

# FORBIDDEN AREA

A NOVEL BY

PAT FRANK

AUTHOR OF "MR. ADAM"



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**forbidden  
area**

**by  
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for Dodie

**FORBIDDEN AREA**

## one

THERE IS no lonelier stretch of beach on the Atlantic than the twenty miles between Ponte Verda and St. Augustine, in northern Florida. A few hundred feet inland Highway A1A parallels the surf, but the coquina road is narrow, pocked, and avoided by wary tourists. It is no scenic drive. High dunes wall the highway from the sea, and where there are no dunes the ocean is curtained by cabbage palms and stunted magnolias fighting for root space in dense palmetto thickets. On a June night in the full of the moon this beach was inhabited only by a boy and a girl lying on a blanket in a white, spoon-shaped hollow between two dunes.

Henry Hazen and Nina Pope, both high school seniors from St. Augustine, had been there before. They called it “our place,” and used it for immature love-making, and confidences, and for dreaming. They did not consider their dreams unreasonable. Nina wanted to go to New York and get a job as a secretary, either to some big business executive or a Broadway producer. She would have her own apartment with full-length mirrors, a built-in dressing table, and a stall shower with sliding glass doors. Henry wanted to be a researcher, or anyway an engineer, for some big electronics company. He would like to find this job in Miami, although he would fly to New York to see Nina, weekends. When he became chief of research, or owned his own company, or invented something really big, like radar, she would give up her job and they would get married. They would live in one of those new Miami houses where when you woke up you pressed a button, the bedroom wall opened, and you rolled out of bed into your own private swimming pool. All this might have to wait a few years. She didn’t know how to type, as yet, and he had just signed up in the Marines.

Just south of their hideaway an unmarked road, simply twin ruts packed with oyster shell, twisted through the dunes from A1A to high-water mark. Since this road was used, on occasion, by the beach buggies of fishermen after red bass, Henry refrained from turning in and blocking it. If he and Nina were seen and recognized, word of it might get back to Nina’s father, a dark,

brooding, violent man, and a deputy sheriff. Instead, Henry eased his car into a palm-shrouded pocket off the shoulder of the highway. Then, carrying blanket and swim suits, they climbed across the dunes to the seclusion of their hollow. His caution, or timidity, undoubtedly saved their lives.

This was likely their last date for a long time, and yet their talk faltered. They were a little sad, and a little frightened, for closing a chapter of youth is a small death, with all the chapters-to-come an uncertain hereafter. On Monday Nina would start a secretarial training course at the St. Augustine business school, and on Tuesday Henry would leave for a training camp in the Carolinas. So they swam for a time in the dark waters beyond the breakers and then walked the beach hand in hand until the soft south wind dried them. They returned to the intimacy of their hollow and lay on the blanket, faces to the stars, shoulders touching but thoughts already diverging ahead. Henry raised himself on his arm, thin and knobby as a bamboo pole, and looked down on her face. Nina was a frail girl, small-boned and slender, patches of freckles on her nose and shoulders. Their classmates thought her mousy. Henry thought her beautiful. He leaned over and kissed her and she responded for a moment, her body arching to meet his. Then she pushed him away. "It's late," she said. "We've got to go. Turn your back while I dress."

He wanted to protest. He wanted to say that this would be their last chance for a long time. But he saw that she was gone from him, her mind on something else entirely. He rose to his feet and turned his face to the sea.

"Now don't look," she said.

"You'll never get hurt by a look," Henry said. Nevertheless he did not look. It was their ritual.

Soon she said, "Okay, you can look now."

He didn't turn or answer. He was witness to an astonishing sight. Where there had been only water before, there was now a black hump in the sea. It lay less than a mile offshore, solid as a reef.

"What's the matter?" Nina asked.

"We've got a visitor," he said, and pointed.

She stepped beyond him up the slope of their hollow until she could see over the rim. "Where did it come from?" she asked.

"I don't know. All of a sudden it was just there." He felt uneasy. He didn't want to say that it had popped straight up out of the sea, but now that he thought of it, that's what must have happened.

"Maybe it's a whale," she said. "A dead whale."

"I don't think so," Henry said. "It's too high out of the water to be a dead whale. Anyway, I think it's bigger than a whale. Must be a ship, but it's a funny-lookin' ship. No masts, no lights."

"It could be an oiler," she said. "I've seen oilers in the carrier base at



Mayport. It could be an oiler in distress.”

“No it couldn’t,” Henry said. “If it was an oiler broke down or something, there’d be a lot of Navy out there with it. Now it could be a menhaden boat that lost its masts in a storm, except there hasn’t been any storm. It looks more like a big ship, capsized.” He hesitated a moment and then added, “Or a submarine.”

So gradually that for a moment Henry thought his eyes were wrong, the black blob on the silvered sea began to change shape. It looked as if it were splitting apart, like an amoeba under the microscope in biology class. Then there was no doubt of it. A small part did detach itself from the larger mass. At first the small part seemed to be drifting, but then it assumed purpose and direction, narrowed, and moved towards shore, its speed increasing until it created a thin, phosphorescent bow wave. Soon it was so close that they could hear the muffled throb of its engine.

Henry had heard stories of dope and Orientals being smuggled in from Cuba, and he was certain that this was what they were witnessing. He pulled on his trousers over his swim trunks, slipped on his shirt without bothering to button it, and his shoes without tying the laces. He took his wrist watch from his trousers pocket and noted the time as he strapped it on. It was 12:15. He said, “Nina, we’d better get out of here right now.”

She put her hand on his arm and said, “Why? This is exciting. Let’s watch.”

He wanted overwhelmingly to attain the security of the car, or at least retreat to the top of the dunes. From the top of the dunes they could watch and then run for it. But he’d feel silly if it turned out that the big boat was just a disabled fisherman and the small one a boatload of men who needed help. He contained his fear, in the greater fear that Nina would think him yellow.

When the boat was inshore of the breakers he recognized its shoebox shape. It was a landing craft such as the Marines used. It grated on the sand, broached, straightened, and lunged to a stop, its stern still rising and falling to the surge of the surf. So shallow was its draught that its ramp dropped into only a few inches of water.

Men started coming out of the bow, trotting down the ramp, ten or twelve of them, all carrying weapons, sub-machine guns strapped to their shoulders. They fanned out along the beach like fingers of a fist suddenly unclenched. They deployed in a purposeful manner, and then advanced on the dunes in a skirmish line like soldiers. One headed directly for their hollow, as if he knew they were there. It was too late to run for it now, not with the sand so white and the moon so brilliant.

Henry dropped to his knees and pulled Nina to his side. He scrambled to the left where a clump of rice grass bent over the lip of their hollow, drawing

her along with him. They pressed themselves into the sand. They tried to mold their bodies to the shape of the grass's feathery shadow. Henry's arm, pushing down on the girl's back, felt an uncontrollable shaking. He didn't know whether it was her body or his hand that shook. In the space of a few seconds their world had gone crazy. Where only a few minutes before he had been thinking about the future, now there might be no future at all, for these men behaved like hunters moving across a field to flush rabbits or quail, guns held for snap shooting. The hollow was no longer a sanctuary. It was a trap, a convenient pit for killing.

Henry heard the crunch of shoes on crusted sand and looked up, with the slightest movement of his face, and over him was silhouetted the bulk of a man. The man skirted the edge of their hideaway, stopped, and stared up at the ridge of the dunes. Despite the warmth of the night, the man wore black, zippered coveralls and a black helmet. His face was blackened, so that only his eyes shone whitely. His hands, sooty like his face, gripped a stubby gun with a circular magazine. The barrel weaved and probed like the head of a snake with eyes of its own. There was no sound except the breathing of this man. With every exhalation, he wheezed. Several times it seemed that he looked directly down on them, and Henry's stomach knotted and all his muscles tensed, awaiting a red spurt of flame and the impact of a bullet. Yet the man did not see them. He turned away and walked up through the yielding rice grass, the gun muzzle still weaving in a short arc. When he was out of sight, Nina drew in her breath in a low sob. Henry's hand tightened on her back and she was still except for quivering that came in spasms. A hundred yards to the south, where the shell road was, a light winked twice.

The landing craft gave birth to something else. Incredibly, it birthed a car, a four-door sedan with whitewall tires, shining as if it had just been rolled off the showroom floor. It had the lines of a Buick. The car slid down the ramp, bounced through a wavelet, and achieved dry, hard-packed sand. Henry thought there were four figures inside, but he could not be sure. The car stopped on the beach, and another man loped down the ramp, waded through the water, walked to the car and spoke to the driver. It seemed to Henry that they were shaking hands, and then the car moved again. Just before it swung into the shell road and vanished between the dunes, its lights came on. Henry could have sworn that it bore an orange-and-blue Florida tag, although the distance was too great to make out numbers.

Soon they heard the car whining south, fast, on A1A. Before the reflection of its lights paled in the sky, the armed men were returning to the landing craft. As if they had practiced the maneuver often, they heaved at its metal sides while its engine roared in reverse. When it was free of the beach the men scrambled aboard and its ramp came up. After it had backed beyond the

breakers, the landing craft swung in a sharp circle, gathering speed. Its return to sea was much faster, and somewhat noisier, than its approach.

They watched, motionless, until they saw it join the mother ship. There was a soundless merger, almost as if the smaller boat had been swallowed. Then the whole mass sank straight into the sea. "It was a submarine, all right," Henry said. He was startled by the sound of his own voice. He realized that these were the first words either had spoken since the landing, which seemed so long ago. He looked at his watch. Since he first sighted the hump in the sea, not more than fifteen minutes had passed. He rose to his feet, his knees stiff, his legs cramped.

Nina got up, too, and held on to his arm and leaned her head against his chest. "My stomach hurts," she said. "I think I'm going to be sick." She retched, but she wasn't sick. He supported her as they started back for the car. When they reached the top of the dunes, both of them began to run.

This incident occurred on the day Russia announced that it had achieved equality with the United States in the production of thermonuclear weapons, a condition thereafter known as H-Parity. Had it been reported immediately, no doubt the car would have been traced, the men captured, and the country alerted.

It was not reported, for one of those curious personal reasons that so often alter the course of history, although when they reached the car Henry had every intention of reporting it. Even as he jammed his foot on the starter of his father's old Plymouth he was estimating times and distances. The Buick was headed for St. Augustine, but the nearest phone was at the Oasis, the lunch stand and liquor store at the edge of Ponte Vedra, in the opposite direction. If he could get to the phone before the Buick got through St. Augustine, the men would be trapped, for this whole stretch of coast is actually an island, bounded by the Atlantic on the east, by the inland waterway on the west, the St. Johns River to the north, and Matanzas Inlet on the south. So when he swung the Plymouth onto the highway, he headed north.

He got the old Plymouth up to eighty and then hit a pothole and almost went off the road and he slowed to seventy, remembering the condition of the tires and what his father would say if he wrecked the car. His father was a carpenter and the car necessary for his transportation and livelihood and it wasn't paid for yet.

Nina had been shaking the sand out of her shoes and trying to do her face and comb her hair. Now she looked up, saw that the dunes were on the right, and said, "Henry, where are we going?"

"The Oasis," he said. "We'll call the police from there."

“What’ll you say?”

“Say we saw a whole pack of spies, or something, land on the beach.”

“Spies!” When she said the word aloud it sounded much too melodramatic to be real. Sounded like something you saw in the movies or on television or read in Steve Canyon.

“Spies for sure,” he said. “Never heard of dope runners with a submarine.”

“Dope runners could have a submarine, couldn’t they?”

“No. Only navies have submarines.”

He slowed for a jog in the road and she said, “Henry, who’ll you call?”

“The St. Augustine police or St. Johns County sheriff.”

“Why not the Navy base at Mayport, if you think they really are spies?” Mayport, at the mouth of the St. Johns, was an operating base for carriers. Sometimes there were two or three carriers and half a dozen destroyers at Mayport, loading fresh air groups and new planes for service in the Mediterranean.

“Maybe I’ll call Mayport after I call the police,” Henry said.

“Won’t it be on the radio and in the papers?”

“Sure.”

They were silent for perhaps a minute, each with the same thoughts. Then Nina said, “Henry, I really ought to be home right now.”

“I know it.”

“You know what he’ll do, don’t you?”

“No.”

“I mean when he finds out where we were.”

Henry took his foot off the accelerator. Nina had told her parents she was going to a late movie in Jacksonville, an imperative white lie. And Henry was deathly afraid of her father. Deputy Sheriff Pope, he had heard, had killed two men and shot others. He knew for a fact that Mr. Pope had beaten up a middle-aged tourist who had made a pass at Nina—beaten him so badly he almost died in the hospital. If they reported what they had seen, Mr. Pope would certainly hear of it. Even if the FBI and the police and the Coast Guard and the Navy agreed to keep their names out of the papers, the word would still get around to all the law enforcement people, and that meant to Mr. Pope.

“Are you stopping?” Nina asked.

“No, I was just thinking.” Henry looked at the speedometer and found that he had slowed to thirty.

“Well, I know what my pop will do to me,” she said. “He has an old razor strap. He hasn’t used it on me in years. But he will now. When he finds out we were at our place instead of the movies you know what he’ll think. And he’ll beat me. He’ll run me away from home.” Her right hand crept back over the narrow ridge of her left shoulder, as if she could feel the bite of the strap.

Suddenly they were coming up on the Oasis and Henry saw that there was a light inside. He pulled up to the door and got out. Then he saw that the place was empty. It was closed, and it was locked. A light burned in the barred liquor storeroom, to discourage thieves.

Henry didn't get back into the car immediately. The desire for haste was gone. He felt, rather, as if he had been given a reprieve. He said, "I guess we can go on to the Innlet, and use the phone there." The Innlet was an expensive motel, a bit further up the coast.

Nina said, "Henry, can't we go home? Honest, I'm scared. He might kill you, Henry."

Henry got back into the car. He did not immediately start the motor. He leaned his forehead on the wheel and tried to think. If there was any way they could report it without giving their names—But that would be silly. Nobody would believe him. They might not believe him anyway. If he called there was bound to be trouble, big trouble. Mr. Pope would take him apart. Finally he said, "Okay, we'll go on back." He started the car and headed south again, fast, but not as fast as they had come. He felt miserable, empty, a coward.

After a while she leaned her head against his shoulder and said, "Henry, thanks."

He didn't say anything.

"If we'd gone on to the Innlet I'm sure we'd have been too late anyway."

"I guess so."

"They must be through St. Augustine by now."

"Sure." He told himself that after all Nina had begged him not to call, and the only reason he hadn't called was to save her. That's what he told himself, but he didn't quite believe it. He wished she hadn't said, "He might kill you, Henry." If she hadn't said that, he would have gone on until he found a phone.

As they crossed the first bridge into St. Augustine he said, "Nina, you won't mention this to anybody, will you?"

"I should say not!"

"Not to anybody at all!"

"I promise, Henry."

They turned into the narrow street where she lived. It was two o'clock but all the lights were on downstairs in her house and he knew Mr. Pope was waiting up for them. He eased the car to a stop and opened the door gently. He took her as far as the steps, but he didn't dare kiss her goodbye, he was that afraid of Mr. Pope.

Then he drove on to his own house, three blocks away. He couldn't get to sleep until dawn.

The driver of the Buick sedan, headed south on A1A, was born Stanislaus Lazinoff in Smolensk, but for two years he had been trained to think of himself as Stanley Smith, American, born in Glebe City, Iowa. The choice of birthplace, like everything else in his manufactured past, was no accident. The courthouse at Glebe City had burned to the ground, along with all its records, some years before. An account of the fire had appeared in the Chicago papers, and had been clipped and forwarded to Moscow by a farsighted agent of what was then the NKVD, attached to the Russian consulate in a clerical post.

Stanley Smith was a stocky, thick-chested, handsome man with close-cropped, sandy hair and intelligent gray eyes. He was in his early thirties but looked younger. Indeed, all his credentials, including his driving license and Social Security card, asserted he was twenty-nine, this being considered a more suitable age for his exact role. He and his companions were very special people, the end result of a scientific experiment utilizing the Pavlov-Lysenko theories of conditioned reflexes. A new environment had been painstakingly grafted on personalities of unquestionable and fanatic loyalty to the state. An American body and mind had been synthetically created, while the heart remained Russian.

Stanley Smith was a second generation Communist. His father, a soldier in the Czar's Army, had led the mutiny of a regiment in Leningrad, then St. Petersburg. Unfortunately his father worshipped the Army leader Trotsky, and had died suddenly and mysteriously. Stalin himself had helped carry the Lazinoff coffin, a clear indication that Stanley's father, while misguided, was still an old Bolshevik hero.

At the age of sixteen Stanley enlisted in the Red Army for the Fatherland War, mistakenly called World War II by Western historians. Even then he knew it was no true world war—but one was coming. During the storming of Berlin, as the youngest lieutenant of engineers in Zhukov's armies, he performed deft and daring feats with explosives that won him two Red Stars, promotion, and marked him for the future.

When he was twenty-five, and a major attached to the Army intelligence service in Budapest, he was recalled for special schooling. For five years, in Leningrad, Moscow, and Kiev, he attended agitprop, espionage, and counter-intelligence schools, and became proficient in such esoteric branches of military knowledge as silent killing and cryptography. He took language courses and studied English and American history. He crammed the fundamentals of nuclear physics, and the basics of biological warfare.

A major military operation is the most complex undertaking yet attempted by man. It may be recalled that the planning for Operation Overlord, the invasion of Normandy in June, 1944, was begun by a British staff four years earlier. Stanley was to participate in something infinitely more ambitious, the

subjugation of a powerful nation with one massive blow. Just as a jet bomber must be on the drawing boards five to ten years before it can be launched against the enemy, so a human weapon must be prepared with equal thoroughness. This is particularly true if the human's mission is likely to be of critical importance. So Stanley's education was still not complete. He was sent to a place that its inhabitants and a few people on the General Staff called, jokingly, "Little Chicago."

Little Chicago was laid out in a section of the Ukraine so thoroughly and often devastated by drought, famine, and war that it was necessary to evacuate only a few kulaks to clear an area of a hundred square miles. This reservation was barricaded by mine fields, electrically charged wire, and watchtowers. In its center was erected a town in microcosm. Except that it nested in no suburbs and farmland and all its buildings were new, externally it could have been Glebe City, Iowa.

The concept behind the training of Stanley Smith and his companions was as old, in warfare, as the Trojan Horse. Something of the kind had been tried, spectacularly but without success, by the Germans in the Battle of the Bulge. A battalion of English-speaking soldiers had been dressed in American uniforms and infiltrated through the lines to spread confusion and seize bridges in Bradley's rear. The Germans, usually so methodical, had not had time for adequate preparation and training. The Red Army did not intend to make the same mistake.

For two years Stanley Smith lived in Little Chicago, speaking only English, reading only American newspapers, magazines, and books. Three nights a week he attended an American movie in a replica of an American theater, complete with popcorn and soft drink machines. He not only learned to play baseball, but developed into a passable shortstop. He listened to the World Series on short-wave, and could quote batting averages.

He took a course in American television and radio. Every Tuesday afternoon he listened to recordings, and watched kinescopes, of the most popular programs. He learned to identify the voices and faces of Eddie Fisher, Liberace, Jackie Gleason, Edward R. Murrow, and Lucille Ball. Some of the comedy programs, in which laughter was heard when nothing was funny, he found entirely incomprehensible. But he was assured by his tutor, a Hungarian who had worked for several years at the Ford plant in Detroit, that his reaction was quite normal.

He drew his pay in dollars. He learned the value of American clothing, and the variety of purchases that could be made in drugstores. He learned to buy, cook, and enjoy American food. He absorbed American poker, which is more conservative than Russian poker, and discovered gin rummy and craps. He acquired a taste for bourbon. He studied the history and geography of the

United States until he was, unknowingly, better informed on these subjects than most American high school graduates. He could even name the members of the President's Cabinet.

Only a small proportion of the population was receiving training. Most of the people were members of the permanent staff, the housekeeping detail, and instructors. He was certain that many of the men were in the *Osoby Otdel*, the military security system that was called, or whispered, O.O. Among the special tutors were Czechs, Rumanians, Poles, Letts, and even a few Russians who had lived in America. There were Germans, graduates of the Abwehr and Gestapo, skilled in techniques of espionage. There were women, of course. They were there in the capacity of instructors as well as for morale and convenience. The emotional language of love may be the same the world over, but the colloquialisms and subtleties of the boudoir differ.

He lived in an apartment with men he knew as Gregg Palmer, Ralph Masters, and William Johnson. It was obvious that their backgrounds were much like his own, but they never revealed their Russian names. On orders, when you entered Little Chicago you forgot your past. It was an important psychological factor in the creation of a new personality. These four had stayed together from the moment they entered Little Chicago. They were a team, their mission one.

