
lawyers call a leading something-or-other. It's not
fair because it could also be misleading. Come on,
Larry, be fair. He's not my husband anymore, but
we didn't break apart

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because he chased girls or bashed my head in. I may
not want to be married to him but I respect him.
He's got his problems and I've got mine, and now
you're implying his are a lot bigger. What's
happened?"

Talbot was silent for a moment, then blurted out
the words, again quickly, quietly; once more they
were obviously repugnant to him. "They say he
assaulted a man in Paris without provocation. The
man died."

"No, that's impossible! He didn't, he couldn't!"

"That's what he told me, but he lied. He told me
he was in Amsterdam, but he wasn't. He said he was
going back to Paris to clear things up, but he didn't
go. He was in Germany he's still somewhere in
Germany. He hasn't left the country and Interpol
has a warrant for him; they're searching everywhere.
Word reached him to turn himself in to the
American embassy but he refused. He's
disappeared."

"Oh, my God, you're all so wrong!" exploded
Valerie. "You don't know him! If what you say
happened, he was attacked first physically
attacked and had no choice but to hit back!"

"Not according to an impartial witness who didn't
know either man."

"Then he's not impartial, he's lying! Listen to me.
I lived with that man for four years and, except for
a few trips, all of them in New York City. I've seen
him accosted by drunks and street garbage punks
he could have pushed through the pavements, and
perhaps some of them he should have but I never
saw him so much as take a step forward. He'd simply

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raise the palms of his hands and walk away. A few times some damn fools would call him names and he'd just stand there and look at them. And let me tell you, Larry, that look was enough to make you feel cold all over. But that's all he'd do, never anything more."

"Val, I want to believe you. I want to believe it was self-defence, but he ran away, he's disappeared. The embassy can help him, protect him, but he won't come in."

"Then he's frightened. That can happen, but it was always for only a few minutes, usually at night when he'd wake up. He'd bolt up, his eyes shut so tight his whole face was a mass of wrinkles. It never lasted long, and he said it was perfectly natural and not to worry about it he didn't, he said. And I don't think he really did; he wanted all that in the past, none of it was ever mentioned."

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"Perhaps it should have been," said Talbot softly.

Valerie replied with equal softness, "douche. Larry. Don't think I haven't thought about that these last couple of years. But whatever's happened he's acting this way only because he's afraid you know it's quite possible he's been hurt. Or, oh my CrJd "

"All the hospitals and registered doctors have been checked," Talbot broke in.

'Well, damn it, there's got to be a reason! This isn't like him and you know it!"

"That's just it, Val. Nothing he's done is like the man I know."

The ex-Mrs. Converse stiffened. "To use one of Joel's favorite expressions," she said apprehensively, "clarification please?"

"Why not?" answered Talbot, the question was directed as much at himself as her. "Perhaps you can shed some light; nobody else can."

"What about this man in Paris, the one who died?"

"There's not much to tell; apparently he was a chauffeur for one of those limousine services. According to the witness a basement guard in the hotel, Joel approached him, yelled something at him and pushed him out the door. There were sounds of a scuffle and a few minutes later the man was found severely beaten in an alley."

'It's ridiculous! What did Joel say?"

"That he walked out the door, saw two men fighting and ran to tell the doorman on the way to

his taxi."

"That's what he'd have done," said Val firmly.

"The doorman at the George Cinq says it didn't happen. The police say follicles of hair found on the beaten man matched those in Joel's shower."

"Utterly unbelievable!"

"Let's say there was provocation we don't know about," Talhot went on rapidly. "It doesn't explain what happened later, but before I tell you, I want to ask you another question. You'll understand."

"I don't understand a single thing! What is it?"

"During those periods of depression, his dark moods, did Joel ever fantasise? I mean, did he indulge in what psychiatrists call role-playing?"

"You mean did he assume other personalities, other kinds of behavior?"

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Exactly."

'Absolutely not."

' Oh."

"Oh, what? Let's have it, Larry."

"Talking about what's believable and what isn't, you're in for a jolt, my dear. According to those people who don't want me to say very much and you'll have to take my word they know Joel flew into Germany claiming he was involved in an undercover investigation of the embassy in Bonn."

"Perhaps he was! He was on a leave of absence from T. B. and S., wasn't he?"

"On an unrelated matter in the private sector, that much we know. There is no investigation undercover or otherwise of the embassy in Bonn. Frankly, the people who reached me were from the State Department."

"Oh, my God . . . " Valerie fell silent, but before the lawyer could speak, she whispered, "Geneva. That horrible business in Geneva!"

"If there's a connection and both Nathan and I considered it first it's so buried it can't be followed."

"It's there. It's where it all started."

"Assuming your husband's rational."

"He's not my husband and he is rational!"

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"The scars, Val. There had to be scars. You agreed with me."

'Not the kind you're talking about. Not killing, and Iying and running away That's not Joel! That isn't wasn't my husband!"

"The mind is a highly complex and delicate instrument. The stresses of the past can leap forward from years ago "

"Get off it, Larry!" shouted Valerie. "Save it for a jury, but don't pin that nonsense on Converse!"

"You're upset."

"You're damned right I am! Because you're looking for explanations that don't fit the man! They fit what you've been told. By those people you say you have to respect."

"Only in the sense that they're knowledgeable they have access to information we don't have. Then there's the overriding fact that they hadn't the faintest idea who Joel Converse was until the American Bar Association gave them the address and telephone number of Talbot, Brooks and Simon.

"And you believed them? with everything you know

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about Washington you simply accepted their word? How many fumes did Joel come back from a trip to Washington and say the same thing to me? 'Larry says they're Iying. They don't know what to do, so they're Iying.' "

'Valerie," said the attorney sternly. "This isn't a case of bureaucratic clearance, and after all these years I think I can tell the difference between someone playing games and a man who's genuinely angry angry and frightened, I should add. The man who reached me was an Undersecretary of State, Brewster Tolland I had a call-back confirmation and he wasn't putting on an act. He was appalled, furious, and, as I say, a very worried man."

"What did you tell him?"

"The truth, of course. Not only because it was the right thing to do, but it wouldn't help Joel to do anything else. If he's ill he needs help, not complicity."

"And you deal with Washington every week."

"Several times a week, and of course it was a consideration."

"I'm sorry, Larry, that was unfair."

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"But realistic, and I meant what I said. It wouldn't help Joel to lie for him. You see, I really believe something's happened. He's not himself."

"Wait a minute," cried Valerie, the obvious striking her. "Maybe it's not Joel!"

"It's him," said Talbot simply.

"Why? Just because people you don't know in Washington say it is?"

"No, Val," replied the lawyer. "Because I spoke with Rene in Paris before Washington entered the picture."

'`Maffilon?~,

"Joel went to Paris to ask for Rene's help. He lied to him just as he lied to me, but it was more than the lies Mattilon and I agreed on that. It was something he saw in Joel's eyes something I heard in his voice. An unhooking, a form of desperation; Rene saw it and I heard it. He tried to conceal it from both of us but he couldn't. When I last spoke to him, he hung up before we'd finished talking, in the middle of the sentence, his voice echoing like a zombie's."

Valerie stared at the harsh, dancing reflections of sunlight off the waters of Cape Ann. "Rene agreed with you?" she asked, barely above a whisper.

"Everything I've just told you we said to each other."

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' Larry, I'm frightened.'

ChaimAbrahms walked into the room, his heavy boots pounding the floor. 'So he did it!' shouted the Israeli. 'The Mossad was right, he s a hellhound!'

Erich Leifhelm sat behind his desk, the only other person in the book-lined study. "Patrols, alarms, dogs!" cried the German, slamming his frail hand on the red blotter. "How did he do it?"

"I repeat a hellhound that's what our specialist called him. The longer he's restricted, the angrier he gets. It goes back a long time. So our provocateur starts his odyssey before we planned. Have you been' in touch with the others?"

"I've called London," said Leifhelm, breathing deeply. "He'll reach Paris, and Bertholdier will have the units flown up from Marseilles, one to Brussels, the other here to Bonn. We can't waste an hour."

"You're looking for him now, of course.

"Naturlich! Every inch of the shoreline for miles

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in both directions. Every back road and path that
leads up from the river and into the city.'