In their first week of training the four had been supplied with American credentials and were constantly tested in their uses until their new identities were fused in their minds. While Stanley Smith had been born in Iowa, he noted that he was now a resident of Florida. Since he was a man of considerable strategic knowledge and active imagination, this gave him a clue to their mission long before their first official briefing. He wasn't being sent to Florida because of the climate or because any vital industrial complex existed there. Florida's military importance lay in the air. Florida was one big landing field, a center of air bases. There was the Navy Station in Jacksonville, with its satellite fields and its companion carrier base at Mayport. But more important were the great bases of the Strategic Air Command. There was Pinecastle in Orlando and Mac Dill in Tampa and Eglin in Pensacola and the gigantic new Hibiscus Field which had recently been described in the news magazines. Why they were located in Florida was understandable. The flying weather was almost always good, and Florida was about as far from Russia as you could get and still stay on the continent of North America. Distance gave the Florida bases an immunity not enjoyed by SAC bases elsewhere. He would bet his bottom dollar (he used the phrase often) that his target would be one of those bases. But he did not mention what he suspected. Silence never sent a man to Siberia.

In his last month of schooling Stanley Smith was examined by a board of



three visitors. One of them, Smith was fairly certain, was a native American, although he could not be sure. He was asked some pretty tricky questions, such as who invented the airplane and the electric light. He found that he had almost forgotten they were invented by Mozkaiski and Lodygin, respectively, and promptly gave the answers he knew were wanted: the Wright brothers and Thomas A. Edison. He also received a physical checkup and it was discovered that some dental work was necessary. An incisor was pulled and replaced by a shining stainless steel tooth. The dentist, new to Little Chicago, muttered in Russian. It was the first Russian Smith had heard in two years and he was forced to translate it, in his head, into English. A man's transformation is complete when he does his thinking in an alien tongue.

Ordinarily, the road out of Little Chicago never doubled back through Russia, a necessary security precaution. In the case of Stanley Smith and his three companions there had been a deviation from normal procedures because of the peculiar nature and importance of their mission. They were flown to Moscow, taken inside the Kremlin walls, and lodged in an office-apartment annex, once barracks. That they were guarded like prisoners, and that security officers slept in their rooms, ate with them, and even eavesdropped in the toilets, did not seem unusual to Smith. All his life he had been watched. Sometimes, as in Budapest, his duty had been to watch others. Only in this way could the state be protected. It was normal, or, as he now said, S.O.P.

In the Kremlin they were introduced to an American—a genuine, Texas-born American—of whom they had been told. They had been warned that this American was erratic, and at times might seem crazy, but that they should be respectful to him, and listen carefully to anything he had to say. He was a great prize. He had been a sergeant in the Strategic Air Command, at a base in England. He had defected to the East while on tourist leave in Vienna. Because of a woman, it was said. His name was Horgan and he was a thin, red-faced, nervous man of about Smith's age. He wore the uniform of the Red Air Force and the epaulets of a colonel, which was not surprising when one considered that in all Russia he was the only man who knew SAC intimately, as a child knows his father's house.

In the week that followed, Smith and the others were closeted with Horgan for many hours. Their conferences were held in a comfortable, unmilitary room furnished with leather chairs, with caviar and cheeses always on the table, and liquor, much liquor. Sometimes Horgan grew excitable, and rambled. Sometimes he digressed in tirades at the brass and the officer clique which had refused to recognize his abilities and commission him. Sometimes he cursed, by name, officers who he said had conspired against him. He had even been reduced to KP, when such duty was allowable punishment. Once he quoted from a letter he had written his congressman. Once he broke down and

put his head on the table and wept and announced that his wife was no better than an *embarcadero* whore. She had divorced him while he was in England, and was remarried, now, to a lieutenant. Yet what he had to say about the inner workings of a SAC base, and its security system, was clear enough and had the ring of truth in it. Horgan's ideas were ingenious, and his advice explicit, but Smith wondered how long he would be allowed to live. Not long, surely, after he had been pumped dry and began to repeat himself and got on the nerves of the O.O. agents who guarded him and the intelligence officers who fawned on him, and dressed him in the trappings of a colonel, while despising him.

The final briefing for Smith, Palmer, Masters, and Johnson, was delivered by a general of the Red Air Force, a Hero of the Soviet Union. The general emphasized timing. They must always remember that their mission was only a small part of a larger plan. At the same time their assignment was vital. Unless they succeeded, there might be no larger plan. They were essential as a tiny jewel in the heart of a watch. The general had no doubt that one, at least, would succeed. If only one succeeded, the names of all four would live forever in the history of the world revolution. They would be greater than Stakhanov. They would enjoy privileges and honors, upon their return, such as no young men had ever received before.

They would enter the United States with funds more than sufficient for their mission. They must be careful with their money as with their tongues, for a display of money could attract attention and betray them. If they ran into trouble, they were on no account to contact the Russian embassy or the consulates and thus compromise the diplomatic situation. Nor must they approach any American Communist, for the Party in the United States was riddled with spies and unreliable. In great emergency, there was one man who had been instructed to assist them. The name of this man, his address, and the manner in which he could be approached would be communicated to them before the landing. Also, in case of a shift in timing or change in orders, this man would contact them. He was to be trusted. Whenever they changed address, this man was to be informed. The general had then smiled and said he was now turning them over to the Navy. He had shaken hands with each of them, and wished them good luck.

The voyage from the naval base at Tallin required nineteen days. The submarine was a new 3,000 tonner, designed along the lines of the French *Surcouf*, with comfortable living quarters, a hangar, and a catapult. The hangar could accommodate four large guided missiles or two jet aircraft, so it received a landing barge with ease. Inside the landing barge was a car. In the car's luggage compartment were five suitcases, four filled with the essential tools of their job, concealed under lightweight clothing, one filled with money.

They were chaperoned, on this voyage, by two dour O.O. men and an

uncommunicative, thin, gray-faced man, much older, who represented the MVD, or perhaps the Presidium itself. On their last day at sea, this man called them into the captain's cabin, which he had occupied since the voyage began. He spoke to them in Russian, repeating much of what the Air general had told them in the Kremlin. Then he gave them the name and address of Robert Gumol, a banker in Upper Hyannis, a suburb of Philadelphia. They had only to tell Gumol, "I am from Five-Star Electric" to establish their identity. Smith was at first surprised that a banker should be an agent, but the more he thought about it the more he was impressed by the cleverness of his superiors. In the United States bankers were the most respected and conservative group in a community. Bankers handled large sums of money as a matter of routine. And a bank's doors were open to all, and in a bank's inner offices private and personal discussions were usual.

Only one small incident disturbed Stanley Smith during the landing. The navigator of the submarine was not a Russian, but a German, a former officer of the German Navy. This man, Karl Schiller, was chosen for the mission because he had been a *Leutnant* on a U-boat that had landed eight German saboteurs at exactly the same spot, on the same coast, in 1942. Schiller and Smith both enjoyed chess and they had become friendly, and Schiller had sometimes invited Smith topside for a breath of fresh air and a glimpse of the stars when they ran on the surface, nights. Schiller often related, with pride, the details of the previous voyage. It had been a much more difficult undertaking, he assured Smith, with the British and American navies to dodge and the coast itself patrolled. Now it would be simple, with the world basking in peace.

It was Schiller who commanded the landing craft in its run for the beach, and it had been Schiller who ran down the beach to the car and shook his hand. At that moment Smith asked a question that had been troubling him. "By the way," he said, "you never told me what happened to the sabotage team."

Schiller had smiled and said, "Oh, I forgot. They were all caught and executed."

It was hardly a pleasant way to bid one goodbye, Smith thought as he drove through the night. It could shake a man, until you considered that it had been wartime, and the eight Germans probably had not been so thoroughly conditioned as he, Palmer, Masters, and Johnson.

The speedometer crept past sixty and Palmer, sitting next to him, said, "Hey, Stan, slow down. Florida law is sixty by day but only fifty by night. Remember?" Palmer was the most cautious of the four.

Smith slowed, although he was confident that there were no cops on the road at this hour. Anyway, back in Little Chicago they had even schooled him not to panic when stopped by the police. It had been a hard thing to learn, but he was ready to test it.

In St. Augustine Smith pulled into an all-night filling station and said, "Fill 'er up with high test."

The attendant, alert despite the hour, filled the tank and checked under the hood. He whistled and said, "Say, lucky I looked. Your battery water's way down." He immediately filled the battery with distilled water, without instructions. Then he wiped the windshield. Smith was impressed with this service and efficiency. He wondered whether all travellers received such service, or whether it was only because the Buick was new and large. He realized that there was still much to learn about America. He had not been told everything.

The attendant said, "Three eighty-four, please," and Smith handed him a five dollar bill. The attendant noted that the four men in the car all wore bright sports shirts. The license prefix was 2-W, which meant Duval County. Four young guys from Jacksonville, he thought, away from their wives for a big weekend in Miami, or maybe a fishing trip down on the Keys.

Smith pocketed the change and drove on. He felt elated. For the first time he had encountered an American on American soil, and had passed inspection.

Just before dawn they pulled off the road and split up the money in the extra suitcase. Smith realized that even by American standards all four were rich men. The thought occurred to him that once they dispersed in Miami his companions could take their money, lose themselves in this fat, careless country where security controls were almost non-existent and a man could travel at will, and enjoy life. In America it was not necessary to register with the police, not anywhere, nor were permits required for work, or for purchasing luxury goods. But he doubted that the others would be tempted. Like himself, they were responsible and dedicated men. Also, one day there would come an accounting, for one day the Marx-Lenin ideal would stand supreme over all nations, united in the comradeship of proletarian order and peace.

In Miami, they breakfasted for the last time together, in a restaurant of antiseptic cleanliness, with walls mostly of glass. Smith felt naked, as if he were eating in a shower room. The eggs, bacon, toast, marmalade, and in particular the coffee tasted different from the same breakfasts in Little Chicago, just as borscht in Kiev might be more flavorful than borscht in Boston. From Miami, Johnson was to go to Louisiana, Masters to Texas, and Palmer to Arizona. Palmer was to take the car, and dispose of it as he wished. As for Smith himself, he could buy another car later, if he found need of one and if a car befitted his station. His first objective, now, was to find a job in a restaurant, start a small bank account, and establish himself as a reliable citizen, suitable for enlistment in the United States Air Force.

Of the forty thousand people who went to work in the Pentagon that morning, Katharine Hume was somewhat of an oddity. Genius shows no discrimination of race, creed, sex, or physique when it chooses a body to inhabit. It can lodge in the twisted shape of a Steinmetz, or behind a sightless, soundless wall, as in Helen Keller. It can even pick the body of a young and desirable woman.

Not that Katharine Hume was a classic beauty. She wasn't. But in a city where a woman's allure is often measured by the collective influence of the guests she can entice to a party, her position on the protocol lists, or her Civil Service rating if she works, and where it can be undiplomatic to have legs finer than those of your senator's wife, Katy Hume was a rarity. She had a dancer's rhythm of movement and sway of hips. Her full lips were usually half open and she had a habit of moistening them with her tongue before speaking. That this was the result of a slight nasal obstruction didn't make her mouth appear less sensual. Her hair was of an undecided color, so she had tinted it ash-blond, which contrasted with dark eyes, in the Viennese manner. Her flair for style she held in check, for in Washington, especially if you are in a responsible or sensitive position, it is chic to be dowdy. The oddest thing about her could not be seen. In her head was a questing brain equipped with an astonishing memory and capable of the most complicated mathematical acrobatics. Her intelligence quotient was 180, minimal, and she possessed Q-clearance for atomic security. She was by nature warm-blooded and friendly, but she was isolated by her profession and its taboos and secrets. Her profession was war.

She entered the River Gate of the Pentagon, showed a pass, and pinned a badge to her gray linen suit. She was admitted to the central corridor over which is a sign that reads: "Joint Chiefs of Staff—Restricted Area." She came to a double door, guarded by Military Police, on which was stencilled: "Planning Division—Authorized Personnel Only." Passing this barrier she walked to the end of the corridor beyond, and stopped at a door unnumbered and unmarked except for the curt notice: "Entrance Forbidden." If you could go through that door uninvited you were one of seven people, six men and a woman, who comprised what the Planning Division called its Intentions of the Enemy Group, and unofficially its "dirty trick department," or "private Kremlin." The guard on duty smiled and opened the door for her. She was the woman. She represented the Atomic Energy Commission.

The conference room was unusual, even for the Pentagon. It was windowless, soundproofed, and devoid of files or safes. Its secrets were held only in the heads of the conferees. Except for the standard government-issue oval table and chairs of bleached oak, the only furniture was a mobile lunch

stand, its electric coffee-maker steaming and cartons of milk and stacks of sandwiches, wrapped in wax paper, on its tray. Maps on sliding panels blotted out three walls. The largest was a target map of the United States, marked with every important military installation and industrial complex, every Navy base and heavy bomber field, population and communications centers, areas of nuclear production and research, hydroelectric sites, refineries, bottleneck roads and bridges. Another map showed the polar approaches to the North American continent, pinpointing picket ships, Texas islands, radar webs, Canadian and Alaskan interceptor strips, and anti-aircraft and guided missile batteries. There were smaller maps of Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, the Pacific, and Iceland and Greenland. On these maps American Air and Navy bases were indicated. Just such maps, it could be presumed, arrayed the walls of the Soviet central command post, and the war plans rooms of the Red Army, Navy, and Air Force. Over the map of the United States was the group's slogan: "*THINK LIKE THE ENEMY!*"

Katharine Hume saw that all six of her colleagues were there before her. The attendance and punctuality, unusual for a Saturday morning, reflected the news, not critical news, or even unexpected, but as interesting as the first bold commitment of the queen in a championship chess match. Quietly, she slipped into the vacant chair. Clark Simmons, a spare, balding man who was senior in the group and who represented State, was speaking. ". . . two questions to answer. First, is the Russian announcement true? Recall that in February of 'fifty-five Molotov made a somewhat similar boast, although not quite so explicit. At that time the AEC decided it wasn't true. Secondly, if true, why a public announcement of H-Parity, and why at this time?" As usual, as he spoke Simmons kept his eyes on the white scratch-pad in front of him and doodled. He raised his eyes to acknowledge Katharine and said, "We waited for you, lady. We've just started."

"Sorry I'm late," she said. "I stopped off at my shop on the way."

"That's what I was hoping you'd do," Simmons said. "Get anything?"

Katharine removed her glasses. They were necessary only when her eyes tired from reading, but she wore them most of the time. She was twenty-nine, an age considered immature for strategic planning. By wearing glasses, adopting a severe hairdo, using little makeup, and choosing clothes of neutral shading, on occasion she managed to look over thirty. "I think I can answer your first question," she said. "In the past three days there has been intensified radioactivity in the upper air currents over Alaska and northern Canada, and some fallout on Hokkaido. Analysis and seismographic reports indicate that the Russians blew two thermonuclear devices or bombs on Tuesday and two more on Wednesday."

She rose, went to the side of the room, slid out a map of Asia, and ran her

fingers along a loop of the Yenisei River, in Siberia. “I should say about here. The bombs—I believe they were bombs rather than devices—were of four distinct types. Two were rigged with U-238.” She hesitated for a moment, and looked down at the others to invite absolute attention. “The yield of one of these explosions—the last—exceeded thirty megatons.”

Jesse Price, the Air Force major newly assigned to the conference, pretended he was about to duck under the table. Price was a large, loose-jointed man with a black patch over his right eye and an arrow-shaped burn scar that ran from the patch to his chin. He talked flight jargon and behaved with the insouciance of a hot pilot. Katharine had wondered why the Air Force assigned him to the Intentions Group until she looked up his record. This record included graduation from the National War College after Korea, two years as Air Attaché in Moscow, another year as observer in Indo-China, and later service with SHAPE Air headquarters in Fontainebleau. In addition, she reflected that the Air Force would never keep a one-eyed pilot unless he had much else besides. Now that Price saw she was looking at him, he straightened and said, “Are you sure?”

“Very sure, Major. The AEC is now ready to admit that they have maximum capability.” She took her seat. For these men, no further explanation was necessary. Thirty megatons meant the equivalent of 30,000,000 tons of TNT. A five-megaton bomb could kill Chicago; ten, New York. Maximum capability was a phrase newly in use. It meant the capacity to utterly destroy any enemy. It meant all the bombs necessary.

For a moment, each was silent with his private thoughts. Four of the men were married and had children, and for them it was impossible to banish concern for their families from their considerations. Simmons had just bought a home in Chevy Chase, a somewhat overpriced Colonial, a bit extravagant for a Foreign Service career officer without independent income. He and his wife and three children, in the event of trouble, were trapped by an inexorable mortgage within blast radius of a primary target city. Commander Stephen Batt, Navy, was thankful for his cottage on the Severn. Annapolis was by no means safe, when you contemplated the danger of fallout. His whole family could die, horribly, because of a bomb on Washington or Baltimore. But it gave him maneuvering space. Colonel Philip Cragey, Army, had been planning to move his family from Charlottesville, where they would be about as safe as you could get on the eastern seaboard, to Washington. At that instant he decided they had better think it over. Felix Fromburg, the quiet little lawyer who represented the FBI, also made a decision. If the international situation tensed up again, he would talk to that real estate agent who had been trying to sell him a farm in Warrenton. A thirty-megaton bomb was beyond all reason.

Major Price scratched his face at the white border of the scar, and

Katharine could see that he was still not satisfied. “They announced they had parity,” he said. “How would they know? How would they know how many bombs we’ve got?”

“I don’t think they know and I don’t think it matters,” Katharine said. Sometimes Major Price flew slowly. He would not proceed until everything on the navigation chart was clear in his head, even the most obvious landmarks. “Force, like space and time, is relative,” she continued, trying not to talk like a school-marm. “If they have enough bombs to destroy us, they have maximum capability, which means parity, because we can’t do anything worse than destroy them. Now I’ll make an assumption. For every bomb they blow in tests, they have stockpiled thirty to fifty. They aren’t quite as profligate as we are. Their resources aren’t quite as large. They don’t have tritium and deuterium to burn.”

Raoul Walback, of Central Intelligence, said, “I’ll buy that. As you know, all our reports from escapees show stepped-up production in the past eighteen months. Particularly in the Angara River area near Irkutsk, where their new hydroelectric plant is operating. There’s another new plutonium complex on the Ob, near Novosibirsk. Big. Real big.”

They absorbed Walback’s words with respect. Raoul was Princeton, had served in Paris headquarters of the OSS during World War II, and rejoined the government during the Korean War, after OSS became CIA. Espionage and intelligence on a high level were more fascinating to Raoul than finance. It had been easy for him to make easy money. He was unmarried, but he too had personal considerations. He was a rich and thoroughly civilized man, a perfectionist in his manner of living, and he hoped to remain that way.

They talked through the lunch-hour and into the afternoon. They brought into their discussion every fact—military, political, and economic—known in their departments. They had been chosen for this job because of imagination plus background. Because they were all young, as years are now measured, they were sometimes considered brash in a military community where a ripe age is often mistaken for wisdom. Their forecasts at times had proved uncannily accurate—so accurate as to embarrass certain of their elders and superiors with contrary views. They received encouragement and backing from a few ranking officers, a few aggressive and inquisitive members of the congressional Armed Services committees, and, on rare occasions, from the White House itself. Their powerful friends regarded them as a useful catalytic agent in a compound that preferred to settle down in an orderly and comfortable manner, the way a military organization should. The group dreamed up logical moves for the enemy to make, and stirred Washington to meet them. When the enemy made such a move, military or political, the Pentagon was already alerted. Sometimes the Kremlin crossed them up, and



the Intentions Group was branded a wild-eyed crew of sensationalists, soothsayers, and worse. Yet their prophecies were reliable enough so they could not be ignored.

At last they talked themselves out, and Simmons, his face lined and weary, said he would try to sum up their conclusions. The Russian announcement, coming after several unusual years of peace, indicated another shift in policy, and perhaps a reshuffle of command. Russia's tactics changed, but strategic objectives always remained the same. One group, while in command, might steer the Soviet ship-of-state on the tack of peace while other leaders, in the background, planned war. When progress towards world hegemony was no longer possible on the peace tack, the second crew took over and changed course. This was nothing new. It had happened before. The announcement indicated such a change. The H-bomb tests, probably unnecessary for scientific reasons, simply emphasized the warning, as when an angry man pounds the table. The warning, sinister as a rattlesnake's whir, was to Britain, France, Italy, Japan, and Germany. It said: "Stand clear!" At the same time it was designed to spread fear and doubt in the United States, and encourage appeasement and dissension.

"But most important," Simmons said, "is its effect on the Russian people. For a long time—ever since December of 'fifty-four when they cut down on civilian goods and increased the production of guided missiles and aircraft and nuclear weapons—it has been tough on the Russian people. Now they are heartened, and at the same time they are steeled for what is coming. They are told that this is what their sacrifices have accomplished. Now they need fear no one, and an end to their austerity is in sight. Since all their efforts and sacrifice have been for war production, the end can only mean an enforced peace, with the collapse of the Western alliance—or victory by arms."

Simmons made two small marks on the pad before him, and crossed one out. "Since we haven't knuckled under, not at the Summit or anywhere else, and since the alliance stands, they must proceed towards the other alternative."