"He can elude you, he's proven it.

"Where can he go, sabre? To his own embassy?
There he's a dead man. To the Bonn police or the
Staatspolizei? He'll be put in an armored van and
brought back here. He goes nowhere."

"I heard that when he left Paris, and I heard it
again when he flew into Bonn. Errors were made in
both places both costing a great many hours. I tell
you I'm more concerned now than at any moment in
three wars and a lifetime of skirmishes."

"Be reasonable, Chaim, and try to be calm. He
has no clothes but what he wears in the river and
the mud, he possesses no identification, no passport,
no money. He doesn't speak the language "

"He has money!" yelled Abrahms, suddenly
remembering. "When he was under the needle, he
spoke of a large sum of money promised in Geneva
and delivered on Mykonos."

"And where is it?" asked Leifhelm. "In this desk,
that's where it is. Nearly seventy thousand American
dollars. He hasn't got a deutsche mark in his pocket,
or a watch or a piece of jewelry. A man in filthy,
soaked clothing, with no identification, no money, no
coherent use of the language, and telling

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an outlandish tale of imprisonment involving der
General Leifhelm, would undoubtedly be put in jail
as a vagrant or a psychopath or both. In which case,
we shall be informed instantly and our people will
bring him to us. And bear in mind, sabre, by ten
o'clock tomorrow morning it won't make any
difference. That was your contribution, the Mossad's
ingenuity. We simply had the resources to make it
come to pass as is said in the Old Testament."

Abrahms stood in front of the enormous desk,
arms akimbo above the pockets of his safari jacket.
' So the Jew and the select marshal set it all in
motion. Ironical, isn't it, Nazi?"

"Not as much as you think, Jude. Impurity, as
with beauty, is in the eye of the frightened beholder.
You are not my enemy; you never were. If more of
us in the old days had your commitment, your
audacity, we never would have lost the war."

'I know that,' said the sabre. 'I watched and
listened when you reached the English Channel.
You lost it then. You were weak."

"It was not us! It was the frightened Debutanten in
Ber

"Then keep them away when we create a truly new order, Cerman. We can't afford weakness."

"You do try me, Chaim."

"I mean to."

The chauffeur felt the bandages on his face, the swelling around his eyes and his lips painful to the touch. He was in his own room, where the doctor had turned on the television probably as an insult, as he could barely see it.

He was disgraced. The prisoner had escaped in spite of his own formidable talents and the supposedly impassable pack of Dobermans. The American had used the silver whistle, that much the other guards had told him, and the fact that it had been removed from his neck was a further embarrassment.

He would not add to his disgrace. With blurred vision he had gone through his pockets which no one in the panic of the chase had thought to do and found that his billfold, his expensive Swiss watch, and all his money had been taken. He would say nothing about them. He was embarrassed enough, and any such revelations might be cause for dismissal or conceivably his death.

* A: *

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Joel headed for the shoreline as fast as he could, submerging his head underwater whenever the beam of the searchlight swept toward him. The boat was a large motor launch, its bass-toned engines signifying power, its sudden turns and circles evidence of rapid maneuverability. It hugged the overgrown banks, then would sweep out toward the open water at the slightest sign of an object in the river.

Converse felt the soft mud below; he half swam, half trudged toward the darkest spot on the shore, the chauffeur's gun securely in his belt. The boat approached, its penetrating beam studying every foot, every moving branch or limb or cluster of river weeds. Joel took a deep breath and slowly lowered himself under the water, his face angled up toward the surface, his eyes open, his vision a muddy dark blur. The searchlight grew brighter and seemed to hover above him for an eternity; he inched his way to the left and the beam moved away. He rose to the surface, his lungs bursting, but suddenly realized he could make no sound, he could not fill his chest with gasps of air. For directly above him, less than five feet away loomed the broad stern of the motor launch, bobbing in the water as if idling. The dark figure of a man was peering through very large binoculars at the riverbank.

Converse was bewildered; it was too dark now to

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see anything even with magnification. Then he remembered, and the memory accounted for the size of the binoculars. The man was focusing through infrared lenses; they had been used by patrols in Southeast Asia and were often the difference, he had been told, between search-and-destroy and search-and-be-destroyed. They revealed objects in the darkness, soldiers in the darkness.

The boat moved forward, but the idle increased only slightly, entering the slowest of trawling speeds. Again Joel was confused. What had brought Leifhelm's searching party to this particular spot on the riverfront? There were several other boats behind and out in the distance, their searchlights sweeping the water, but they kept moving, circling. Why did the huge motor launch concentrate on this stretch of the shore? Could they have spotted him through infrared binoculars? If they had, they were proceeding very strangely; the North Vietnamese had been far swifter more aggressive, more effective.

Silently, Converse lowered himself beneath the surface and breaststroked out beyond the boat. Seconds later he

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raised his head above the water, his vision clear, and he began to understand the odd maneuverings of Leifhelm's patrol. Beyond the darkest part of the riverbank into which he had lurched for concealment were the lights he had seen eight or nine minutes ago, before the launch and its searchlight monopolized all his attention. He had thought they were the lights of a small village, but he was in the wrong part of the world. Instead they were the inside lights of four or five small houses, a river colony with a common dock, summer homes perhaps of those fortunate enough to own waterfront property.

If there were houses and a dock, there had to be a drive an open passage up to the road or roads leading into Bonn and the surrounding towns. Leifhelm's men were combing every inch of the riverbank, cautiously, quietly, the searchlights angled down so as not to alarm the inhabitants or forewarn the fugitive if he had reached the cluster of cottages and was on his way up to the unseen road or roads. A ship's radio would be activated, its frequency aligned to those in cars roaming above, ready to spring the trap. In some ways it was the Huong Khe again for Joel, the obstacles far less primitive but no less lethal. And then as now there was a time to wait, to wait in the black silence and let the hunters make their moves.

They made them quickly. The launch slid into the dock, the powerful twin screws quietly churning in reverse, as a man jumped off the bow with a heavy line and looped it around a piling. Three others followed, instantly racing off the short pier

up onto the sloping lawn, one heading diagonally to the right, the other two toward the first house. What they were doing was obvious: one man would position himself in the bordering woods of the downhill entrance drive while his colleagues checked the houses, looking for signs of entry.

Converse's arms and legs began to feel like weights, each an anvil he could barely support, much less keep moving, but there was no choice. The beam of the searchlight kept moving up and down the base of the riverbank, its spill illuminating everything in its vicinity. A head surfacing at the wrong moment would be blown out of the water. Huang Khe. Tread water in the reeds. Do it! Don 't die!

He knew the waiting was no longer than thirty minutes, but it seemed more like thirty hours or thirty days suspended in a floating torture rack. His arms and legs were now in

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agony; sharp pains shot through his body everywhere; muscles formed cramps that he dispersed by holding his breath and floating in a fetal position, his thumbs pressing relentlessly into the cores of the knotted muscles. Twice while gasping for air he swallowed water, coughing it out below the surface, his nostrils drowning, and twice found the air again. There were moments when it crossed his inner consciousness that it would be so simple just to drift away. Huang Khe. Don't do it! Don 't die!

Finally through waterlogged eyes he saw the men returning. One, two . . . three? . . . They ran down to the dock, to the man with the rope. No! The man with the rope had rushed forward! His eyes were playing tricks! Only two men had run onto the dock, the first man joining them, asking questions. The line man returned to the piling and released the rope; the other two jumped on board. The first man once again joined his companions, now on the bow of the launch leaving another on shore, a lone observer somewhere unseen between the riverbank and the road above. Huang Khe. An infantry scout separated from his patrol.

The motor launch swung away from the dock and sped within a few feet past Joel, who was buffeted underwater by its wake. Once more the boat veered toward the shoreline and slowed down, its searchlight peering into the dense foliage of the bank, heading west, back toward Leifelm's estate. Converse held his head above the surface, his mouth wide open, swallowing all the air he could as he made his way slowly very slowly into the mud. He pulled himself up through the wet reeds and branches until he felt dry ground. Huang Khe. He pulled the underbrush over him as best he could, finally covering his upturned face. He would rest until he

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felt the blood flowing steadily if painfully through his limbs, until the muscles of his neck lost their tension it was always the neck; the neck was the warning signal and then he would consider the man on the dark hill above him.