Raoul Walback was impatient. Walback often thought Simmons as prissy as an old maid aunt. "Why don't you say war?" he challenged.

Perhaps because of his baldness, his weariness from the long session, Simmons suddenly looked sixty, rather than forty. "I hate the word!" he said. Simmons had spent all his adult life in study of Eastern Europe, which meant study of Russia principally. He had served two tours of duty at the embassy in Moscow. He explained, "You cannot know a people very well—any people—without finding much to admire in them. I hate to say war between my country and Russia but I have to say it. War. Oh, they haven't made the decision yet. They'd much rather have us appease them. But that we'll never do and so they move towards war. I don't know why this insanity, just when things seemed to

be shaking down.”

“If we’d had another depression,” said Walback, “war wouldn’t be necessary. I think they counted on a depression. We cut down on production of aircraft and guns, but we built roads and schools instead. We fooled ’em.”

Fromburg, who as usual had said little, and who was so inconspicuous it was hard to remember whether or not he attended meetings, spoke up. “I want to ask a question.” Fromburg was their skeptic. While others concocted adventures, military and political, for the enemy to attempt, Fromburg decided whether such moves were feasible. “Just one question—why war now?”

“I think I can answer that,” said Jesse Price. “It’s now—or never.”

Katharine Hume was surprised. The Air Force major had been sitting in with them for a month, but this was the first positive opinion he had volunteered. He had asked and answered questions, made statements of fact, but he had offered no opinions. The major kept three pipes on the desk in front of him and smoked them in rotation. Now he picked up number three, filled it, and continued. “‘Never’ will come on the day we have perfected the ICBM, and enough of them are emplaced and aimed so that our retaliation will be automatic—and nothing can stop it.”

ICBM meant Intercontinental Ballistics Missile. Speed: 8,000 miles an hour. Range: 5,000 miles with a thermonuclear warhead. Its aim could be pre-set, like that of a cannon, or it could be guided by radar stations on its path. Eventually its more intelligent siblings would take their own star sights and solve their own navigation problems. All of them, there in the conference room, knew that a prototype had been tested at Patrick Air Force Base on Cape Canaveral. It had soared up and out into space, down the range of islands, past San Salvador, past the Dominican Republic, past Puerto Rico, even past Ascension Island, the rock with an airstrip carved through its middle in the distant South Pacific. This first ICBM had carried no payload, and like all new weapons it doubtless had bugs. But the bugs would be eliminated, and the ICBM, whose German mother was named V-2, was on the way. Katharine Hume couldn’t help asking, “How soon will never day come?”

Jesse Price frowned and his teeth clamped down on his pipe-stem as if determined to dam any careless flow of words. “I know,” he said hesitantly, “that all of us here are cleared for Top Secret and most of you have Q-clearance to boot, and yet I’m not going to give you an exact answer. Anyway, all I could tell you would be the target date of our research and development people. I’m not going to do that without their permission. I can tell you this, though, Miss Hume. Your never day can hardly come sooner than eighteen months, and I hope not later than five years.”

Katharine was instantly angry. This was the first time that a fact had been withheld from the conference, and since she had asked the question she felt

that the rebuff was aimed at her. While other girls were getting married and having babies and settling down to homes, she had been absorbing and storing and even creating secrets. She had never been indiscreet. Her clearances meant not only that her patriotism, loyalty, and discretion were above suspicion, but her past and present personal life spotless. It meant that she had never been arrested, befriended a person of bad character, or joined a questionable organization. She had no close relatives on the wrong side of the curtain. Her drinking stopped after the first cocktail, and she always paid her bills. She didn't gamble, associate with homosexuals, and she was not a drug addict. She neither gossiped, nor was gossiped about. Her neighbors in Georgetown had attested to her rectitude. Her personnel files and report cards, back to grammar school, had been scrutinized for any trace of unstable behavior. None had been found. She said, "That isn't much of an answer, Major."

She had tried to keep her voice low. She realized she hadn't succeeded.

Price said, "It's the best I can give you."

Simmons, disturbed at this friction, began, "Now, Katy—" but it was Fromburg who broke the tension. "Major Price's answer is good enough for our purposes," Fromburg said, his dark, active eyes begging Katharine for caution. "But it's not exactly what I was trying to get at. Even if they know the ICBM is coming up, how can they risk war now? How could they win it?"

Colonel Cragey stirred. Just as Simmons knew Russia, Cragey knew China. He was China-born, the son of a missionary. He had fought in the Far East, for the Chinese against Japan, against the Chinese in Korea. He didn't look like a fighter. He looked like what he was primarily, a professor, and he wore his uniform as an amateur actor wears an uncomfortable costume. He had been lecturing on the Orient at the University of Virginia when, for the second time, the Army called him out of reserve, this time to serve on the Intentions Group where a specialist on the Orient was needed. He said, "I'll try to catch that one. Maybe the Kremlin can't help itself. The Kremlin has an unmanageable tiger by the tail. Name of China. Six hundred million people. Peiping controls twice as many people as Moscow and won't be run by Moscow. The rulers of Peiping have something they call face. It's more important to them than country, than party, than their life. They've sworn they were going to drive us out of the East. They couldn't get away with it and they lost face and they have to get their face back, even if it means war."

"Go ahead," Simmons encouraged him.

"If Russia fails to support China, the whole Communist world will fly apart. Yet if Russia is dragged into war on China's tail, they'll surely lose because we'll be on a war footing, and ready. In either case the men at the top in the Kremlin would surely be purged. They would die, personally. So Russia has to plan a war it can win. That means a one-day blitz. In one day they must

create a hundred Pearl Harbors.”

“They have to do a little more than that,” said Major Price. “First they have to eliminate SAC. A hundred Pearl Harbors won’t save Russia if SAC is still around.”

Commander Batt leaned forward. “SAC and the Navy,” he amended. “Of course, like the Air Force we’re in a transition period. We’re changing our weapons systems. For us, too, rockets are the ultimate answer. A screen of sea-to-air rockets to protect our carrier striking force. That’s what we’ve got to have.”

“Very well,” said Simmons. “It’s too late to get technical.” One of his duties, as senior in the group, was to fend off the endless arguments between Navy and Air. “Let’s assume that the Russians decided to launch their peace offensive at the January, fifty-five, meeting of the Presidium, but at the same time they began preparations for their alternative, war. At some time in the recent past they decided the peace offensive was faltering. I think operations were initiated as soon as this occurred, and I think these operations, preliminary or paramilitary operations, are now going on. What are they? How do they plan to strike? That’s all we have to figure out.” Simmons smiled, an admission that he recognized, as they all did, that their task was impossible. And the meeting was over.

Felix Fromburg, as security officer for the group, stayed for a few minutes after the others left. He drew dark blue curtains across the walls to shield the maps. He tore the notes and doodles from the scratch-pads. It was said that a man’s unconscious doodling revealed his character. Simmons’ pad, as usual, reflected his neat mind. Single, numbered words represented the subjects they had discussed. Major Price always covered his pad with airplanes and rockets, although on this day there was something new—the profile of a girl. Colonel Cragey had drawn an oldtime fortification, a walled city with a moat. Raoul Walback’s squiggles consisted of tiny stars and crescents all grouped in one corner of the paper. Commander Batt had drawn rowboats and fishes. Now what was so subconscious about that? Maybe he was trying to be too Freudian. Batt probably wished he was out on the Severn, fishing. On Katy Hume’s pad was some sort of an equation with symbols Fromburg couldn’t decipher. He folded them all up and dropped them into the burn bag. His job as security officer was finished for the day. In a way, he thought, it was all very silly.

When Katharine Hume stepped out of the River Gate she paused on the entrance walk and shook her head as one does to rout a nightmare in the reassuring sunlight. To her right the Jefferson Memorial rose like a white

bubble against the cobalt sky. To her left the Lincoln Memorial gleamed in serene splendor, the nearest thing to a temple that her countrymen had erected to mortal man. Two girls in white shorts, carrying tennis rackets, brushed past her. From the river she could hear the dissonance of racing outboards. Overhead an airliner lowered its undercarriage and gracefully wheeled into the glide path for National Airport. A tiny foreign car, a girl and golf bags inside, came to a stop directly in front of her. A young lieutenant with the patch of SHAPE on his sleeve came down the steps two at a time, kissed the girl, climbed into the car, and they laughed and drove off. Katharine wished she were the girl in that car. I don't live in a real world, she thought. That air-conditioned vault inside isn't real. It's grisly. It's out of Dante. Real people make love and have babies and worry about bus fares and P-TA politics and the starling plague. She lifted her face to the sun. If you brought the sun down to earth, and touched it to Washington, the result would be about the same as the kiss of the enemy's thirty-megaton bomb. That also was a fact, true and real, but few people were troubled. A half million of the untroubled would be away from Washington that afternoon. They would be up in the Shenandoahs and clustered on the beaches from Jersey to the Carolinas and three foursomes deep on every hole of every golf course within fifty miles, or perhaps only walking, by twos, in Rock Creek Park. They could live in the present while she stirred the muddy cauldron of the future. She felt a hand on her arm and Raoul Walback said, "Give you a lift, Katy?"

She said, "Thanks, Raoul," and walked with him to his car. She felt better. It had been bitterly lonely, there for a moment.

They were crossing Arlington Bridge when he said, "Doing anything tonight, Katy?"

"Yes. I've got a heavy date with a couple of books on biophthora."

"That's a big word."

"It has a big meaning. The destruction of life—all life, that is. It's from the Greek."

"Katy, why don't you relax for twenty-four hours? How's about driving up to my place in the mountains?"

"I'm not playing any one night stands this season."

He drove in silence until they reached Dumbarton Road and pulled up in front of the red brick apartment building, saved from ugliness and uniformity by shrubbery and vines, in which she lived. Then he said, "I'll make you another proposition. Let's get married."

She had realized that one day he would ask and she would have to answer. At first there had been lunches in the Pentagon cafeterias, and then dinners at Hall's and Herzog's and Normandy Farms, and then dancing at the Shoreham. There had been a quite proper professional weekend visiting the Crageys in

Charlottesville. She had been invited to dine at the Walback home, a marble mausoleum big as an embassy, on Massachusetts Avenue, and she had been presented to his mother, an authentic Washington cave dweller. Yet now that the question had been put she found herself off guard, with no answer ready. In a city where unmarried young women outnumber eligible males three to one, this was unfortunate. "Are you serious?" she asked, to gain time.

"Absolutely."

He was handsome enough, goodness knows. He was witty and companionable. They danced well together, a definite indication, he claimed, that they would get along fine in bed. He deferred to her at the conference table, a tonic for her ego. He was rich. Katharine didn't remember her own mother, who had died when she was nine, very clearly, but she did remember one thing her mother had said: "Katy, it's just as easy to marry a rich man as a poor one." This had been said, half in jest, at the dinner table at the end of a polite argument over a bill at Woody's. Her father was not poor. His salary, as Military Curator of the Library of Congress, was considerably above the average paid government workers. But he was poor according to the standards of people like the Walbacks. It was curious that out of the total advice her mother must have given her, this alone she recalled exactly. Yet she found it necessary to say, since she was resolutely honest, "Raoul, I'm not sure I love you. If I loved you, we'd be on the way to the mountains right now. You wouldn't have to bribe me with marriage."

"You haven't given me a chance, really, to find out whether you love me or not."

Katharine inspected him as she never had before. You look at a man differently after he suggests that you live with him for the rest of your life. Raoul did everything properly, everything right. His courtliness was a little something extra, like the dimple in the clean buttress of his chin. She had no doubt that their life together would be a symphony of gracious living, as glossy and impeccable as the color plates in *Town and Country* and *House and Garden*. Yet when she projected her thoughts ahead, she was disquieted. He would want her to quit her job, and eventually she would have to because there would be children. She would find her political discussions confined to discreet chitchat at receptions, and her research downgraded to equations involving boiled water, evaporated milk, Karo syrup, and pabulum. He would want her to live in the Massachusetts Avenue house, at least for a year or two, but she doubted that twenty rooms would be big enough for both her and Raoul's mother. Or fifty. She would find herself Mrs. Walback, junior, the one who had tried such an odd career, now producing grandchildren for *the* Mrs. Walback. She wondered whether, at this moment in history, she wanted children at all. The first legacy that a child should have was a reasonable

chance to grow up. She said, "Sorry, Raoul, but I'm going to stay Katy Hume."

He put his hand on her arm. He was so very civilized, Raoul was. She would bet that he never took a girl without verbal permission. "Think it over some more," he said. "I'm going to ask again. Perhaps if we tried it out—"

"Are you sure that what you want isn't simply a twirl with a girl?"

"Plenty of girls in Washington," he said. "What I want is a wife. I'm choosy. I want you."

"That's a very pretty speech," she said. "I'll put the matter on the agenda."

## 5

Katharine Hume's apartment was as unorthodox, for a young woman, as her job. Dominating the living room, claiming most of two walls, was an enormous L-shaped desk, built to her specifications from drafting-table boards. Books were stacked on the desk. Books rose to the ceiling above it. Books monopolized most of the remaining wall space, and even narrowed the entrance corridor. From her father she had inherited a miniscule estate but one of the finest private military libraries in the country. She constantly augmented it, and acquired an impressive scientific library of her own. She never loaned a book, she never asked for any other gift, and when in New York she spent her days prowling for books on Fourth Avenue as most women scout for gowns and fur bargains on Fifth. On H-Parity Day she was reading a history of the German General Staff, Nettleship's book on biophthora, and Sturtevant's papers on the same subject. Her furniture, an old-fashioned sofa with graceful lines, a few still-sturdy Hepplewhite chairs, a Queen Anne lowboy—all was from the family house in Alexandria. The furniture seemed adrift, the individual pieces scattered like lifeboats in a sea of books.

She read through the late dusk until at last she could no longer ignore hunger and was forced to face a penalty of spinsterhood—the dreary alternatives, cook for herself or eat out alone. There is no joy in cooking for oneself. Even the juiciest roast is tasteless unless spiced with a friend's praise. And eating in the gayest and most intimate French restaurant, alone, is an experience cold and cheerless as spreading a cloth on a marble counter in a bank. What she needed was a roommate, but the apartment wasn't big enough for both a roommate and her books. That, or a permanent guy. Trouble was, the commission's security people would frown on either a roommate or a beau unless they were provided with security clearances as aristocratic as her own. That limited the possibilities considerably. As if she talked in her sleep, or brought home classified documents. Being a logical and farsighted woman, she realized that if Raoul allowed her to eat alone often enough, she'd marry him, mother and all.

She had minute steaks in the refrigerator. She had decided to cook one of these, open a can of peas, and dine at her desk, when someone knocked. She supposed it was Callie Kantor, who worked for Interior and lived down the hall and sublimated, so she said, by raising parakeets and walking to work every morning. If it was Callie, she'd invite her out for a lobster dinner. "Come in," she called, and opened the door.

Major Price came in, bulking ominous and piratical in the shadowed hallway, his cap tilted over his eye patch and scar. He lived only a few blocks away, on R Street, and he had been to her apartment with a few of the others for a Sunday brunch two weeks before. She was not surprised at his call. The relations of seven people who three days a week face each other across a conference table, as equals, are naturally informal. She said, "Sit down, Jess, and I'll make you a drink. Bourbon?"

"With water. I saw your lights were on. I wanted to talk."

"Go ahead, talk." She went into the kitchen alcove and brought out ice and glasses and mixed drinks at her combination tea table and portable bar.

"I want to explain about this morning."

"Not necessary," she said. "Felix was right. You gave us all the information we required."

"I just don't believe in telling anyone—anyone at all—about future operations. Only ones who should know are the people who have to know to do their jobs."

She handed him a drink and said, "Sit down, there." She indicated the sofa. She sat at her swivel chair at the desk so her head was higher than his, an advantage if this talk was to be serious. "That reasoning is valid," she said, "up to a point. Is there anything else?"

"Yes, there is," he said. "There was a wing of B-Two-Nines on Okinawa in 'fifty-one. They were briefed to go up the Korean west coast and hit the Yalu bridges. Everybody in the wing was briefed. Not just the nine crews who were to make the strike. The night before the strike we lost a reconnaissance plane up there. Some of the crew bailed out, and were captured. They were good men, I suppose, but they talked. God knows what the Commie interrogators did to them. Anyway, when the nine B-Two-Nines got over the Yalu they were jumped by sixty Migs. We lost three up there, three more were washed out in forced landings in Japan, and one of the three that got back to Okinawa had its hydraulics shot out and blew up after a belly landing. We never ran unescorted B-Two-Nines up to the Yalu again. If we had got those bridges, just at that time—"

"A personal experience?" she asked.

"Yes. It was my squadron. I blew at Okinawa. The burned child dreads the fire." He touched the scar with his fingers.



She ran her tongue along her lips. "I understand. But suppose the information I requested had been essential to our plans, our forecasts that were coming up? What then?"

"I don't think you'd get it."

"Why not?"

"Because you couldn't do anything with it. Our group has neither responsibility nor authority. It can't act, but there is always the possibility it might leak."

She was angry all over again. She stared down into his single, unwavering, disconcerting gray eye. She told herself that this was, after all, an unofficial discussion, and he was a guest in her house, and she must not lose her temper. "Go on," she challenged.

"What makes you think that in our echelon we are better equipped to divine the intentions of the enemy than the people right at the top, say the National Security Council?"

She was on her feet. "I'll tell you why! Because we haven't anything else to do! It is precisely because we have no responsibility or authority, or administration either, to worry about, that we can do this thing. The people at the top have a million things to do. They can't devote all their time to the enemy."

"Stop pacing up and down like a leopard," he said, "Sit down and take it easy."

"I won't take it easy. I'm mad. Take the Secretary of Defense. Next to the President and perhaps the Secretary of State he's the most important man in the country. He runs three departments, each five times as big as General Motors. These departments are designed to do different things in different ways, and there is more rivalry between them than there is, say, between Oldsmobile and Buick. If you were running fifteen General Motors, but each one more complex than General Motors, do you think you could spend all your spare waking hours reading everything that has ever been written, including all the classified files, about the schism between the Army and the Party in Russia, as Simmons did last week?"

"Well, you have a point," Price said. "That's something I hadn't considered."

"If you don't believe in the Intentions Groups," she demanded, "why did you join it?"

"If you'll sit down I'll tell you. You make me nervous." She sat down, irritated by the ring of military command in his voice, but obeying nevertheless. "Two reasons," he said. "First, Keatton asked me to." Keatton was General Thomas Keatton, Commander of the Air Force. "Secondly, the Air Force hasn't any place in its T.O. for one-eyed pilots. They don't let one-

eyed pilots fly a B-Nine-Nine, which is what I ought to be doing to earn my pay. But they will let a one-eyed Pilot sit in on the Intentions Group, and I want to stay in the Air Force.”

“You like the Air Force?”

“Maybe it can save us,” he said. “Maybe.” He finished his drink, rose, and stretched. When he stretched, his arms seemed too long for his frame, and altogether he seemed too large and unwieldy for the apartment. His eye took in the opened books on her desk, the notebook and pencils, and the fact that she still wore the gray suit. “Katy,” he said, “why don’t you relax for twenty-four hours?”

“Do you by any chance have a place in the mountains?” she asked.

“No,” he said, looking puzzled. “I don’t have anything but an apartment no bigger than this. But I do have a car and I can take you out to eat. I hate to eat alone.”

“Just wait a minute,” she said, “while I comb my hair.”

## 6

After that, for more than a year very little happened. It was an era of comparative peace, with no shooting wars such as the half-forgotten wars of Korea and Indo-China. There was much talk of disarmament, although no nation actually disarmed. There was much talk of neutrality, although few governments were actually neutral. Russia was quiet except when internal convulsions, hidden like earthquakes at the bottom of the sea, ruffled the flat surface exposed to men’s eyes.

Americans were concerned with automobile production, the new television shows, the national road-building program, the possibility that antibodies could be stimulated to fight cancer, and the new space satellite.

The Intentions Group concentrated on its impossibly bold divination of events to come.

Katharine Hume dined out quite often, sometimes with Raoul Walback and sometimes with Jesse Price. Since she also entertained them in her apartment, she added a collection of cookbooks to her library.

Stanley Smith enlisted in the Air Force without difficulty, applied for a rating as Food Service Helper, and passed his aptitude tests easily. After ninety days of basic training he was promoted to Airman 2/c and requested and received assignment to the Strategic Air Command.

Henry Hazen survived boot camp, was trained as a radar operator at Quantico, and was then shipped to Camp Pendleton, California, preparatory to overseas duty.

Nina Pope got a job as a stenographer in a St. Augustine real estate office.

In mid-November of the following year, when she was dating an automobile salesman and memory of the night in the dunes had dimmed to the proportions of a bad dream, a B-99 on a training flight from Hibiscus Base, Florida, vanished without trace in the Gulf of Mexico.

## two

THE LOSS of a single jet bomber, and the presumed death of its crew, was front page news for only a day, even though the B-99 was the ultimate in military aircraft. The story dropped from the paper entirely after the search was discontinued. So long as men are born unequipped with wings, nature will occasionally slap them from the skies as a reminder that they were not designed to fly.