He dozed, until a slapping wave below woke him. He pushed the branches and the leaves away from his face and looked at the chauffeur's watch on his wrist, squinting at the weak radium dial. He had slept for nearly an hour fitfully, to be sure, the slightest sounds forcing his eyelids briefly open, but he had rested. He rolled his neck back and forth, then moved his arms and legs. Everything still hurt, but the excruciating pain was gone. And now he faced a man on a hill above

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him. He tried to examine his thoughts. He was frightened, of course, but his anger would control that terrible fear, it had done so before, it would do so now. The objective was all that mattered some kind of sanctuary, a place where he could think and put things together and somehow make the most important telephone call in his life. To Larry Talbot and Nathan Simon in New York. Unless he could do these things he was dead as Connal Fitzpatrick was undoubtedly dead. Jesus! What had they done to him? A man with the purity of vengeance purely sought caught in a diseased web called Aquitaine! It was an unfair world.... But he could not think about it; he had to concentrate on a man on the hill.

He crept on his hands and knees. Stretch by stretch he crawled through the woods bordering the dirt road that wound up the hill from the lawn and the riverbank. Whenever a twig crunched or a rock was displaced he stopped, waiting for the moment to dissolve back into the sounds of the forest. He kept telling himself he had the advantage; he was the unexpected. It helped counteract the fear of the darkness and the knowledge that a physical confrontation was before him. Like the patrol scout years ago in the Huang Khe, that man above him now had things he needed. The combat could not be avoided, so it was best not to think about it but to simply force himself into a mind-set empty of any feeling, and do it. But do it well, his mind had to understand that, too. There could be no hesitation, no intrusions of conscience and no sound of a gun, only the use of the steel.

He saw him, oddly enough, silhouetted in the distant glare of a single streetlamp far above on a road. The man was leaning against the trunk of a tree and facing down, his sweep of vision taking in everything below. As Joel crept up the slope the space between his hands and knees became inches, the stops more frequent, silence more vital. He made his way in an arc above the tree and the man and then started down like a large cat descending on its prey. He was the predator he had once been long

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ago, everything blocked out but the requirement of the lifeline.

He was within six feet; he could hear the man's breathing. There was a snap beneath him. A branch The scout turned his eyes alive in the glare of light. Converse lunged, the barrel of the gun gripped in his hand. He crashed the steel handle into the German's temple and then into his throat. The man fell backward, dazed but not unconscious; he started to

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screarn..loel sprang for his enemy's neck and half choked him before bringing the steel handle down with all his strength on the German's forehead, instantly there was an eruption of blood and crushed tissue.

Silence. No movement. Anotile'; SC'C'llt separated from his patrol had been taken out. And as he had years ago, Converse permitted himself no feeling. it was done, and he had to go on.

The man's dry clothes, including the dark leather jacket, fit reasonably well. Like most small or medium-sized commanders, Leifhelm surrounded himself with tall men, as much to protect himself as to proclaim his superiority over his larger compatriots.

There was also another gull; Joel struggled with the clip, removed it, and threw it along with the weapon into the woods. The bonus came with the German's billfold; it contained a sizable sum of money as well as a frayed, much stamped passport. Apparently, this trusted employee of Leifhelm traveled widely for Aquitaine probably knowing nothing and being very expendable, but always available at the moment of decision. The man's shoes did not fit; they were too small. So Converse used his drenched clothing to wipe his own, and the German's dry socks helped to absorb some of the moisture of the leather inside. He covered the man with branches and walked up the hill to the road.

He stayed out of sight between the trees as five cars passed by, all sedans, all possibly belonging to Erich Leifhelm. Then he saw a bright-yellow Volkswagen come into view, weaving slightly. He stepped out and held up his hands, the gesture of a man in trouble.

The small car stopped a blond girl in the passenger seat, the driver no more than eighteen or twenty, another young man in back, also blond, who looked as though he might be the girl's brother.

"Was ist los, Opa?" asked the driver.

"I'm afraid I don't speak German. Can you speak any English?"