The Air Force was more than usually concerned, however. The B-99 was a reliable and sturdy aircraft. It could maintain altitude on four of its eight engines. This was the first operational B-99 to be lost.

There was no conceivable explanation for disaster. The plane had left Hibiscus Base with a flight plan calling for a rendezvous with a jet tanker after 3,500 miles of cruising over the Gulf. Its fuel replenished, it would then swing northwest to Salt Lake City and simulate dropping an H-bomb. The people of Salt Lake would know nothing of this macabre experiment, for the B-99 would be at 65,000 feet, out of sight and out of hearing, and would make its bomb run by radar. The contour of Salt Lake, on the radarscope, resembled that of a certain industrial complex locked in a pocket of peaks in the Urals. The crew and plane had accomplished this identical mission without incident a dozen times before. The procedure taxed plane and men to the same extent as an intercontinental bombing mission, come the day.

More than that, there had been no distress calls or warning of trouble. Nineteen minutes out of Hibiscus Base, which lies between Orlando and Tampa, this B-99 had reported that it was at 20,000 feet, on course, speed 550 knots, climbing towards its most efficient ceiling of 55,000, with everything normal. After that, silence—nothing. It was the mystery that annoyed General Keatton. Once, a long time before, he had led his shattered air division back to England with forty-two B-17's missing from his formations. But he knew what had become of them. He had seen. This way, it was different. Long after it was officially announced that the search had been called off (it would have been cruel to keep the families in suspense because of a million-to-one hope)

Keatton kept an air-sea rescue squadron quartering the Gulf. And the Air Force quietly offered a five thousand dollar reward to any fisherman or shrimper who could bring in a bit of wreckage, no matter how minute.

For there was something else, unpublicized.

The B-99 had been rushed into production in a crash program. It had replaced the B-47 and the B-52 on the assembly lines, and on every SAC base, not only because of superior speed, range, and altitude. The difference wasn't that important. The bomb bay of the 99 was no larger than that of the 47. When you can hide a small-city-size atomic bomb under a plug hat the bomb bay doesn't have to be big. The fuselage of the 99 was somewhat longer than that of the B-52. All that extra space was crammed with new and strange electronic defenders. A bomber has deadly enemies, anti-aircraft rockets such as the Nike, launched from the ground, and the Navy's Sparrow, fired from interceptors, and these enemies are smart. They have small inhuman eyes that guide them relentlessly to the bomber. The human brain piloting the bomber cannot outthink or outguess a guided missile. The human brain may decide to dodge, climb, weave, or dive, but the missile's quicker brain will seek him out and destroy him. It takes a machine to outsmart a machine. The electronic machines inside the B-99 could distract a Russian missile's one-track mind. They could take the missile's thoughts off its task, and might even persuade it to turn traitor, and to return to the ramp from whence it was launched.

It was Keatton's belief that the peace of the world, at that moment, rested with the B-99. This had not been true in the era of good feeling a few years before, and it might not be true a few years hence. But in that November, it was the existence of the B-99 and its pulsing metal brains that insured unbearable retaliation. It would be catastrophic if the enemy got hold of a B-99. It would be the end. They could pick its brains, learn its habits, and then build rockets to ignore its electronic tongues.

In his still, carpeted office down the main corridor from the River Gate, Keatton could not tear his mind away from the grotesque possibility that the B-99 had been stolen. As chief of an organization that was planning, among other fantastic things, to create an inhabited artificial satellite of earth, he could never forget that anything can happen. Keatton had no illusions whatsoever concerning his own future in the event of war. Whatever happened, he was through. If the enemy strike succeeded, in all likelihood he would either die very quickly, or be executed later. If he was called upon to strike their cities first, his soul could not survive the trauma of being an instrument of death for twenty or thirty or fifty million human beings. The worst of it was that ninety-nine percent of them were plain, ordinary people with no voice or choice in the schemes and ambitions of the leaders. Just people who wanted to work a little, play a little, love someone, and eat plenty. He couldn't even be sure his strike

would get the men in the Kremlin. When it happened, the bastards would be somewhere else. But if it did come, he would like to be certain that he could win it. For a protégé of Hap Arnold and Tooey Spaatz, it was a professional matter.

He called in Colonel Lundstrom, the Chief of OSI, and ordered him to Florida, just in case. OSI meant Office of Special Investigations, Air Force. He told Lundstrom to dig into the background of every crew member of the lost B-99.

## 2

The matter of the missing bomber did not become of transcendent importance until the third Monday of December.

On that day the Intentions Group met to review the final draft of a Russian war plan they had been constructing for eighteen months. Their plan was not complete, for while they believed they knew the answer to “How?” and “Where?” they could not presume to know when. Not that morning, they couldn't.

That it had required eighteen months to produce a facsimile of a Russian plan of attack was not surprising. They took it for granted that Russian staffs had been working on the original for at least five years. The skeletal draft was not wordy. The stapled copy, No. 6, that lay on the table before Katharine Hume contained only twenty-eight pages of typescript. It was called, simply: *FORECAST OF RUSSIAN MILITARY ACTION*.

The philosophical basis for the forecast had been written by Simmons and Craggy. The Kremlin was aware that nothing could be decisive except what happened to the United States and its air power in the first twenty-four hours of war. Twice in the century the explosive industrial might of America had resolved world conflicts. It would again, if given time. To win a war, Russia had to destroy the industrial potential of the United States, and at the same time protect itself against atomic holocaust. So the plan began:

“OBJECTIVE: Destruction of 65-75 percent of the largest cities and industrial complexes, with populations; destruction of the Strategic Air Command; destruction of those carriers capable of mounting an attack on Russia proper.”

Since this objective, if fulfilled, would insure total victory, the plan could now follow the principle of war called “economy of force.” It discarded ground, sea, or air action in Europe and in Asia, with a single exception, unless directed at American air and naval bases. The exception was London. Other nations might be awed into submission by the blitz; the British, never.

Each time she read the first few pages of the forecast, as she had a hundred

times as details were argued and altered, Katharine shivered. It was a plan ingenious and terrifying, but it would anger higher authority, particularly in the Continental Air Defense Command, and probably in the Army and Navy as well. Yet it was their duty to plan the destruction of the United States in the hope that someone else would think up a countermove to prevent it. It was not their duty to plan a defense. Indeed, Katharine wondered if defense were possible.

The guts of the forecast was that the main blow would be delivered not by air, as everyone anticipated, but by sea. Geography and the lethal trident of submarine, guided missile, and H-bomb, made their concept logical. Sixty-five percent of America's heavy industry lay within three hundred miles of the sea, which meant within range of the old-fashioned German V-weapons. The Russians had much more efficient gadgets, and more of them, now. Several German rocket research establishments had fallen into Russian hands in 1945, along with thousands of technicians, tons of blueprints, acres of underground factories, and components by the carload. When the war ended the Germans had been working on a V-9, a two-stage rocket designed for transoceanic warfare. This work had not faltered, under Soviet direction.

To fathom the enemy's intentions, it had first been necessary to determine his capabilities, and of course this had been the hardest part of the job. The Russians hold no open legislative hearings to decide whether their strategic air force shall have fifty or a hundred wings. Neither do they announce the composition of their Navy, or display motion pictures, publicly, of their new rockets.

Yet something always comes through. And an intelligence analyst works in much the same way as an archeologist. Give him a small bone, and often he can reconstruct the whole animal. So it was that Commander Batt could say that Russia's submarine fleet comprised six hundred vessels, of which half were capable of long-range action against the shores of North America. Of these, two hundred were equipped with hangars or rocket-launchers, or both. The rockets had a range of five hundred miles and could be dropped within two miles of target. Armed with an H-bomb, this was the same as a direct hit. The submarine-launched rockets would drop at a speed of 3,500 miles an hour. Interception was next to impossible.

Katharine guessed, conservatively, that the Russian stockpile of H-bombs stood at three hundred and the annual production had been stepped-up to one hundred. A few of these bombs, designed to contaminate vast inland areas, might be rigged with U-238 or cobalt casing, although this seemed as unnecessary as poisoning elephant-gun bullets to shoot mice. The nominal, ten-megaton bomb would sink Manhattan Island, kill almost everyone in the other boroughs by blast and heat alone, and spread a radioactive cloud that

would fall over an area of seven thousand square miles down wind. Rigged with U-238, the fallout area would be big as the state of Pennsylvania, and perhaps uninhabitable for several years.

All vital coastal cities and such inland centers as Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Dallas, Atlanta, Youngstown, and Bethlehem would be targets for the submarines. Katharine read:

“Because of the overriding importance of destroying the New York area—the largest financial, communications, population, and industrial complex in the world—special means can be used. In addition to submarines assigned, two seagoing tugs will put in through The Narrows a few hours before Zero. One will find a berth between Canal and 20th streets, North River. The other will dock between the Brooklyn and Williamsburg bridges. Each of these ships will carry an H-bomb, with time fuse, in its hold. Crews will be considered expendable. If the Red Navy considers this method will not in any way compromise the security of the whole plan, it can also be used on such first priority targets as Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Norfolk.”

The forecast estimated that the attack from the sea would kill forty million Americans, of whom thirty million would die in the first six hours.

But this was by no means all. So long as SAC existed, ready to retaliate from bases ringing the Soviet Union, the Kremlin still couldn't win. So except for two wings assigned to hit Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, Denver, St. Louis, Kansas City, and a few other inland centers, the whole strength of the Red Air Force was to be thrown against SAC bases the world over.

Jesse Price had made the estimate of the potentialities of *Aviatsiva Dalnevo Deystviva*, which he called SUSAC, the Air Force contraction for Soviet Union Strategic Air Command. Its principal weapon was the T-37, nicknamed Bison, an intercontinental bomber first displayed at the 1954 May Day celebration in Moscow. The T-37 was larger, and perhaps faster, than the B-47. It could carry the load of a B-52. But Major Price doubted that it possessed the electronic defensive gear of the B-99. He believed SUSAC had replaced all its obsolete, propeller-driven T-4's with the T-37. Since the Russians had possessed twelve hundred T-4's, it was safe to assume they would have at least an equal number of T-37's.

The two wings assigned to hit Middle America would not cross the Arctic and approach the DEW line—the Distant Early Warning radar and interceptor net stretching from Alaska to Greenland—until after the strike from the sea. Thus the Air Defense Command would not be alerted until the instant of the main blow. The Air Defense Command, on which almost all hope of repelling



nuclear attack now centered, was dispersed to protect the whole country. In the hours of shock and confusion following obliteration of the coastal cities, it would be called upon to defend the Midwest against concentrated attack. Price predicted that at least ten enemy bombers would get through. Ten bombers delivered to the proper targets would paralyze and poison the solar plexus of the nation.

Simmons, at the end of the long table, head bent, was touching a pencil to his pad, arranging his thoughts, as he had been taught, into a precise parade. He saw that the others waited for him to speak. "You've all read the forecast in this form, which I hope will be final," he said. "Do you have any reservations?"

Commander Batt rose. Most of the others remained in their seats while talking, but Batt was accustomed to thinking, and speaking, on his feet. Since boyhood, Batt had been questioned on serious subjects by admirals, and when you spoke to an admiral you stood up, respectfully. Batt, a taut, neatly made man, was third generation Navy. His boyhood heroes had been Farragut and John Paul Jones and Decatur instead of Dick Tracy or Tom Swift. He had absorbed Mahan while still at Macdonough School and graduated from the Academy in '41, close to the top of his class. He finished flight training just too late for Midway, but in plenty of time for Santa Cruz and a dozen battles that followed. By the end of the war he had reached a conclusion, not novel but still unacceptable to most of his superiors, that the air was the dominant ocean. It was an ocean without bounds or shoals and Mahan's theories could apply to the sky. Yet he remained all Navy, and he always tried to fit the Navy into the ever-shifting picture of a future war. He had been one of the first to advocate the use of carriers as mobile bases for strategic air war, had written an essay on the subject for the *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, and had seen his arguments adopted by his seniors. "I don't want you to mistake me," he began. "I like our plan, and yet—"

Jesse Price grinned. "Still worried about how to get your subs across?"

"No. It's not that. At first I was skeptical about moving fifty to seventy-five submarines across the North Atlantic without their being spotted. But I kept thinking of Pearl Harbor and how the Japs got six carriers and a supporting fleet to within two hundred miles of Oahu with no sweat. And I thought of how much bigger a carrier is than a snorkel and periscope. So, as you can see in the plan, I staged most of the subs in the White Sea and at Murmansk. They slip through the Denmark Straits and come down from the north, keeping out of shipping lanes. If they started in mid-winter, say about now, when the weather was bad and trans-Atlantic traffic at a minimum, there wouldn't be much chance of detection. A smaller flotilla sneaks out of the Baltic. They'll be the ones bound for our Gulf coast. All of them can do most

of their cruising on the surface, keep their radar going, and duck long before anything can see them. Even if one or two were spotted on our side of the ocean it would hardly be a *casus belli*.”

“Matter of fact,” said Major Price, “it’s happened a few times already without anybody pushing the panic button. And we’ve had a lot of snooper planes over Greenland and Alaska. More than normal. Maybe testing our radar net. Maybe just letting us get used to them.”

“Right,” said Batt. “Anyway, these subs don’t have to enter our territorial waters until their final run in for their targets. At dusk they can be two hundred miles offshore, and two hundred feet down, and at first light, D-Day, be in firing position without ever having shown themselves.”

“Machiavelli, junior,” Katharine said.

“However,” Batt continued, smiling, “I still have some reservations about whether they can nail the *Forrestal* and our other big carriers. I’m afraid they won’t have much trouble knocking out the Sixth Fleet, in the Med. They have agents strung all the way from Gib to Stamboul, so they know the approximate location of Sixth Fleet carriers almost from day to day. The Mediterranean, after all, is narrow waters. Dangerous. But a task force in the Atlantic is an entirely different matter. Its location can be shifted six hundred miles every twenty-four hours.”

Simmons said, “Assuming that the *Forrestal* and two or three other big carriers were loose on the high seas, would that alone deter the Russians?”

“A carrier bomber can tote the same bomb as the B-Nine-Nine,” Batt said. “But they don’t have the range. Carrier planes can’t get to their heartland. Nor do they have the altitude and defensive equipment of the Ninety-Nine. They are intended to complement SAC, not replace it.”

“Haven’t you answered your own question?”

“I guess I have,” Commander Batt admitted, and sat down.

“Anyone else?” asked Simmons.

Jesse Price arranged his pipes in a row and said, “Me. Understand, I like this plan. It is feasible and practical and well within the Russian capabilities. It has unexpected elements of strength, such as leaving the major concentrations of our fighter and anti-aircraft defense strictly alone, immobilized while the blitz is going on. But the plan doesn’t contemplate the destruction of all of SAC. Our bases in England—and I’ll include the RAF strategic bombing bases along with ours—are in range of the Russian fighter-bombers and probably of the Baltic rocket sites. Scratch our British bases. I think we can also scratch our island bases in the Pacific. They’re sitting ducks for submarine-launched missiles. Maybe SUSAC will have trouble knocking out our fields in North Africa and Turkey, but I doubt it. The only thing that stumps me are the bases in our southern and southwest states. They’re just about as far as you can get

from the U.S.S.R. Missiles from submarines may kill the ones close to big cities, but the enemy can't hope to get them all. If only a few survive, the Russians win but they lose."

Simmons looked at Felix Fromburg and asked a question, "Could SAC be taken out of the play by sabotage?"

The FBI man's lips pursed as if to taste the words before he permitted them to leave his mouth. "No," he said finally, "I don't believe SAC can be successfully sabotaged. Security on SAC bases is more rigid than on any installations in the country, including the AEC and the U.S. Mint. It would have to be an inside job, and that I cannot imagine."

"Well," said Simmons, "I say thank God for SAC."

The only telephone instrument in the conference room, a "hot line" from the Pentagon switchboard for matters urgent and official, rang. Simmons answered it, handed it to Price, saying, "For you, Major."

Price spoke his name into the phone, listened, said, "Thank you, Maude," and hung up. Two small canyons appeared in his forehead above the hawk-beak nose, and his single eye narrowed. He turned to his colleagues and said, "Speaking of SAC, two B-Nine-Nines are missing. Vanished. Lost in the Gulf, like the one in November. That was my secretary, up in Air Force."

Sometimes, as now, Jess looked positively forbidding, Katharine Hume thought. She said, "Well?"

"It could be collision," said Price, "or navigation snafu."

They were all silent, thinking. Katharine said it, glancing at Felix Fromburg, "Or sabotage?"

"Or sabotage," Fromburg acknowledged. "I didn't say it couldn't happen. I just said I couldn't conceive of it, which may only mean that I don't have Katy's imagination."

"No use getting excited until we know," Price said. He still frowned.

"I'm excited," said Katharine. "It's my Air Force, too. I've got a brother in it. On a SAC base in the Midlands."

"I think we should get this excited," said Simmons. "I think we should get this forecast out as quickly as we can. If everyone is agreeable, I'll turn it over to General Clumb, for distribution, right after the meeting."

"Does he have to see it?" Katharine asked. Clumb was not one of her favorite generals. Clumb had definite views on the role of women in the military establishment, which he had expressed, publicly and often. She, in turn, had quoted to him Clemenceau's opinion that wars were far too important to be left in the hands of generals.

"Yes, he has to see it," said Simmons. "We operate under the aegis of his section, and the forecast has to go through channels, like everything else. Another thing—let's try to answer, 'When?' Oh, we may be way off, but I

think it's up to us to try. Let's scrape up everything pertinent in our own departments, and be back here at eight tomorrow."

"Eight!" said Raoul Walback. "Tomorrow?" He had been invited to play golf at Burning Tree that afternoon. He had intended to ask Katy to go dancing that evening. That was out, too. She would be communing with whatever oracles dwelt behind the blank white marble of the AEC, and he would be racing around the CIA's haphazard cluster of old buildings walled off in Foggy Bottom, a highly secret compound known to its inmates as the "campus." And the routine of the Walback household provided for breakfast at eight-thirty, and Raoul enjoyed his regularity.

"Eight," said Simmons.

### 3

The news of the missing B-99's travelled more swiftly to the Pentagon in Washington than to the room of Airman 2/c Stanley Smith in Barracks 37, only a mile from Hibiscus Operations. Hibiscus was the newest of the super-bases constructed under the emergency budget. It covered an area of twenty-two square miles, enclosed by maximum security fencing, floodlit in the darkness hours. Around the perimeter, at intervals of five hundred yards, bulked concrete flak towers mounting the rapid-fire 75-millimeter Skysweepers, or smaller platforms with heavy machine guns. An elf couldn't sneak into Hibiscus without a pass from the commanding general.

Since one of the aims of SAC was to encourage re-enlistment, thus maintaining its skilled cadres of mechanics, technicians, and fliers, much thought and expense had been devoted to the comfort and happiness of the airmen. Hibiscus did not look like a military installation, but like a pastel-hued development freshly created in the tourist belt. Its theaters, clubs, and public rooms were air-conditioned. It had seven swimming pools, a golf course, baseball diamonds, and tennis courts. Flame vine and bougainvillea softened the stark outlines of its ammunition dumps and restricted areas. Palms flanked the streets. Azalea beds and clumps of camellias were in their second year of growth and flower. Banks of hibiscus and gardenias shielded the barracks. True, this town also possessed a gray factory district composed of enormous shops and hangars, and an area forbidden to most of its 4,500 inhabitants—the flight line. On the flight line customarily rested between ninety and a hundred and twenty B-99's, their wings drooping with tons of fuel.

Barracks 37 did not resemble a barracks at all. It could have been an airy dormitory at the University of Miami, or an apartment house of small efficiency units at any one of a hundred new Florida subdivisions. Most of the men in Barracks 37, like Stanley Smith, were graduates of the Cooks and

Bakers School and were rated as Food Service Helpers. They could not advance far in grade, and yet Barracks 37 was one of the most comfortable and coolest buildings at Hibiscus. The Air Force recognized the importance of its cooks, for it regarded the stomachs of its fliers with solicitude. If indigestion drops an infantryman in combat, the others in his fire team simply close ranks and assume his duty. Indigestion to a pilot or radarman at 55,000 feet can wreck a mission, or lose a \$2,000,000 piece of equipment plus two hydrogen bombs. Conceivably, a stomachache could spare Moscow.

Airman Smith's duties began at midnight and ended at eight in the morning, five days a week. He had asked for these odd hours and never requested a change. Smith was one of the quietest and oldest men in Barracks 37. Also, he was popular. He always had plenty of money, which was to be expected since he was one of the best poker players among the cooks, and never went out on tears and threw his dough around. It was known that he had a girl in Orlando, a doll. He was seen, sometimes, driving her car. He had Fridays and Saturdays off, choice days. A man who worked the midnight shift could pick his days. He was entitled to it. Smith never talked much about himself, or his girl. He was a solid man, and would surely make sergeant in a hurry.