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"I speak some English," said the boy in back, slurring his words. "Better than these two! All they want to do is get to our place and make love. See! I do speak English?"

"You certainly do, and very well, indeed. Would you explain to them, please? Frankly, I've had a fight with my wife

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at a party down there you know, at those cottages and I want to get back to Bonn. I'll pay you, of course."

"Ein Streit mit seiner Frau! Er will nach Bonn. Er wird uns bezahlen."

"Warum nicht? Sie hat mich halbes sowieso schon zu viel gekostet," said the driver.

"Nicht für was du kriegst, du Drecksack!" cried the girl laughing.

"Get in, mein Herr! We are your chauffeurs. Just pray he stays on the road, ja! What hotel are you staying at?"

"Actually, I'd rather not go back there. I'm really very angry. I'd like to teach her a lesson by staying away tonight. Do you think you could find me a room? I'll pay you even more, of course. Frankly, I've been drinking a bit myself."

"Ein betrunkenen Tourist! Er will ein Hotel. Fahren wir ihn ins Rosencafe?"

"sort sind mehr Nutzen als der alte Knecker schafft. "

We are your guides, Amerikaner, " said the young man beside Converse. "We are students from the university who will not only find you a room, but with excellent prospects of getting back at your wife with some pleasure! There's also a cafe. You'll buy us a lager or six, ja?"

"All you want. But Ed also like to make a telephone call. To the United States it's business. Will I be able to?"

"Most everyone in Bonn speaks English. If they don't at this Rosencafe, I, myself, will take care of it Six lager then

"Twelve, if you like."

"Da wird es im Pissoir eine Überschwemmung geben!"

He knew the rate of exchange, and once inside the raucous cafe actually a run-down bar favored by the university crowd he counted the money he

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had taken from the two Germans. It was roughly
five hundred dollars, over three from the man on
the hill. The seedy clerk at the registration desk
explained in convoluted English that, indeed, the
switchboard could place a call to America, but it
might take several minutes. Joel left fifty dollars in
deutsche marks for his youthful Good Samaritans,
excused himself and headed for his room such as
it was. An hour later the call came through

"Larry?"

"Joel?"

"Thank God you're there!" cried Converse in relief.

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"You'll never know how I kept hoping you weren't
out of town. Getting a call through from here is a
bitch!"

'I'm here, said Talbot, his voice suddenly calm
and in control. 'Where are you. Joel?' he asked
quietly.

'Some poor excuse for a hotel in Bonn. I just
got here. I didn't get the name. '

You're in a hotel in Bonn but you don't know
which one?

'It doesn't matter, Larry! Get Simon on the line
I want to talk to you both. Quickly.'

'Nathan's in court. He should be back here by
four o'clock our time. That's about an hour from
now.

"Goddamn it!"

"Take it easy, Joel. Don't upset yourself."

"Don't upset. . . ? For Christ's sake, I've been
locked up in a stone cabin with bars in the windows
for five days! I broke out a couple of hours ago, and
ran like hell through the woods with a pack of dogs
and lunatics carrying guns chasing me. I spent an
hour in the water damn near drowning before I
could reach land without getting my head shot off
and the

'You had to what, Joel?' asked Talbot, a
strange passivity in his voice 'What did you have to
do?'

'Goddamn it, Larry, I may have killed a man to
get out of there!'

'You had to kill someone, Joel? why did you
think you had to do that?'

"He was waiting for me! They were searching for
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me! On the land, in the woods along the
riverbanks he was a scout separated from his
patrol. Scouts, patrols! I had to get out, get away!
And you tell me not to be upset!"

'Calm down, Joel, try to get hold of yourself....
You escaped before, didn't you? A long time ago "

'What s that got to do with anything? Converse
broke in.

"You had to kill people then, didn t you? Those
memories must always be with you

Larry, that s bullshit! Listen to me and take
down everything I say the names I give you, the
facts get it all down.

"Perhaps I should bring Janet on the line. Her
shorthand

'No! Only you, no one else! They can trace people,
any

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one who knows anything. It's not that complicated.
Are you ready?"

"Of course."

Joel sat down on the narrow bed and took a
deep breath. "The best way to put it as it was put
to me, but you don't have to write this down, just
understand is that they've come back."