On this Monday Airman Smith was awakened at two in the afternoon by his roommate, Phil Cusack, who was still young enough to be troubled by acne. Cusack came from Morgantown, West Virginia. His father had been a miner and he would have been a miner also had it not been for the Air Force. Cusack had never lived so well, and so clean, before. He had no plans beyond the Air Force, except that he never wanted to go back to West Virginia.

Smith was just stirring out of sleep when Cusack opened the door and said, his voice unnaturally high, "Hey Stan!" Usually, Cusack was careful not to disturb Smith until after he had shaved, because his roommate was grumpy when first awakened.

Smith rolled over on his back and opened his eyes. "Yeah?"

"Hell out on the flight line. Two more Ninety-Nines are gone."

"Gone?"

"Twenty minutes out on this morning's mission, and then no radio contact. Like they kept on climbing right into the sky. You ought to hear the crews at lunch. Ape sweat."

"Too bad," said Smith.

"Fourteen guys gone. Glad I'm fryin', not flyin'."

Smith swung his legs out of bed and stretched. It had been so easy. He said, "Cusack, how about trotting downstairs and getting me a cold Coke?"

"Sure," Cusack said, and left.

Smith shucked his pajama top and turned on the radio and shaved. Three

scragged and he could get two more with the material he had on hand. Then he'd have to drive up to that beach between Ponte Vedra and St. Augustine for resupply. His instructions were to start on the third Monday of December, and keep going. He was carrying out his orders. There had been no change except for the test requested the month before.

Four weeks ago he had received a letter from Robert Gumol, president of the First National Bank of Upper Hyannis, Pennsylvania. The letter had been cagily composed, in case it should fall into the hands of the wrong Stanley Smith, or Hibiscus Base mail was being monitored. "If you are the Stanley Smith who has had some experience with Five-Star Electric," the letter said, "please telephone me concerning a matter that may be of some benefit to you."

That evening Smith had called Gumol from a pay booth in Orlando. Three days later he was in Upper Hyannis on a seventy-two-hour pass. He had been hoarding his leave for such an eventuality.

Gumol turned out to be a short, heavy-shouldered man, thick through the middle, probably in his late fifties, with the opaque china-blue eyes of a week-old baby, uneven dark splotches marring his pink skin. For a few minutes they chatted about the Florida climate, and other trivialities, in the office of the bank, feeling each other out, and then Gumol had said, "Now, concerning your mission—"

"Everything seems to be going very well," said Smith.

"How many others came over with you?"

"Don't you know?"

"Yes, I know."

Stanley Smith understood that Gumol was just making very sure of his identity, and he said, "Three."

"Right. Well, two of the others have been shifted around a good deal, and I haven't heard a word from the third. That's why I decided to call on you. The home office sent me word that it wants a test. On or about November fifteenth. If the test goes well, you are to continue as before."

"That all?"

"That's all the message."

"Very well. I understand."

"You can do it?"

"Certainly." Smith hesitated and added, "I wonder why they want a test?"

Gumol squirmed in his chair and Smith noticed how short and inadequate his legs were, for his heft. When Gumol leaned back in the chair his feet did not quite touch the gray carpet. "To tell you the truth," Gumol said, "I don't exactly know what you're going to do. I wish I did know. If something big is

going to happen, they ought to give me time to make plans. They ought to let me know. Do you think anything big—I mean really big—is contemplated?”

“All I know is what I’m supposed to do. I don’t ask questions.”

“Now, don’t misunderstand me,” Gumol said. “I don’t want to know your job. Far from it. I was just thinking of something bigger than any one man, or four men, can do, if you know what I mean.”

“I know what you mean,” said Smith, “but I don’t have the answer.”

“Do you by any chance need extra money?” asked Gumol.

Gumol knew very well that Smith would have asked for money, had he needed it. So Smith understood, correctly, that this was an offer of money in exchange for information. “Not right now, thanks,” he said. He wanted to ask the location of his roommates from Little Chicago, and the identity of the one from whom nothing had been heard. He did not think it politic to do so.

Gumol said, “Well, whatever you’re up to, good luck. I expect I’ll be able to guess on the fifteenth.”

Smith smiled and said, “Yes, I expect you will.”

And he had flown back to Florida.

Now that the plan was operating successfully, with three planes behind him, he too was wondering whether anything bigger would happen. SAC would find the disappearance of two more 99’s big enough. There had been a flap over the first one, with SI men all over the base. Hibiscus would really be in an uproar this day. He decided that this would be a good night to lay low and do nothing, and let Gregg Palmer, Masters, and Johnson carry the ball. If they were in a position to operate, it would take the heat off Hibiscus. It would spread the risk, and make things simpler for himself, and possibly for the others as well.

Smith asked himself, again, why that test in November? He thought he could guess. Military machines, being civilization’s most massive organizations, were sensitive to the laws of motion and inertia. They cannot move instantly into top speed from a standing start. His experience in the engineers’ regiment had taught him this. A battle did not begin when the artillery opened its barrage and the infantry rose from its positions and charged. A battle began when the bridging was brought up, the roads strengthened to support tanks, the ammunition dumps replenished, and partisans struck in the enemy rear. He could envision a meeting of generals in the Kremlin, and one of them saying: “Before we start this, I’d like to know whether our saboteur teams can perform their mission.” Then the order had gone out to him, via Gumol, and he had succeeded. The great locomotive had not yet begun to move, but the exploit of November had set its wheels to

spinning.

Cusack came back with the Coke and Smith said, "What's at the movies tonight?"

#### 4

Robert Gumol did not guess the exact nature of Smith's mission when the first B-99 vanished on November 15. He realized, of course, that Smith must have had something to do with the disappearance of the aircraft, but at first he believed that Smith, somehow, must have stolen the bomber and delivered it to his Fatherland.

Gumol changed his mind on the third Monday in December. Shortly after two o'clock that afternoon, just as he was about to lock his desk and leave the bank, he heard the news that two more bombers were missing from Hibiscus. All he said to Kirkland, his cashier, was: "Something must be wrong with them."

Thirty minutes later he joined Al Kauffman, hardware, Lou Stone, real estate, and Pete Kenney, Presto Markets, for golf at the Upper Hyannis Country Club. His game was more abysmal than usual, he couldn't break 110, and he lost eighteen dollars in the nassau. In the locker room, afterward, he drank two double Scotches. They failed to cheer him. Instead of going directly home from the club he returned to the bank. He sat at his desk and stared at the Rotary Club plaque on the wall, but he was trying to look into the future.

Robert Gumol had come to the United States with his father, a Petrograd banker, at the age of thirteen. The year was 1914, and the world was at war. Everyone thought it would be over in a few months. Unless it was over swiftly, all the warring nations would be bankrupt. No one dreamed that for the next forty-odd years there would be little peace, and that governments would be so constituted that the support of wars would be their principal business. Gumol, senior, was sent to the United States on behalf of the Czar's treasury, selected for the mission because he spoke fluent English and had married a Scotswoman with banking connections in America. For three years the Gumols lived in hotels in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington. Papa Gumol bartered Imperial Russian bonds for dollars, for torpedoes, for bandages and gas masks. Most of his colleagues returned to Russia before the revolution, and perished. But Gumol, senior, with prescience of the terror abuilding, managed to remain in America. After the capitulation of Russia he set up a private bank in Philadelphia, specializing in foreign exchange. At first, he did not do well.

In the early days of the revolution, when the ruble was devoid of honor in the court of currencies, and the Bolshevik regime unrecognized in the United



States, Papa Gumol was approached by a personal emissary of Lenin. As a result, certain Romanoff crown jewels were converted into dollars, and several shipments of machine tools and tractors reached the port of Odessa in time to bolster the first five-year plan. From that day, the house of Gumol was a chattel of the U.S.S.R., for the jewels had entered the country without benefit of customs.

In 1931 the Gumols built a fifteen-room Tudor home in Upper Hyannis, a suburb close enough to the Main Line to be both respectable and expansible. In 1933 Russia and the United States resumed diplomatic relations. The Gumols, thinking that their usefulness to the Soviets would now end, and their dealings in foreign exchange prove less profitable, bought and reorganized the tottering Upper Hyannis bank. They were wrong about the Soviets. A man from the re-established Russian embassy paid them a visit and informed them that their continued co-operation would be both remunerative and necessary. Dealings with the embassy would remain strictly secret, as had dealings with unofficial agents in the past. After his father died, Robert Gumol continued this relationship.

Gumol's function was at once that of a postoffice and a bank. Although he handled large sums not his own, or listed to any depositor, there was never any trouble with the bank examiners. Most of the embassy business was in cash, and for cash safe deposit boxes are adequate. Upon occasion he was called upon to convert various currencies into dollars, these occasions usually following Russian absorption of small countries, or the acquisition of a satellite. Money conversion aroused no suspicion. The Gumols had always specialized in foreign exchange.

He was never approached by American Communists, or Amtorg, or front organizations. His only contacts were with discreet representatives of the embassy, or the consulates, and approved people who looked and acted like Americans, but who he sensed were Russian. All was done with such precision, and so infrequently, that he felt perfectly secure. He felt secure, that is, so long as he pleased his masters. There was never any doubt in his mind what would happen if they suspected the slightest carelessness or deviation.

It was not until the late 'forties, when Stalin's implacable hatred of America became apparent, that Gumol grew jumpy. By then, of course, it was too late. Had he attempted to excuse himself from his functions, or shown any weakness, he would certainly have been murdered.

Had he sought the protection of the FBI or Treasury Department, and told the whole story, his life might have been saved, true. But he would be ruined and perhaps jailed. His son at Penn and his daughter at Bryn Mawr would have been disgraced, children of a traitor. Now even the alternative of confession was beyond possibility. If implicated in the loss of the bombers, and the death

of the crews, he would be executed. Accessory before the fact. He might be lynched.

And everyone in Upper Hyannis would tell you that Robert Gumol was certainly a leading citizen, a member of all the big committees and a director of the Community Chest, and quite a democratic guy, to boot, for a banker. He enjoyed a drink and a good story in the club locker room. He had even been seen at a couple of stag movies. And when he was in New York or Chicago or Havana on a convention he really did the town. Nobody would ever imagine him a second generation spy.

The hell of it was, he thought, that he actually hated communism and socialism and had said so in dozens of speeches, one of them at the bankers' regional convention in Atlantic City only the week before.

The Commie bastards were crazy, starting something now, just when things seemed to be rocking along so well, and even dealings in their currency were returning to profitable normalcy. He tried to recall everything he knew about the Russians.

Gumol had only met one big-shot Russian commissar in his life. It was in 1930, on a trip abroad with his father. In Berlin they had been introduced to Dmitri Manuilsky, chief of the Comintern, and engaged in a fight to establish Communist rule in the Reichstag. He remembered Manuilsky as a careless, cynical Bohemian, living it up in a Berlin gayly decadent and falsely gay. Manuilsky had been friendly to the Gumols, but contemptuous of Americans generally. Gumol recalled, exactly, one thing Manuilsky had said:

"Today we aren't strong enough to attack. Our time will come in twenty or thirty years. The bourgeoisie will have to be put to sleep, so we will begin by launching the most spectacular peace movement on record. There will be electrifying overtones and unheard-of concessions. The capitalist countries, stupid and decadent, will rejoice to co-operate in their own destruction. They will leap at another chance to be friends. As soon as their guard is down we will smash them with our clenched fist."

And Manuilsky had brought his fist down on the table, and the glasses and bottles had jumped and quivered. What Manuilsky had said, there in Berlin, was now part of history, for he had repeated the same thing in an address at the Lenin School of Political Warfare the next year and Gumol had read it in *The Inquirer*.

Recalling Manuilsky's statement, and knowing what he did, knowing that saboteurs had destroyed three of the best bombers the United States had and undoubtedly would get more, it looked like a big war was coming. Such extensive sabotage was surely an act of war, wasn't it? He asked himself a question, "What'll war do to me?" The answer was easy. It would kill him.

It would probably kill him right there in Upper Hyannis. He had no

illusions that his contacts at the embassy would give him warning. At war's instant, his usefulness ended. He doubted, knowing their passion for secrecy, that all the Russians themselves, in Washington and the consulates, would get warning. He tried to recall what that Civil Defense man had told Rotary about the H-bomb, after the AEC had come out with the dope on fallout and radiation, but he couldn't quite get it straight in his mind. Whatever the man had said, Upper Hyannis was much too close to Philadelphia. At best, Gumol's survival would depend on the vagaries of the wind and whether he was in the bank, or at home, when it happened. If he was in the bank, he might live in the vault for a day or two until the fallout was over. Maybe.

Suppose there was a war and the Americans won? He'd be just as dead. They'd get access to the Russian records, or some of the Russians in Washington would talk, and they'd find out all about him. He hated to think what Americans, after an atomic war, would do to traitors. He said, to himself, aloud, "What in hell's going to happen to me?"

The glimmer of an idea entered the dark dungeon of his helplessness. If he could only get out of the country! If he could get out of the country for a few weeks he might ride it out. He could see which way the cat jumped. And when war came, whatever happened, he would be rid of *her*.

He hated *her*, and he had hated her for years and would have divorced her long ago, in spite of the children, except that he suspected she knew something. You cannot live with a woman for twenty-eight years without her learning almost everything. He had never told her a word, and yet he was quite sure she knew, and would blab if he left her. This ill wind coming might blow him some good. It was a chance—the chance of a lifetime.

This was not the first time he had thought of skipping out and leaving her. His favorite daydream was escape from the conspirational net in which he was gilled, and from his wife. He had considered it very carefully. It was not an easy thing to do. It was very difficult for a man of his prominence to vanish. If there was a public alarm, it would be impossible. A banker, widely known and often photographed, could not change his identity and erase his spoor in a small world, laced with pervasive and efficient communications. Were it not for the Russians, he might flee his wife. There were countries in the world where leaving a wife is no crime, and from which he could not be extradited. Quitting a lifelong job of espionage was quite another matter. In countries where extradition laws are loose, murder also can be casual. Until this moment there had seemed no solution. But now he could take a perfectly logical trip, which would raise no alarm or chase, and he doubted that he would have to come back. If the big thing didn't happen, nothing was lost. The situation, at worst, would be as before.

Gumol's daydreams had not been barren. He knew, at least, how to begin.

He picked up his largest brief case from the floor next to the file cabinet, walked out into the bank's lobby, and chatted for a moment with Liggett, the partially crippled watchman. He went into the basement and unlocked the safe deposit cage. Five of the larger safe deposit boxes were in his own name. He opened one of these and started packing the brief case. He first put in all the thousand dollar bills, two hundred of them, and eight packages of hundreds. Then he crammed in fifties, twenties, and even tens, counting as he worked. When the case was full it contained \$385,000. Whatever happened, that should be sufficient.

He returned to his office and thought what he must do next. The thought of returning home, to Ruth, was repugnant. She'd guess something was up. She never missed. He lifted the telephone, dialled his home number, and told the maid he wanted to speak to Mrs. Gumol. When she answered he said, "Ruth, dear, I've got to go to Havana right away."

"Havana!" Her voice, as always, was like an iron file on tin.

"They're floating a big bond issue down there. I think I can get in on it—get the Pennsylvania distribution."

"You've never done anything like that before."

"Lots of things haven't been done before."

"You're not still at the bank, are you?"

"Yes, I've been talking long distance most of the afternoon."

"I thought you had a golf date." In her voice was triumphant suspicion.

"Well, after golf, I mean."

She said, "Robert, I don't think you're telling me the truth. Anyway, it's seven o'clock and we're going out for dinner."

So he was a liar! He was furious, but he strained the anger from his voice, and forced himself to speak impersonally, as when turning down a ne'er-do-well's request for a loan. "I'm afraid you'll have to go by yourself, Ruth. I've got to catch the first plane I can get from Philly."

"You mean you're not even coming home to pack?"

"No. I'm not coming home to pack. Only be gone a few days. It's possible to buy clothes in Havana, you know."

"But Robert!"

"I'll wire my address when I get there. Goodbye, Ruth." He hung up, and leaned back in his chair. He discovered that his hands trembled, and he was breathing heavily. He assured himself that it was excitement, not his heart. Old Doc Blandy had told him to take off weight and cut out golf entirely. Blandy was nuts. Golf was his only recreation, and exercise, and how could a man lose weight by cutting out exercise? What must he do next, now? The bank. That would be simple. A bank didn't question your motives, call you a liar, or talk back. Not when you owned it, it didn't. In recent years he had entrusted

Gifford, his cashier, with almost all the routine, while he travelled about as much as he could. A man could live elegantly, while travelling, at no cost. He lived on an expense account, and it didn't even cost the bank anything, really, because of the tax structure. Everything came off the top. Everything, even call girls, if you knew how to squeeze them in under the column headed Entertainment. Gumol penned a note:

“DEAR GIFF—

“Ran into a heart specialist today who advised me to take a rest. Decided to go to Havana for a week or two. When I'm down there I'll investigate opportunities in Latin-American exchange, so the whole trip can come off the top.” That would sound authentic to Gifford, he thought.

“Told my wife the trip was strictly business because I didn't want to alarm her. Please see to it that she continues to think so. I will send my address as soon as I get there. Will probably stay at the Nacional, as usual.”

He signed his name and thought of something else. “P.S.,” he wrote. “Let's keep this in the family. Don't tell anyone that I'm in Havana.” More than anything else, he was afraid the Russians might suspect he had skipped. If they knew where to find him, they could compel him to return. Or kill him.

Gumol re-read the note. The handwriting was shaky. Perhaps that was just as well. Gifford knew about his slight heart murmur and would think he was really ill. He wasn't ill at all. He was just a little excited, perhaps a little frightened. If the Russians, or anyone, learned he was leaving the country with all this cash—he patted the brief case and forced himself to think of something else.

There was that girl in Atlantic City. Maybe she'd go for an all-expenses-paid tour of Havana. No, that would be stupid. If he took her to Cuba, he might be hooked with her—forever. Anyway, Havana was alive with women, young and easy. From now on, he was going to live.

Robert Gumol caught a night flight out of Philadelphia and changed in Washington for Havana. He congratulated himself on being the first to foresee what was coming, and to get out from under. Actually, he wasn't.

## 5

Katharine Hume spent that afternoon and most of the evening at the Atomic Energy Commission, seeking the answer to “When?” Every day Air Force and Navy planes cruised the upper altitudes between Japan and Alaska, and over the northern rim of Canada and Greenland, trapping samples of air. At seismograph stations circling Russia men watched for a tremor that was not a natural grumbling of the earth. Even the smallest atomic explosion—if any

could be called small—could be detected. Its location would be fixed by triangulation, its strength estimated and composition analyzed from radioactive particles carried beyond the bounds of the Soviet Union by a constant ally, the west wind.

In the past year Britain had tested two of its new H-bombs in the frigid and unpeopled waters southwest of Australia. The United States had ignited a twenty-megaton shot at Eniwetok. In Nevada several new anti-aircraft rockets, armed with a core of fissionable material no larger than a golf ball, had been tried out. One such rocket would sponge a whole formation of bombers from the sky. In Russia there had been three nuclear explosions. They were so minor that nobody had bothered to announce them. Russia had tested no more H-bombs. So the intelligence evaluation of the AEC, at that moment, was that the world was comparatively normal. She gathered nothing new. The AEC felt no cause for alarm.

Katharine Hume left the AEC before ten o'clock and walked home through the fog settling over the Potomac basin, head down, wishing she had worn a topcoat, thinking. The world wasn't normal at all. Each nuclear shot raised the atmosphere's background radiation a jot. She had access to the latest figures. To her they were frightening, yet she no longer mentioned her fears to her superiors, or checked her computations with her colleagues. Trouble was, she knew she could never produce an unchallengeable paper to offer them. You could prove the deleterious effect of excessive radiation on generations of fruit flies. You could make fairly accurate predictions of the effect on mice if you bred and studied them for years. But people were different. It would be a century or two before all was known of Hiroshima. With people, all you could do was make an informed guess, because often the mutations would not appear for generations.

It was not fashionable or safe to tread in this forbidden area. Once she had been publicly rebuffed by a commissioner, no less, as "a beautiful young woman engrossed in her genes." Once she had overheard a remark made to Kevin Lane, whom she was dating at the time, by another junior administrator. "I hear," the other man had said, "that Katy wears a lead chastity belt." Kevin had laughed at the crudity, and she had never gone out with him again. She suspected that one of the reasons she had been assigned to the Intentions Group was her insistence in pursuing a subject disagreeable to men whose principle *raison d'être* was the designing and testing of bigger and better bombs. While the AEC admitted her ability, still it was embarrassing to have her around, dropping barbed questions about future generations, if any, into the solemn pools of scientific deliberation. So she had learned to keep silent.

She stopped at the corner delicatessen and bought cottage cheese and herring pickled in cream, and the early edition of the morning paper. She went

up to her apartment, undressed, showered, and washed her hair. She put on a pair of men's broadcloth pajamas, loose and comfortable, and settled down at the coffee table to eat and read. The paper's double-banner headline said:

## NAVY JOINS AIR FORCE IN HUNT FOR LOST PLANES

She started reading the story. "All Navy and Coast Guard ships south of Norfolk, and in the Gulf, have joined the Air Force in the search for two B-99 bombers of the 519th Wing. . . ."

She shook the paper. It was impossible. It must be a typographical error. Then she remembered, chillingly, that SAC wings were rotated every sixty or ninety days between bases at home and abroad. Her brother was in the 519th.

She forced herself to hunt for names. There were none. She found a paragraph that began: "Names of the fourteen missing airmen were withheld, pending notification of next of kin."

The paper fell to the floor and she stared at the telephone, waiting for it to ring, begging it to keep its silence. They were very close, she and her brother, Clint. With both her mother and father gone, Clint was all that was left. He was what maintained the Humes as a family. He was, in every sense, a big brother. He had made it possible for her to finish Sarah Lawrence and go on to M.I.T. He had financed her post-graduate year, urged her on to win her doctorate. He had inflated her confidence until she had courage enough to apply for a job with the Atomic Energy Commission. Then he had staked what influence he had, and enlisted the support of friends of their father, to make sure that she was not turned down because of sex or age. Outwardly, he was casual with her, but when all the rest of the world quaked and shifted, he was a rock.

She thought of Clint, while watching the phone. She watched it for perhaps ten minutes before it rang.

## 6

It is said that the state of the world can be judged by the number of windows illuminated in the Pentagon at night. When lights burn only in the cubicles of the duty officers and in the code rooms and communications centers on the upper floors, then the world is at peace. In time of crisis, such as the beginning of the Korean War, the French agony in Indo-China, and the week when an invasion fleet massed off Formosa, the building is ablaze. On this foggy night more than half the windows, including all the Air Force corridors, signalled their yellow alert. For the first time in years, the United States was uneasy.

Jesse Price had not left the Pentagon since the conference and did not

intend to leave at any time during the night and perhaps the following day. This was no hardship. The Pentagon is not an ordinary building. It is a city, walled and roofed. There are all sorts of shops on the ground level and several of its cafeterias operate around the clock. It has facilities for recreation, health, and cleanliness. There are cots in the duty offices and guardrooms, sleeping quarters in the deep shelters underground, and, of course, comfortable couches in the staff reception rooms, and the suites of the civilian hierarchy. It is possible to live in the Pentagon, with all the amenities, indefinitely.

All afternoon and into the evening Jesse Price shuttled between the Pentagon's cerebral cortex, the habitat of the Joint Chiefs, and his own small office in an Air Force wing on the opposite side of the building, a quarter of a mile away, poking his long, beaked nose into various intelligence centers on four floors. To find out what is going on in the Pentagon, one needs not only a pleasing personality and some rank, but strong legs and a congenital sense of direction, for it is designed like a maze for the confusion of white rats. At nine o'clock Major Price returned to his office, sent his secretary home, and took off his size eleven shoes. His feet were swollen and his long shanks ached, but he had accumulated a number of facts as unrelated as they were disturbing.

The Pentagon is shaped like a spider web, and beyond its physical confines this shape extends along unseen lines of communication, so that the outer fringe of the web touches the far places of the earth—a shack on an ice island in the Arctic, a consulate in Azerbaijan, an observer on the Kurdish frontier, a naval attaché in Stockholm, an agent deep in the Eastern Zone of Germany, a Constellation nicknamed Pregnant Goose, bulging with radomes, flying in lonely darkness close to the North Pole. Something had ticked the web at all these places, and others.

A Russian reconnaissance plane had penetrated the air spaces over Greenland so deeply that interceptors were sent up from Thule. This was not unusual, but at the same time Russian multi-engined jets, very high and very fast, were probing Alaska and the wastes of northern Canada. Radar on Shemya, at the tip of the Aleutians, had picked up what seemed to be a whole squadron of aircraft maneuvering over the Komandorskis. For many months there had been little suspicious activity in the Far North. Now there it was, suddenly.

Major Price stripped off his socks and lifted his feet to his desk and rubbed the itching, corrugated skin. Was all this an accident of sighting? Was it intensified reconnaissance preparatory to an attack? Or was it a diversion, intended to focus the attention of the Pentagon on the northern strands of its web, and on the air? There was no sense in guessing.

Colonel Cragey and Steve Batt also had collected news, equally puzzling. The Intentions of the Enemy Group used its conference room only for the



exchange of ideas and the search for conclusions. The physical preparation of its forecasts went on in another room equipped for the storage of classified documents, its phones monitored, its stenographers and researchers under the jurisdiction of the Top Secret Controllers. It was in this second room that Price had run into Cragey and Batt, and they had swapped information.

The Seventh Fleet, maintaining its vigil over Formosa, detected a shift in military strength in China. For a month there had been a buildup of junks and naval craft in the Chinese coastal waters. This had suddenly ceased. At the same time a squadron of medium jet bombers, believed manned by Russians, had vanished from Chinese coastal air bases.

“That’s strange enough,” Batt had said, “but hear this. We’ve lost about thirty Russian submarines. No radio intercepts. Same thing happened before Pearl Harbor, but that time we lost the Japanese carriers. Of course we often lose a flotilla of Russian subs when they’re in port and don’t send. Still, I’m worried, even if ONI isn’t.”

Navy had another worry. The carrier *Forrestal*, at sea with a destroyer screen west of Scapa Flow, reported it was being shadowed by a bogey. When the *Forrestal* catapulted interceptors, the bogey drifted away at great speed, indicating that it too was equipped with powerful radar and had spotted the launch. But the bogey could have been simply a fast trans-Atlantic jet airliner, minding its own business, so the matter was not pegged as serious.

Cragey had contributed a G-2 summary. What was going on in Europe made even less sense than what had occurred in China. All along the Iron Curtain frontiers, Russian armor was pulling back from the borders. This was exactly the reverse of Red Army maneuvers in past times of tension. But who could say that this was a time of tension, except for the loss of the B-99’s, and the extraordinary air activity in the North? There had been no disturbing diplomatic incidents, or unusual political friction.

Price was pulling on his socks and shoes when the phone rang. It was General Keatton’s office. The general was holding a meeting, right away, on the B-99’s. He thought perhaps Major Price would like to attend.

Price said, “I’ll be right down.” This was what he had been waiting for—Keatton’s evaluation of the B-99 business. He finished tying his laces and started on the long hike north, leg muscles protesting and toes burning. He was no infantryman.

The relationship of General Keatton to Jesse Price was that of a father to a son—except that Price was only one of a hundred sons, each receiving, consequently, a tiny fraction of personal attention. Yet it was enough. It was a

bond that held the devotees of the Air Force together, close as an Indian tribe that initiates its youth in pain and blood. The careful selection of protégés dated to the days of Billy Mitchell and Hap Arnold, when the Air Force was fighting for its separate existence, and perhaps its life, against enemies domestic rather than foreign. When Hap Arnold found a young man dedicated to flight, his eyes on the stars and his feet on the ground, he made him his son, and the tradition had continued.

Jesse Price was chosen for this brotherhood after Keatton came to Italy in the summer of 1944 as a deputy commander of Fifteenth Air Force. Price, then a lieutenant in his early twenties, flying a lumbering B-24, had qualified himself by a single act, and the correct answer to a single question. When his squadron leader was shot out of the sky by an 88, Price had led the formation on to bomb the primary target, a refinery near Wiener Neustadt. Because of foul weather, the Fifteenth had radioed in flight permission to all groups to seek easier, secondary targets, and everyone else had. While he was pinning a star on Price, the general asked: “What made you go for the primary, son?”

The gawky lieutenant (you could tell he was still growing because his wrists extended two inches beyond the sleeves of his best jacket) had been embarrassed as an adolescent called upon for public recital of poetry. Finally he said, “Sir, I kept thinking that if we didn’t do it that day, we’d have to go back again.” He hesitated and went on. “And I don’t want to die for nothing. I don’t want to die for Rosenheim or Klagenfurt. If I get it, I want it to be for something big, like Wiener Neustadt.”

This answer had pleased Keatton, who had marked Price for the future. Just so other generals in other lands marked young officers for exceptional deeds, such as twice, with coolness and guile, blowing up German pillboxes on the eastern approaches to Berlin.

Jesse Price’s career would have ended after his misfortune over Korea except that Keatton had noted his name on the casualty lists. Instead of being invalided out of the Air Force after his release from the hospital in Japan, Price received orders to Washington. This particular major, Keatton had decided, even though deprived of an eye, still had spirit and a logical mind. The thing to do was train that mind. Send him to the National War College, send him to Russia, send him back to sop up more lore of the Far East. Assign him to the Intentions Group—Keatton called it “the unholy seven,” defended its functions, and was amused rather than angered when it blundered—and let him exercise his imagination. The Air Force would use this boy for the war of wits, the war of the future.

When Price walked into Keatton’s inner office he saw that he was junior in rank to all there. The chairs drawn up to the general’s desk were occupied by other generals of three or two stars. Brigadiers stood. Inconspicuous against

the wall were two lieutenant-colonels, no older than himself. He would have been a light colonel, also, except for his wound. Promotion came quickly to men commanding squadrons, slowly to men in hospital or flying a desk, out of sight and out of mind abroad. He found a slice of wall against which to lean beside Polk and Rankin, the light colonels.

The general was listening to the other generals. The general sat back in his chair, relaxed, with the flags of his country and his rank staffed behind him, his delicate, wrinkled hands patting the spot where his jacket stretched. The general was slight, and probably not more than five pounds overweight, but the excess was all in one place. His hair was white and sparse, his brows white and heavy, his eyes deep blue like the blue in the flags, his mouth straight, his teeth his own and fine.

The talk, at this point, was technical. It concerned tons of fuel, wing stress factors, thickness of aluminum skin, pounds of pressure per square inch, and the inability of the human body to withstand a blowout at high altitudes, where the blood itself boils.

General Keatton spoke. "Is there any chance these two aircraft could have come together?"

A major-general, the A-3, Operations, held up a yellow sheet of teletype paper. "No, sir. I don't think it's possible. Here's the tower log, sent in from Hibiscus. These two planes were to fly to Corpus Christi for a rendezvous with tankers, then swing north for a target run on Omaha at fifty thousand, then return to base. A milk run. Takeoff time for the first was oh-eight-twenty-seven. Takeoff of the second was four minutes later. They maintained the same speed and rate of climb, and, we can assume, about the same interval. At five hundred knots, they were about twenty miles apart. Weather, CAVU. They weren't close enough together to see each other, but if they had got close enough, they certainly would have."

"So mid-air collision is ruled out," said Keatton. "Kidnapping is out too. I'll admit that I considered the possibility that the enemy could have snatched that first one last month. But he can't kidnap three B-Nine-Nines. Not from one base he can't. Not with half my SI teams at Hibiscus. Not with Lundstrom there, eating out the Air Police. I'll bet a red ant couldn't have crawled out on the Hibiscus flight line this morning." The general leaned forward, lifted his locked hands and brought them down on the bare, polished desktop, gently. "Know where that leaves us, gentlemen?"

They all allowed him to say.

"Structural failure or treason!"

He waited for them to absorb the word.

"I use the word treason rather than sabotage because if it was sabotage it had to be done by people in uniform, which makes it treason. It had to be

treason within the Air Force.”

Jesse Price drew in his breath and held it. Neither he, nor anyone else in the room, stirred. They waited for Keatton’s next words.

“I hardly know which is worse, basic structural failure or treason. I hope it is only treason.”

Jesse thought he was hearing wrong, or that Keatton had got his phrases twisted, but the general continued:

“If it is treason it is probably localized to one base, and certainly we cannot lose too many planes. If it is structural failure it means every B-Nine-Nine on every base we own.”

Now Price understood the general’s reasoning, and the fear that had been in the back of his mind since the morning’s conference, when his secretary first phoned him the news, began to take form, as a shapeless dark cloud whirls itself into the deadly funnel of a tornado. If it was structural failure, Keatton would have to ground the B-99, which meant grounding all heavy bombers of SAC. There could be no other choice. Keatton would be called upon to obliterate, by a single order, the weapon of massive retaliation, the weapon that had maintained the peace of the world. If there was a weakness in the 99, Keatton could not send up his men in it until the weakness was ferreted out and corrected. The people wouldn’t stand for it.

The general spoke again. “I keep thinking of the British Comets—you remember—the first jet airliners. Two of them blew, one after the other, over the Med. Early in ’fifty-four, if I remember correctly. It was structural failure—metal fatigue. Take a piece of tin and bend it in your fingers, back and forth, back and forth.” The general’s frail fingers bent an imaginary piece of metal. “Finally, it snaps. It took the British months to find out where, and why. Meanwhile, all Comets were grounded.”

An elderly lieutenant-general, his face gray with overwork or poor health, spoke. He was Chief, Matériel Command, and he sat at Keatton’s elbow. “It can’t happen to the B-Nine-Nine,” he said. “We wrung them out for years before the first wing was formed. They don’t have bugs any more. They’re sturdy as the Four-Sevens. Sturdier, I think. And, sir, these three aircraft apparently were lost at between twenty and thirty thousand feet, long before they reached optimum altitude. They’ve bombed from sixty-five thousand. We’ve never had a pressure failure. The Nine-Nine is tight!”

Lieutenant-colonel Polk, standing beside Price, could not restrain himself. “All from that one base, too, sir!”

“I realize that,” said the general, “but we can’t take any chances. We’ve got a hundred tech reps and factory men flying to Hibiscus tonight. Suppose they do find structural failure? Where are we? We’re without a strategic air force. Begging pardon of the Navy, we’ve had it. So we’ve got to prepare a reserve

SAC to take over. We've got two thousand Fifty-Twos and Forty-Sevens mothballed, lined up on every desert in Arizona. How long will it take to bust 'em out?"

They all looked at the elderly lieutenant-general, whose name Price could not recall, for he was one of those plodding rear echelon generals, whose name never appeared on orders or in *Time* or *Newsweek*, who kept the airplanes flying. "On a crash program," said the lieutenant-general, "using everything I've got and some things I haven't got but I'll get, I can have a hundred Forty-Sevens flyable in a week, two hundred more and two hundred Fifty-twos flyable in two weeks, and the whole reserve fleet unzipped in sixty to eighty days."

"Well, get going on it. Not tomorrow morning. Now."

"Yes, sir," said the lieutenant-general. He got out of his chair, with definite physical effort, and left the room. Jesse Price thought, I'd hate to be in that old man's shoes. A gallant old man, a tired old man with troubles he had not brought to the meeting.

"So I guess that wraps it up for tonight," said the general. "I don't know of anything else we can do." He stood up, and the meeting was over, and those of lower rank, that is, brigadiers and under, began to file out. Jesse stayed, hoping that the knot of brass around the desk would part and disperse. He wanted to be alone with Keatton for just thirty seconds. He wanted to urge Keatton to read the Intentions Group's forecast. Then he realized how silly it would sound, at that moment. The general had solid troubles aplenty. He had no time to read a Russian war plan, hypothetical and nebulous, really no more than fantasy. And yet—

Lieutenant-colonel Polk came back into the general's office and touched Price's elbow. "The list is just now coming through," he said. "Want to see it?"

They walked together through the reception room and into the message center annex where a row of teletype printers clattered out dispatches, in clear, from the commands. Price watched the names march out in neat oblong groups, just like flight assignments for the next morning's mission, except that for these names there were no more mornings. Price read: "*LT. COL. HOWARD DINK (PILOT)*." He said aloud, "Dinky!"

"Know him?" asked Polk.

"Yes. Italy." This was all he said, in no way indicative of all he felt, the quick, sick emptiness, as if part of his own life had been removed. For six months their cots had been side by side in the same faded brown tent. Every morning they swung their feet into the same cold mud, oozing out from under the duckboards. They played poker across the same blanket, shared their combat whisky ration, took their leave together in Bari, tried to make the same girls, and on mission after mission flew in the same seven-plane box and faced

the same death, which makes men brothers.

“Too bad. Know any of the others?”

Jesse forced himself to read the other names. “No.” He turned away, although he knew he was being impolite, and trudged back towards his own office.

He sat down at his desk and tried hard not to think about Dinky.

Wasn't there someone else he knew in the 519th? The wing was just back from England. Somebody's brother was in the 519th. Of course, Katy's! Thank God the name Hume wasn't on the list too.

Whenever Jesse Price thought of Katy he thought of the round curve of her thigh next to his at the conference table, of her smooth fingers and changeable eyes, and of his desire and need for her. He did not think of it as love, for when you admit you love a woman, even in your secret mind, you have committed yourself. As a consequence, you must try to possess her, and thus expose yourself to failure and rebuff. This was a risk he preferred not to take. He was sensible of his liabilities, his seared face, the insecurity of being a one-eyed major, his small hope of promotion or advancement in the future. Also, he was pretty sure there was some sort of a liaison between Katy and Raoul, and he was not a poacher. So long as he was not in love with Katy he could enjoy the warmth of her company, the stimulus of her intellect, and the pride of having her at his side in public places, which he recognized as salve to his ego. He had never been one for platonic friendships, but now he was fearful of staking what he had for something he probably could not attain. They dined together several times each week, and sometimes he took her dancing or to a movie or the ballet. On two Saturdays they had flown to New York together to see a show, but they had returned on the midnight plane.

He wondered whether he should call her. She would know, by now, that the missing bombers were out of the 519th and he doubted that the names of the crews had yet been released. In that case she would be very worried. Worry wasn't the right word. There is no torture like uncertainty.

He dialled her number and she answered instantly, as if she had been sitting by the phone, poised to pounce at its ring. She said, “Yes?” Her voice was strained.

“Katy? Jess.”

“Yes?”

He sensed her fear and phrased his words carefully. “It's all right, Katy. Everything's all right. Your brother didn't go in. He wasn't on the list.”

He could hear the choked sob. She said, “I was so scared!”

He said, “I still am.”

## three

AMONG THE passengers who landed at Havana Airport Tuesday morning was Robert Gumol. December was a tourist month, but it was obvious that he had come on business. He wore a blue suit of expensive texture, cannily cut to minimize his girth, and he carried a heavy brief case. He hustled down the ramp of the DC-8, and shouldered his way to the front of the line of those moving into the air terminal from Gate 7. At the gate an olive-skinned girl wearing a chic, powder-blue uniform was serving Bacardi cocktails, free. It was not yet ten o'clock, and most of the others refused, but Gumol accepted one and drank it at a gulp. Although it was not unseasonably warm, a rivulet of sweat ran from his sparse, crinkled sideburns, and overflowed the fatty canyons in his neck. His stiff white collar was collapsed and sodden. A lush, the girl thought, getting drunk before breakfast. The truth was that Gumol was quite nervous.

Ordinarily he was the most careful and methodical of men, but now he wondered whether he might have forgotten something. There is always a certain hazard in bringing a large amount of cash into a foreign country. His passport, which he always kept up to date and in the top drawer of his desk, was no worry. Cuba required no visas from North Americans. But if your luggage consists solely of a brief case, a certain curiosity is invited. Customs, finding a stack of cash and noting that he was a banker, might jump to a faulty conclusion, and tip off the American authorities in hope of a reward. The bank examiners would find everything correct in Upper Hyannis, but Treasury agents might inquire about the taxes on such a large sum of money. But even as he considered the hazard, Gumol thought of a way to avoid it. If an explanation was necessary, he would tell Customs that the money was for deposit in the Bank of Cuba to finance a certain transaction in which higher officials of their government were interested. That would grease his way, quickly. Gumol was satisfied. The rum glowed within him, and he took his place in the line waiting for inspection.

The line edged ahead. Immigration glanced at his passport and asked,

casually, how long he expected to stay.

“Only a few days,” Gumol said.

“You’re a banker. Business, I suppose?”

“Yes, business.” He saw that Customs, a thin, mustached man standing at the table beyond Immigration, was listening.

He moved on. To his relief, Customs didn’t reach out for the brief case. Customs said, “Go right ahead, sir. Taxis are across the lobby.” The little fat man, Customs thought, is uneasy because his brief case is stuffed with money. He wants to get the dollars to the bank in a hurry. He thinks that if I force him to open the brief case someone will see the money, and he will be robbed, and indeed he might be. It is best, therefore, that the brief case not be opened at this counter. Cuba didn’t care how much money Americans brought into the country, so long as a portion of it remained.

Once in a cab, Gumol did indeed consider taking the money to the bank, but decided against it. That might be dangerous. Banks, even in Cuba, listed and reported the serial numbers of thousand dollar bills. In time Treasury might inquire about the source of his cash. Havana was the center of money exchange in the Caribbean. In Havana were certain traders who would accept currency, of any denomination, without question or remembrance so long as there was a profit in it. These traders avoided the authorities, and it would be safe to deal with them. They would enable him to diversify his assets. He would buy Argentine and Mexican pesos, quietly and slowly. After a successful attack on the United States, what would dollars be worth? Until he got rid of his dollars, he would stay married to this brief case.