"Who?"

"The generals field marshals, admirals,
colonels allies and enemies, all field and fleet
commanders and above. They've come together
from everywhere to change things, change
governments and laws and foreign policies, every-
thing to be based on military priorities and
decisions. It's crazy, but they could do it. We'd live
out their fantasies because they'd be in control,
believing they're right and selfless and
dedicated as they've always believed.'

"Who are these people, Joel?"

"Yes, write this down. The organisation is called
Aquitaine. It's based on a historical theory that the
region in France once known as Aquitaine might
have become all of Europe and by extension as
colonies the North American continent as well."

"Whose theory?"

"It doesn't matter, it's just a theory. The
organizahon was conceived by General George
Delavane he was known as Mad Marcus in
Vietnam and I saw only a fraction of the damage

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that son of a bitch did! He's pulled in military personnel from all over the place, all commanders, and they're fanning out recruiting their own kind, fanatics who believe as they do, that theirs is the only way. For the past year or so they've been shipping illegal weapons and armaments to terrorist groups, encouraging destabilisation wherever they can, the ultimate purpose being that they'll be called in to restore order, and when they do, they'll take over.... Five days ago I met with Delavane's key men from France and Germany Israel and South Africa and, I think, possibly England."

"You met with these people, Joel? Did they invite you to a meeting?"

"They thought I was one of them, that I believed in everything they stood for. You see, Larry, they didn't know how much I hated them. They hadn't been where I'd been, hadn't seen what I saw as you said, years ago."

"When you had to escape," added Talbot sympathetical

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ly. "When you had to kill people times you'll never forget. They must have been terrible for you."

"Yes, they were. Goddamn it, yes! Sorry, let's stay on course. I'm so bred still frightened, too, I think."

"Relax, Joel."

"Sure. Where was I?" Converse rubbed his eyes. "Oh, yes, I remember. They got information on me, information from my service record, my status as a POW, which wasn't actually part of the record, but they got it and they found out what and who I was. They heard the words that told them how much I hated them, hated what Delavane had done what they all had done. They drugged me, got whatever they could and threw me into a Godforsaken stone house set in the middle of the woods above the Rhine. While under the chemicals I must have told them everything I knew "

"Chemicals?" asked Talbot, obviously never having heard the term.

Amytols, Pentothals, scopolamine. I've been the route, Larry. I've been there and back."

'You have? Where?"

In the camps. It's immaterial."

"I'm not sure it is."

"It is! The point is they found out what I know. That means they'll move up their schedule."

"Schedule?"

"We're in the countdown. Now! Two weeks, three weeks, four at the outside! No one knows how or where or what the targets are, but there'll be eruptions of violence and terrorism all over the place, giving them the excuse to move in and take over. 'Accumulation,' 'rapid acceleration,' those were the words they used! Right now in Northern Ireland everything's blown apart, nothing but chaos whole armored divisions are moving in. They did it, Larry! It's a test, a trial run for them! I'm going to give you the names." Converse did so both surprised and annoyed that Talbot did not react to any of the men of Aquitaine. "Have you got them?"

"Yes, I have."

"Those are the salient facts and the names I can vouch for. There's a lot more people in the State Department and the Pentagon, but the lists are in my briefcase and it's been stolen, or hidden somewhere. I'll get some rest and start writing out everything I know, then call you in the morning. I have to get out of here. I'm going to need help."

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"I agree, so may I talk now?" said the lawyer in New York in that odd flat voice. "First, where are you, Joel? Look on the phone or read the print on an ashtray or check the desk; there must be stationery."

"There's no desk and the ashtrays are chipped glass. . . . Wait a minute, I picked up some matches from the bar when I bought cigarettes." Converse reached into the pocket of the leather jacket and pulled out the book of matches. "Here it is. Riesendricks."

Look below that. My German is limited, but I think it means big drinks' or something.'

"Oh? Then it must be this. 'Rosencafe.'"

"That sounds more like it. Spell it for me, Joel."

Converse did, an undefined feeling disturbing him. "Have you got it?" he asked. "Here's a

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ERROR: syntaxerror
OFFENDING COMMAND: --nostringval--

STACK:
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