At the Hotel Nacional it was unnecessary for Gumol to show his credit cards. He was remembered. He registered, and was escorted to a double room overlooking the harbor. When the bellhop was gone he took off his clothes and fell on the bed, much relieved. He had made it, with ease and safety, and he felt he was entitled to another drink. He picked up the phone, ordered rum, ice, and Cokes, and remembered that he ought to telegraph his wife and inform her that he had arrived safely. Then he decided not to wire her. She could wait. If she worried, it served her right. Let her sweat a while. The rum came and he mixed a drink and walked out on the balcony. On a similar balcony, one floor below, two girls were standing in the sunshine, their hands on the white-painted iron railing, chatting. One of them, a yellow-haired girl with bright black eyes and dark brows boldly painted, looked up at him and smiled. He raised his glass in a silent toast, and invitation.



wearing the smart green of the Marines, arrived in Jacksonville from the West Coast, and then caught a bus to St. Augustine. He had three weeks' leave, which would extend through the holiday season, before shipping out to Okinawa, and he was on the way to visit his family and see Nina Pope, who had been his girl. Whether she was still his girl was unclear. Her letters had arrived with less and less frequency, and their language was stilted and vague. Eighteen months in the Marines had changed Henry. He had gained twenty-five pounds, his chest filled his uniform jacket, and his legs no longer resembled those of a wobbly colt. Anyone who survives the Corps' boot camp and combat training course grows quickly to manhood.

Among the realities Hazen had absorbed was that you didn't join the Marines to learn a trade, in spite of what the recruiting posters said and his family believed. Marines were trained for other things, such as fighting a dangerous and wily enemy. At Pendleton he had been taught the nature of this enemy, and thereafter he brooded often on what he had seen, and what he had failed to do, on a moonlit night in June the year before.

He could not banish it from his mind. He had to tell someone.

The leader of his training platoon, at Pendleton, was a Sergeant Asbury, a onetime professional football player who might have made second string on the Redskins had not the Korean War intervened. At first Asbury had seemed formidable, tough and distant, but after a few weeks Hazen learned that Asbury, when you grew to know him, was human and friendly, like a high school athletic coach. So it was to Asbury that Hazen had confided his story of the submarine. Asbury listened without interruption until Henry came to the part about the Buick rolling off the landing barge. Then Asbury laughed and said, "Sure it was a Buick, Slim?"

"I'm almost certain it was a Buick."

"Come on, Slim, don't try to snow me. You're making this up as you go along, aren't you?"

"No, this is honest-to-goodness truth. Somebody ought to know about it."

"Well, why tell me? What can I do?"

"I don't know."

"You really saw this?"

"I saw it."

Asbury looked worried. Maybe the boy had seen a submarine, maybe he hadn't. Anyway, he thought he had, but he also thought he had seen a car delivered by landing barge, and of course that was ridiculous. Besides, it had all happened more than a year before, and nothing could be done about it now. Asbury had been in the Marines long enough to realize how much trouble a tale like that could cause, if bucked to higher authority and taken seriously. "Know what I'd do if I were you, Slim?" he said. "I'd forget all about it."

“Forget it? Why?”

“I’ll tell you why,” the sergeant said. “Suppose I take this up with the captain? Whether he believes you or not, he personally can’t do a thing. He has to buck it to the battalion commander. So what does the Major do? He doesn’t know you, and it sounds real screwy to him. Does he take your word for it and go to the big brass and risk getting laughed at? No, sir. He calls in the post psychiatrist. The psychiatrist talks to you and nods, yes, yes. Then he puts you under observation for two weeks. If you’re still sane after two weeks in the crazy ward, he certifies that you were suffering from a temporary delusion. He says you’ve got an inferiority complex and you were trying to compensate for it by inventing this story to call attention to yourself. So he sends you back to the platoon with a note on your jacket saying you’re emotionally immature and unstable. After that, you’ll never even make corporal. Now, still want to see the Captain?”

Henry knew that Asbury’s reasoning was logical and accurate. It could even be worse. They might kick him out of the Corps with a medical discharge, and after that it would be tough getting a job, any kind of a job, on the outside. He said, “No, don’t tell the Captain. Don’t tell anybody, will you?”

“Okay, Slim,” the sergeant had said. “We’ll just keep it quiet.”

Now, on the bus to St. Augustine, so close to where it had happened, his conscience troubled him again.

### 3

The alarm clock jolted Katharine out of bed at six-thirty that morning, an hour earlier than usual. She zigzagged into the bathroom, splashed cold water on her face, and the cocoon of sleep began to unravel. She recalled that she had been up until two trying to get her brother, Clint, on the telephone. Sometimes the long distance operator had penetrated as deeply as Orlando, more often she could not get beyond Jacksonville, and she had never reached the switchboard at Hibiscus. All the lines into the base were always busy. She had also tried to call Anne, Clint’s girl in Baltimore, but Anne’s line had been tied up too, and this gave Katharine a clue to what was occurring.

Now Katharine turned on the radio, set water to boiling for coffee and eggs, and tried Hibiscus again. She still couldn’t get through. Official traffic would be heavy, of course, but that wasn’t all. There are usually forty crews for the thirty aircraft of a heavy bomber wing, and seven men to a crew. That meant there were two hundred and eighty families competing with each other, and with government and factory priority calls, to learn whether their sons were still alive. Not only families. The flyers’ girls, like Anne in Baltimore,

would be competing also. Katharine wondered what happened to communications in a really big disaster—something bigger than two bombers missing—when the names of the lost were unknown.

She called Anne again in Baltimore and reached her this time and told her that Clint was all right. As she suspected, Anne, too, had been up most of the night, and had a call in for Hibiscus.

Katharine reached the conference room at seven-fifty and set the coffee-maker going, her natural chore as the only woman in the group. In a few minutes they began to drift in. All except Raoul looked weary. She had never seen Raoul mussed or unshaven. Jess looked as if he had slept in his uniform, and she said so.

"I did," Jesse said. "Fell asleep in the office with my feet on the desk. Now I can hardly bend my knees."

Simmons arrived exactly at eight. "All right," he said, "let's get going. I feel this is going to be a long, tough day. I've got something hot, but I want to save it for last because I'm sure, from your looks, that you all must have something hot too. Let's start with AEC." He nodded to Katharine.

"I haven't got anything hot at all," Katharine said. "AEC passes to Army."

Cragey sat at her left, Jess Price at her right where his good eye was on her. Directly across sat Raoul, flanked by Batt and Felix Fromburg.

Cragey's face was ascetic, his shoulders too thin and frail for the weight of eagles, but when he spoke of military matters it was with a scholar's exactitude and authority. He told, first, of the strange withdrawals of the Russian divisions from the frontiers of Western Europe. Then he said:

"We have something out of Hong Kong. Our military attaché there has a friend in Peiping, a merchant. The merchant exports hog bristles to Hong Kong, and he also exports information. In the hog bristles. Don't ask me how. This merchant, who, incidentally, was an acquaintance during my years in China, and whom I know to be reliable, has a mistress, a most charming girl, really; educated in India. Happen to know her too. She is a linguist, and works as an interpreter in the War Plans Staff of the Chinese People's Army. The word from Hong Kong is that Peiping planned to invade Formosa early this month, but that the invasion has been called off. This fits in with what Steve told me last night—the massing of junks at Amoy and Tsingkiang, and then suddenly a cessation of activity."

"I know why," said Raoul Walback.

"In just a minute, Raoul," said Simmons. "Let's tap the military first. How about air, Jess?"

Jesse Price spoke of the heavy reconnaissance in the polar regions, not unprecedented in the years before the era of conciliation and hope, but now unusual.

Batt rose. He told of the thirty missing submarines, and the possible shadowing of the *Forrestal*. “Now I have a harder fact,” he went on. “We have just heard from our naval attaché in Stockholm. On five December a Swedish patrol vessel sighted a flotilla of twelve submarines passing out through the Skaggerak.”

Batt paused to give them time to consider this statement. Simmons demanded, “Why are we getting this so late?”

“Hard to say,” Batt said. “The Swedish kid commanding the patrol boat probably didn’t think it important. After all, Sweden is worried about the Baltic, not the Atlantic, and the Swedes see Russian subs maneuvering all the time. So he probably just turned in his sighting in a routine way when he got back to port, and it stayed routine until it got to the Navy Ministry and somebody mentioned it to our man in Stockholm. Same sort of thing happens here, you know.”

Katharine’s fingers felt cold and she looked at her hands and saw that the palms were white. Suddenly, she was afraid. It was eerie, the way in which the Russians seemed to be following their plan. It was as if, in childhood, you had scared yourself reading ghost stories which you *knew* were just stories, and then looked up to see a spook at the window. She started to speak, but decided it was unnecessary. Everyone else was thinking the same thing. She could read it in the stone set of their faces.

Simmons asked a question, the words tiptoeing carefully down the table. “Assuming that the submarine flotilla is headed from the Skaggerak towards our Gulf ports—as our forecast calls for it to do—how soon, Commander Batt, would they reach their target areas?”

Steve Batt leaned back in his chair, staring at the ceiling, and did his computations half aloud. “I’ll give them seventeen knots on the surface, nights, and eleven knots submerged during daylight hours, and they’ll have fifteen hours of darkness, average, each day. I’ll move them west just south of Iceland to thirty degrees, west; then due south; then west again.” His lips moved soundlessly and his eyes closed as he calculated the navigation problem. He said: “They should be in firing position by twenty-four December—certainly not later than the twenty-fifth. You understand it’s only a guess. This isn’t the chartroom in Leningrad.”

So they would know, for sure, within the week. Simmons said, “What has CIA got?”

“Hold your hats,” Raoul said. “We are presently entertaining in our Vienna office a most unusual guest. Simonov. For years he was a hatchet man for the NKVD, and later for the MVD. Pal of Beria’s, and we had expected his throat would be cut in ’fifty-three when they liquidated his chief. Simonov survived. He may have delivered Beria over to Malenkov and Khrushchev. You never

can tell for sure about those things. Anyway, Simonov flew to Vienna recently on some murderous mission for Moscow and promptly came over. Said some sort of ruckus was developing in the Kremlin, and his number was up. The important thing is that he gave a reason for what's going on in China. Seems that the Chinese were planning to hit Formosa this month, just as we heard from Colonel Craggy. They kept it secret, even from the Russians, until a few weeks ago. The Russians were furious when they found out. Simonov overheard a conversation between two of the deputy premiers and the Chinese ambassador to Moscow. The Russians told the ambassador that an outbreak of war in the Far East would spoil everything. They told him that they were withdrawing all Russian air from the area for use elsewhere, and that if the Chinese insisted on striking they could count on no help. Then one of the deputies patted the ambassador on the shoulder and said, 'If you'll just be patient a while longer, you'll be able to swim to Formosa.' ”

“Very interesting,” said Simmons. “It appears that the Chinese decided to be patient. In this same connection, there's been another schism in the Russian high command. Our ambassador doesn't know exactly what it is, as yet. For one thing, the big military boys haven't been seen in public recently. No announced purge, understand. But the men behind the scenes, the Party men, are openly seizing executive power. It is good to keep in mind that the Russian military tradition is to defend the homeland, but the Party's goal has always been one thing—world revolution and hegemony. This split can mean a purge, or it can be that the marshals are now engaged solely in military matters, and therefore have relinquished all their control in internal affairs.”

“It's coming all right, isn't it?” Raoul Walback said, more a statement than a question, and more to himself than to his colleagues.

Simmons nodded. “Yes, I'm afraid it's coming—and very soon. I haven't quite finished. Two weeks ago, as you know, the Russian ambassador left Washington for Moscow. The announcement was 'routine consultations.' He took quite a staff back with him, of rather unusual composition. Only a few were of high rank or proven diplomatic quality. The others were all assistant military attachés and obscure vice-consuls who we have reason to believe are either high in the Party, or agents of the MVD.”

“How about their ambassador to the UN?” Katharine asked. “He's still here, isn't he?”

“Yes, and he undoubtedly will remain here. He has been treated for cancer at Memorial Hospital, and told he cannot get well. Now, based on these facts —”

Felix Fromburg spoke. “Just a minute.” Katharine realized that they had all forgotten Fromburg, as usual. Fromburg looked like a younger Harry Truman. He looked like her postman and like one of the guards at the AEC main

entrance and like Ed Salinger, her English professor at Sarah Lawrence, and like Mr. Kippel, the patient clerk at Brentano's on F Street. He looked like everybody.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Felix," said Simmons. "Didn't mean to leave you out."

"I may have a little something," Felix said. "One of the Tass men in New York is a Party wheel. He flew to Mexico four days ago. His girl, an American, quit her job in a dress shop and went with him. It was quite a good job. She can't marry him because he's already married. His wife is still in New York. There has been a quiet exodus of other Russians, not counting those who left with the ambassador's party. Scandinavian Airlines and BOAC has been doing a very brisk business. All the tickets are one way."

"What about the people from the satellites?" Raoul asked.

"Oh, they're still here. For that matter, so are the majority of the Russians. They're necessary sacrifices. And I doubt that any of the people recalled know what's up. I can imagine a meeting in Moscow, and somebody checking off the names of those who for one reason or another were considered worth saving. These people were simply ordered home. A few others, like the Tass man in New York, may suspect something is coming and have decided to get out from under, or at least save their families. There were twenty-eight Russian women and children aboard a cruise ship for the Caribbean last week."

While he listened, Jesse Price's chair had been tilted back, his pipe pointing at the ceiling. Now his chair cracked to the floor. "I think Christmas Eve," he said.

"Christmas Eve!" said Simmons. "Why?"

"Because I don't think anybody can bring himself to get excited about Russia with the holidays coming up. Not in this country, except maybe in this room and a few other rooms. Just as Sunday morning was the right time to hit Pearl Harbor because so many officers and men were ashore or off base, weekending and curing hangovers, so Christmas Eve is the right day to destroy the United States. All the cities will be jammed with shoppers. Everybody in uniform who can get leave will be at home. There'll be skeleton crews at every command post and duty office and interceptor field and AA rocket emplacement. Key men in government will be scattered all over the map. Every Navy captain will try to have his ship in port, and liberty for his men. That right, Steve?"

Commander Batt smiled. "That has been the custom," he admitted.

"Who wants to fly long range search on the day before Christmas?" Price continued. "What about the men in the radar huts up on the DEW line? Are they thinking about mail, and families, and girls Christmas Eve, or watching their screen for pips? Which do you think?"

"It's a horrid conception," Katharine said.

“Perhaps I’m a horrid man,” said Jesse, “but it fits in with Steve’s estimate of the Baltic flotilla’s cruising time to the Gulf ports. And I’ll bet his thirty missing subs, at this moment, are somewhere up there in the fog and winter storms, heading west and south, about a hundred feet submerged and doing eleven or twelve knots. Think of the confusion if it came Christmas Eve. There wouldn’t be any Christmas Day, only confusion, only chaos and savagery.”

Simmons spoke, very quietly, “This is your true, considered opinion?”

“It is.”

“Good. It is mine also. Is there any dissent, any flaw in the reasoning?”

No one spoke.

Simmons leaned forward. “Would each of you stake your life that this is what’s going to happen?” He paused. “I know you think that a strange question. But if we send along an appendix to our forecast, saying that the attack is coming Christmas Eve—and if we are believed—then many others will stake their reputations, yes, and even their lives, on our judgment. There will be mobilization, alerts, the movement of thousands of aircraft and hundreds of ships, and enormous expense. In such a drastic upheaval casualties will be inevitable. Martial Law will be necessary. In some cities, the news may inspire panic buying or even disorganized exodus. The Stock Market will fall on its face. There may be runs on banks, for people may be moved to withdraw all their cash and buy commodities. If we are wrong, not only will we personally be through, forever, but the careers of all who supported us in the past, and believe in us now, will be finished. The United States will be the laughingstock of the world. It’ll be Orson Welles’ invasion from Mars all over again, but much more serious, multiplied a thousandfold. The Administration will be disgraced, and nobody will ever believe a similar alert in the future.”

Jesse Price knocked out his pipe in a glass ash tray. In the silence it sounded like a hammer. Yet when he spoke he was calm, even smiling, for he had made his decision. “I don’t mind laying my life on the line for a sufficient reason, and I consider this sufficient. In my heart I know we are right.”

“We would be taking an awful chance, though, now wouldn’t we?” Raoul said.

Katharine looked across the table at him. Raoul, she realized, was essentially conservative. Simmons had called for unanimity, and she felt impelled to back him up. “Jess is right, Raoul,” she said. “It is like mathematics. There can only be one correct answer to an equation, and this is it. Oh, I know we take a chance, pinpointing the day. But we need shock effect. If the forecast is to be useful, it must be distributed and read—now.”

“It used to be that you could get anything read around here,” Bart said, “by stamping it top secret, or ‘eyes only.’ Now everything is top secret and it doesn’t attract attention.”

The single door to the conference room was flung open, and General Clumb entered, rumbling in his throat like the exhaust of a medium tank. His cropped gray head was down and his wide shoulders held low, as if he expected to tackle someone. His face, rigid and cragged like rough terrain, was scarlet. In his right hand, rolled up as if for swatting flies, and encased in the red plastic jacket that indicated top secret documents, was a sheaf of paper. Katharine knew it was *FORECAST OF RUSSIAN MILITARY ACTION*, Copy No. 1.

#### 4

General Clumb had been assigned to the Pentagon, duty which he detested, two years before his date for retirement. Clumb was a field general, and more specifically a general of cavalry, or, as it is now called, armor. As commander of one of Patton's regimental combat teams, he achieved the summit of his fame in the sweep across France. He was photographed, just before the liberation of Metz, standing in the turret of a point tank, tommy gun under his left arm, his powerful right hand flourishing an 1870 sabre he had discovered in a French farmhouse. It was a dramatic photograph, seeming to symbolize the union of Custer with a helmeted Superman, widely published, and perhaps responsible for his first star. Clumb remembered World War II with nostalgia and preferred not to think of wars tanks couldn't win. Oh, he believed that nuclear weapons would work, all right (although not against armor properly dispersed), but he pretended to ignore their existence, in staff discussions, as a gentleman avoids mention of social diseases in mixed company. If pressed, he announced that neither side would use bombs, A or H. "Just like poison gas in the second World War," he always said. "Both sides had gas but neither used it."

Clumb was in command of a NATO division when the atomic cannon and Honest John rockets and Matador pilotless jets began to arrive in Europe. Since he could not seem to find a place for such weapons in his formations, Army was forced to make a decision. Either Clumb or the atom had to go, and it was Clumb who was shipped home. Army assured him that duty in the Pentagon, especially in the august company of the Joint Chiefs, would be a fitting close to a glorious career.

He became Chief, Special Projects Section, Planning Division, Joint Chiefs, a post that carried no specific authority. It was an administrative clearinghouse for studies and functions that the Joint Chiefs believed essential, but which were still of a quasi-military nature. The Pentagon hoped only that General Clumb would keep his desk reasonably clear, and see to it that papers and reports flowed to the sections where they could be useful. At the bottom of



his table-of-organization chart was a small box, Intentions of the Enemy Group. He didn't understand exactly why it was there, but he was suspicious of that little box from the very start.

They were a weird bunch, including a one-eyed pilot and, of all things, a woman. Four of them were civilians, and their senior member was a State Department striped-panty. It was General Clumb's conviction that civilians should keep their noses out of military matters until they were called up, in due course, by the draft. As to the military members of this organization, none of them had any rank, really, the Army representative being only a reserve colonel. What useful function this group could perform he could not imagine. They churned around a good deal, and some of them seemed to have influential friends whom they consulted, in person, outside proper channels. He had been waiting for months to put them in their place, or erase the troublesome box from his T.O. entirely, and now the time had come. He had devoted hours of study to their so-called forecast, an abominable and cheeky thing, and now he knew he had 'em.

Clumb charged into the conference room and rapped the rolled-up report on the edge of the table. Colonel Cragey, Commander Batt, and Major Price rose, as military courtesy required. The civilians were either rude or totally untrained in military matters. They all kept their seats. "You may be seated," General Clumb said, his voice rasping like metal tank treads on concrete. "What I have to say isn't going to take long. In all my years as an officer, this is the most preposterous and outrageous document that I have ever seen. Rejected!" He tossed the forecast on the table, where it slowly unfolded, as if of itself attempting to regain shape and dignity.

Simmons stood up. "General," he said, his voice controlled, but loud enough to match Clumb's, "do you mind explaining what you mean by 'rejected'?" Simmons had once faced down a Russian marshal. He was not terrified by rank.

"I mean," said Clumb, "that there will be no distribution of this document under my name. In other words, there will be no distribution whatsoever."

"We have been working on this forecast for more than a year. It is our opinion—and I am sure that I speak for all of us—that it is of utmost importance, and should be distributed immediately. This thing is not only going to happen. The facts indicate that it is happening this instant."

"Ridiculous!"

"Not only that," Simmons said, "but we have been discussing intelligence received by all the departments and agencies we represent—including State and CIA—over the last twenty-four hours. We have reached the opinion that the United States will be attacked, in exactly the manner outlined in the forecast, on Christmas Eve."

The general was certain that they had lost their collective minds, and that he could now get rid of them, swiftly and with impunity, and he allowed himself to smile. “Do you mind telling me what time?” he said.

Very casually Jesse Price, half slouched in his chair, said, “I should say at the crack of dawn.”

“Are you being insolent?”

“No, General, I am absolutely serious.” Although his manner was undoubtedly insolent, his voice was still subdued, and very grave. “The enemy submarines will surface, pick up bearings, and launch their missiles at first light.”

Katharine Hume had to speak. Psychologically, they were going at it the wrong way. They had to get Clumb talking. Perhaps if he talked enough he might talk himself into changing his mind. Nobody else, under the rank of lieutenant-general, was going to change it for him. “Sir,” she asked, innocently as a college girl asking for clarification of a lecture, “do you mind telling us what your objections are?”

“What they are? Gad, girl! I wouldn’t know where to start!”

Katharine rose. She was the youngest in the room, and the general was more than twice her age, and it would be politic to offer him her chair. “Do sit down, sir, and tell us about it. After all, we realize your experience outweighs ours.”

Uncertainly, as if doubting the tactic, the general sat down. “All right,” he said, “I’ll tell you. Your plan is full of holes. Now I don’t doubt that the Russians would attack us if they could get away with it, but what do you think our NATO forces would be doing while all this was going on over here? I’ve been reading the intelligence summaries also. The Russian divisions, including armor, are pulling back from all the frontiers. Does that sound like they’re preparing for war? No, sir! When you’re ready for war you mass for an attack. You don’t retreat.”

Colonel Cragey shifted in his chair, looking unhappy. “General, NATO is prepared for defensive action—not attack. The Russian divisions are pulling back simply to remove themselves from the range of NATO’s atomic cannon and missiles.”

“And you’re a colonel!” said General Clumb, sadly. “Do you mean to tell me that the Russians are going to leave the NATO armies intact?”

“What good is an army without a country?” Cragey asked.

The general sucked in his breath and straightened. “Colonel, I consider that remark insubordination!”

“Well, what good is it?” Cragey insisted.

The general ignored him. “And another thing. Suppose the Russians were capable of turning two-thirds of this country into a desert—which of course is

as preposterous as all the rest of it—how would it benefit them? Wars are won by occupying the territory of the enemy. That’s the first rule of warfare. You take this territory with tanks, nowadays, and hold it with infantry. What would the Russians want with a radioactive America?”

Katharine saw that all was lost, anyway, and that there was no possible point of compromise, or meeting of minds, between them. She said, quietly, “Perhaps they’ll just put a fence around it and stick up a sign reading, ‘Forbidden Area.’ ”

The general got to his feet. “I have nothing more to say. Except this. In my opinion this whole outfit is a dangerous boondoggle.” He reached across the table and picked up Copy No. 1. “Every copy of this so-called forecast, except this one which I will keep for presentation to higher authority at a suitable time, will be burned. Meanwhile, duties and activities of this group are suspended. Military members of the group will report to their immediate superiors for such assignment as may be found for them. As to civilian individuals, your further employment is the problem of your respective departments and agencies. Good day.”

He left the field, victorious.

After he was gone, Felix Fromburg was the first to speak. “Don’t get too excited. We’ve licked this sort of thing before. We’ll have to go over his head, and it may take time, but—”

“Time is what we haven’t got,” said Simmons. “Let’s not think about saving our jobs, or the group. Let’s think about saving the forecast. Somebody at the top or near the top has got to see it. I know what I’m going to do. I hope all of you have similar plans, although I cannot, of course, ask you to do anything contrary to the general’s order. I guess we’ve been adjourned, *sine die*.”

Walking down the main corridor towards the taxi loading ramps at the far side of the building, Katharine Hume saw an unusual sight. A leggy Air Force lieutenant, clutching a sheet of paper in his hand like a relay racer’s baton, sprinted past her at top speed. She considered stopping in at Jess Price’s office to find out if anything important had happened. But Price, like all the others, would be busy. Her curiosity could wait. As for herself, she doubted whether she could enlist a powerful ally within the AEC, although she would try. Only the AEC commissioners would have sufficient prestige to influence the Joint Chiefs and she knew that the commissioners—even if they agreed with the group’s findings—would hesitate to interfere with what was primarily an internal affair of the Pentagon. If help came, it would have to come through the military. All the way home she wondered about the Air Force lieutenant, recalling how his hair bounced on the back of his head with each long step. She had never seen anything, even one of the three-wheel carts pedaled by

messengers, move that fast in the Pentagon before.

## 5

Airman 2/c Smith awoke at three that afternoon, showered, put on his pressed blues, and caught a base bus to Orlando. He sauntered through the lobby of the biggest hotel, the Angebilt, bought an evening paper, and went into the bar to kill time. Betty Jo Atkins, his girl, wouldn't get home until five-fifteen. She was a waitress at the Sea Trout Inn, and her hours nine to five.

He ordered a bourbon and water and glanced at the single black headline. **FOURTH B-99 IS MISSING!** The story was out of Lake Charles, Louisiana. The bomber had taken off that morning on what was described as a routine training mission over the Gulf. Circumstances were identical with the B-99 that had vanished from Hibiscus in November, and the two others that disappeared Monday. Since all available air-sea rescue planes were already occupied in searches, the Air Force had sent out tactical planes, called on the Civil Air Patrol and airlines for help, and was bringing down an additional air-sea rescue squadron from Alaska.

Smith read the story, in its entirety, with relief. At least one of his three companions was on the job. The heat would be off Hibiscus. He felt neither pity nor exaltation. He was certain the crews were dead, just as he was certain that the crews of the first three B-99's had died, quickly. They were soldiers, as he was a soldier.

A stranger, a civilian of about his own age, edged along the bar, looked at the headline over Smith's shoulder, and said, "What d'you think's wrong with those bombers?"

"I wouldn't have any idea," Smith said. He knew that SI men were on the prowl all over the place, not only at Hibiscus, but combing the bars and theaters and dance halls in Orlando and Tampa as well. He knew that Special Investigations men customarily wore civilian clothes, so you could not tell a sergeant from a colonel. But if you had long experience with undercover agents, as Smith had, then you could smell them, of whatever rank or nationality. This man was undoubtedly SI, probably a captain, listening for loose talk.

"I think it's sabotage," the man said.

"Do you?" said Smith. An *agent provocateur*, he thought, a clumsy one. Smith finished his drink and walked out. He stopped at a drugstore, twirled a rack of quarter books, and selected one called, *Lost at Sixteen*, with an undraped, nubile redhead bent back across its cover. Betty Jo liked to read, providing it was about sex. Then he took a cab to her house, south of the city on Orange Blossom Trail.

She wasn't at home yet and the door was locked so he sat on the steps and waited. The house was one of a row of four-room dwellings, identical except for the color of their roofs, its construction modern but cheap. Betty Jo's rent was \$55 a month. She complained that this was more than she could afford, except during the winter season when the Sea Trout attracted the tourists and tips were good. Northerners tipped fifteen or twenty percent, she said, Southerners rarely more than ten, and the back country crackers sometimes nothing at all. Betty Jo often pointed out that the house was plenty big enough for two. On these occasions he usually gave her a ten or twenty to help out. Money wasn't all she wanted, or what she was really after, but money stopped her worries and whimpering, at least temporarily. Presently a green-and-white Chevy turned off the Trail into Kingsley Street and pulled into the carport. "Hi, honey," he said, opening the door for her. Betty Jo was home.

Betty Jo's maiden name was Iwanowski. She was wide-hipped, deep-bosomed, and heavily boned, the heritage of Slavic grandparents who had settled in Detroit. Her face was round and pleasant, her hair long and yellow, and her skin tough and tallow-colored, so that no matter how many hours she sunned she never seemed able to acquire a tan.

The men in her family had always worked in the automobile factories, but none had ever graduated beyond the ABC's of the assembly line. Betty Jo herself was a little backward in her studies, but precocious in other ways. At sixteen she married Atkins, a marijuana-smoking drugstore cowboy, and part-time collector for a neighborhood bookie. She lived with Atkins, off and on, for two years. Then her father loaned her enough to take a bus to Florida and get a divorce. Florida divorces were almost as quick, and much cheaper, considering transportation and living costs, than Nevada divorces. That's what the union lawyer in Detroit had advised her father. After the divorce came through she had stayed in Orlando. She was now twenty-four and seriously concerned about her future. She hated being a waitress, but it was all she knew. She wanted to get married to a good, solid man like Stanley Smith, with a steady job in the Air Force.

Stan Smith was the most considerate man she had ever known, and the handsomest. He had lunched at the Sea Trout two or three times, Fridays or Saturdays, always finding a seat at one of her tables, before he asked for a date. She had given him a date the first time he asked, and invited him to her house that first night, and not withheld herself from him. He was so handsome that she wondered why he had fallen for her, and inquired, frankly. He said that she reminded him of the girls back home. Back home, she understood, meant Iowa. She'd accepted it as a compliment since she'd known a couple of nice girls from Iowa, both of them pretty, and slim.

Stan had done a wonderful thing for her. He'd bought her a car, a brand-

new Chevy hardtop. After that, she wasn't at the mercy of the lousy bus service and it wasn't so hard living out on the south end of town. Oh, she understood that it was really his car and he could take it and use it whenever he wanted. But he'd put it in her name, which to Betty Jo's mind indicated his intention to marry her, because she was sure no man would give her a car unless he expected to get it back.

He was real kind, and generous, in other ways. He only wanted one thing from her, and she needed that too, so they never had any quarrels. Nor did she date anyone else, seriously, because she never knew when Stan would turn up. It could be any evening, early, because he always worked the midnight shift at the base. Generous and dependable as he was, in some ways Stan seemed strange. He could sit for hours, looking at her, without ever really seeing her. He ate anything she put in front of him, never said it was good or bad. Sometimes he talked in his sleep, and threshed wildly about, his right arm jerking as if throwing a baseball. She never understood a word he said, when he was like that, because his language was so garbled. It sounded almost foreign. It sounded like Grandpa Iwanowski when he was drunk.

This afternoon, when she stepped out of the car into Stan's arms, she felt a little guilty. Backing out of her parking place downtown she had rammed the car behind her, creased the left rear fender of the Chevy, and smashed the left tail light. She hoped he wouldn't notice. She'd get it fixed after she was paid, Saturday. Inside the house, she kissed him and led him to the bedroom. Later, she cooked steaks. When he called a cab and left at ten-thirty, in time to make the eleven o'clock bus back to the base, she was curled up in bed, reading the book he had bought her.

Another evening had passed without him mentioning marriage. All he'd said, of importance, was that one night soon he'd need the car. He had promised some of his buddies to drive them to Jacksonville. He might be away for only a night, or for several days. It depended on length of leaves.

## 6

Raoul Walback was the first of the Intentions Group to reach a man on an upper level of government. The CIA Director was in Switzerland that week, but his Deputy Director for Administration, Clarence Clarey, was available. Raoul approached him on the social plane—he had a hunch this was the best avenue to Clarey's attention—and asked him to dinner at his club, the Lochinvar. Clarey instantly accepted. Most of the CIA executives were upper upper, in New York or Chicago as well as in Washington, but Clarey was definitely upper middle, and his family probably lower middle. Raoul had never seen Clarey at the Lochinvar, or on the course at Burning Tree or even

Chevy Chase.

Raoul greeted Clarey in the club foyer and had drinks sent in to the lounge, hung with portraits of the Cabinet members, Supreme Court justices, and the two Presidents who had belonged to Lochinvar. Between the first and second highballs a waiter brought menus and Raoul ordered for them both—Chincoteague oysters, terrapin Maryland, duck stuffed with wild rice, and a spirited Chablis, '38. He could see that Clarey was impressed, but he refrained from mentioning the troubles at the Pentagon until the liqueur. Then he told the story, with emphasis on the need for haste. “I think you, as Deputy Director, can and should present the whole matter to the National Security Council,” he concluded. “We have to break this forecast out of Clumb’s desk.”

There were certain facts about Clarey that Raoul Walback didn’t and couldn’t know. One of them was that Clarey had been in government for twenty-four years, and he had not achieved his present eminence, and a \$15,500 salary, by exposing his neck to the sabres, even though blunted, of major-generals, or by making recommendations, and attracting the attention, of any such powerful bodies as the National Security Council. Nine of those twenty-four years Clarey had spent as a \$2,400 clerk three floors below the Archives Building. He escaped from this dungeon in 1941 by transfer to a new organization called the Coordinator of Information, then being established by General Donovan. CIO gave birth to twins, OWI and OSS, and after the war OSS metamorphosed into the CIA. Generals and admirals, professors and professional spies, researchers and administrators came and went. Clarey stayed on. By adhering to the government’s immutable laws for survival—shunning all controversy, buttering his superiors, and keeping in touch with his congressman—through normal attrition he was now deputy director. He had not the slightest intention of jeopardizing his position and eventual pension, not for the hydrogen bomb or anything else. He rolled the stem of his glass between his fingers, pretending deep thought before he spoke. “To tell you the truth, Raoul,” he said, “I’m rather glad it happened.”

“You’re what?”

“I’m glad it happened. We need you back with us. I may say that both the Director and I have been somewhat disturbed by the actions of your group in the Pentagon. Stepping on our toes, you know. Duplication of effort. After all, CIA is responsible for gathering and analyzing strategic intelligence. By sending you as our representative to the Intentions Group, we really weakened our own position.”

“I’m afraid you don’t understand,” Raoul said. “We think it probable that we’re going to be attacked. By Russia, that is. On or about Christmas Eve. After Christmas, there won’t be any CIA, or Pentagon either.”

Clarey leaned back in his chair and laughed. “Oh, come now, Raoul.

You're over-dramatizing the situation. Now I'm no expert on Eastern Europe, but Russia hasn't got the savvy and know-how and organization to attack this country."

"They have savvy enough to make hydrogen bombs, and they know how to build aircraft and guided missiles and submarines to deliver 'em, and organization—why, Clarence, the Communist organization controls half the people on earth."

Clarey said, "One day the whole thing will collapse."

"Perhaps. But not by this Christmas."

Clarey finished his *crème de cacao*. He didn't want to offend Walback, whom he knew to be on good personal terms with the director, but the young man was talking madness. Obviously, he was overworked. "Raoul," he said, "you have a place in the country, haven't you? Why don't you take off for a week or two, and then come back to us. Speaking personnelwise, we really need you back in CIA operations very badly."

"I think," Raoul said, "that a vacation is exactly what I'm going to take."

## 7

The Secretary of State, that evening, was delivering a major address on East-West economic problems before the Foreign Policy Association. The Under Secretary was in the Philippines. One Assistant Secretary was waiting at National Airport to greet the Emir of a Middle East principality richly endowed with oil. The other assistant secretaries had already left Washington for the holidays. Since Christmas fell on Tuesday, and Christmas Eve would be devoted to office parties for those government workers remaining in the capital, a long weekend was coming. So Clark Simmons, in desperation, telephoned Walter McCabe at home. McCabe was a special assistant to the Secretary of State, with a nebulous overlordship of Eastern European Affairs.

Unfortunately, McCabe was entertaining the Yugoslav ambassador and a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at dinner. He was carving the roast when the phone rang. When the maid said it was a Mr. Simmons, from the Department, McCabe did not at first place the name. McCabe was not a career diplomat. He was a super-market millionaire from Georgia, a generous contributor to the last election campaign. "Tell him if it's important," he told the maid, "he can call me back later."

At ten o'clock Simmons called again, and by then McCabe had recalled that Simmons was the expert on Russia now working on some sort of a hush-hush job in the Pentagon. McCabe's guests were still there, and both he and Mrs. McCabe were annoyed by the interruption, particularly since the maid publicly relayed Simmons' insistence that McCabe come to the phone.



McCabe took the call on the extension in the study. “What’s so important that it won’t wait until morning?” he demanded.

“I wouldn’t like to talk about it on the phone. I think I’d better come on over.”

“Oh, come now. Let’s not be security-happy.”

Simmons was a little rattled. He didn’t know McCabe very well. He said, “Mr. McCabe, this is a matter of the national safety.” The phrase, “a matter of the national safety,” was used seldom, and never recklessly, in the Department. Its meaning was at once literal and cabalistic. It meant: “Drop everything else. This is of supreme importance.”

McCabe was not aware of the phrase. “What do you mean?”

“I’d better come on over.”

“Now look, Simmons, I’m entertaining some very important people. You’d better give me a general idea of what you want.”

Ever since he had been created a Foreign Service Officer, Class Eight, Simmons had been taught to take it for granted that all phone calls over unscrambled wires were monitored. He had been told never to say anything into a telephone that you would not care to have broadcast over the NBC combined network. So he found it difficult to phrase what he had to say. “I’d better start in at the beginning. We have been working on this forecast, and it must be got out immediately, and now our group has been abolished by General Clumb. You know he’s . . .”

“Simmons, are you drunk?”

“Certainly not!”

“Well, you sound drunk.”

“Mr. McCabe, I don’t drink!”

“Well, whatever this is, take it up through the proper channels. Goodbye!”

McCabe returned to the living room, smiled, and said, “Hope you’ll pardon me. Some sort of intramural scrap in the Pentagon.”

## 8

Commander Bart had better luck than Simmons. Since he was of an old Navy family, he had no trouble seeing Admiral Blakeney, and he was able to tell the whole story, in detail. Blakeney, who was also aware of the thirty missing Russian submarines, and the flotilla that had slipped out of the Baltic, was already somewhat worried, and he promised to take action. He could not, he explained, interfere with whatever was going on in the organization of the Joint Chiefs, which after all was on a higher echelon. He could, however, act directly, in his capacity as commander, Eastern Sea Frontier.

There was a hunter-killer task force, two light carriers and six destroyers,

under his command. Unfortunately, at that moment the ships were steaming into the Gulf to co-operate with Air Force in the search for the B-99 missing from Louisiana, and on the way they would scout for the two lost off Florida the day before. There would be an uproar, and renewal of inter-service friction, if he called them off on the basis of no tangible threat. As soon as the survivors were found, or the search abandoned, he could use the task force, with its helicopters and dive bombers, for other duty; and the patrol bombers based at Jacksonville, Virginia Beach, and Quonset as well. Bart had to be satisfied with that.

## 9

Colonel Cragey, Felix Fromburg, Jesse Price, and Katharine Hume could not get through to anyone of influence and importance that day. Air Force, naturally, was in an uproar, and General Keaton constantly in conference. Four of the AEC commissioners had returned to their home towns for Christmas, and Katharine did not know the fifth.

She did, however, speak to a colleague, Dr. Nebel, a scientist of awesome reputation for his work on the H-bomb. "I think you will find," Dr. Nebel told her, "that the National Security Council is already aware of this threatening situation if it already exists. We—that is, the AEC—might be making fools of ourselves if we called it to their attention."

"I don't believe it," Katharine said. "If this attack is coming off, and the Security Council is aware of it, certainly they would have informed Civil Defense—and I'm pretty sure that hasn't happened."

"I'm not at all sure that they'd tell Civil Defense," the scientist said, "unless attack was actually imminent. Think of the risk of panic. Orderly evacuation plans or not, there'd just be a wholesale rush to get out of the cities. New York traffic is paralyzed when one truck gets stuck for an hour in the Holland Tunnel. Imagine what would happen if two million people tried to get off Manhattan Island at the same moment. No, they wouldn't say anything until the last minute. Any premature warning would immobilize whatever defensive dispositions the Army and Air Force plan to take. If word of it leaked, nothing would move—except through the air."

Katharine wasn't satisfied. "You know people on the National Security Council, don't you?" she asked.

"Yes, I do."

"Couldn't you make an inquiry, unofficially?"

Dr. Nebel hesitated. "I suppose I could, but I'm not going to. To tell you the truth, Miss Hume, on principle I am against interference in political affairs by people in our position. We have our job to do, they have theirs. Whenever

we step into their territory, we antagonize them and invite distrust.”

So Katharine had gone home, and to bed. At midnight the phone rang. It was Jess Price. He asked what she’d been able to do, and she said nothing. He said, “I tried to get Keatton all afternoon, and all evening. An hour ago I went out to eat. When I came back he had left his office. He’s on the way to Hibiscus.”

“Not another?” she said.

“No, not another. Not any since the one from Lake Charles this morning.”

She told him, in guarded words, about her disappointing talk with Dr. Nebel. He expressed no surprise. Then she said, “Jess, are you terribly tired?”

“No. Only my eye is tired. I’ve been reading.” He didn’t tell her what he had been reading, while waiting in the hope of seeing Keatton. He had been reading a new, and exciting, top secret report out of Wright Field. There had been a breakthrough in the development of the intercontinental ballistics missile.

It was eleven o’clock. She said, “Would you like to come up to my apartment for a drink, or a coffee?”

He said, “I’ll be right there.”

She hung up the phone, wondering at the boldness of her invitation, trying to analyze her feelings. He certainly wasn’t the type that needed mothering. He was at least as self-sufficient as herself. The truth was, she decided, that she simply felt better when he was around. The days on which she didn’t see him at all, those days seemed empty. This feeling for Jess was not new, but she could not tell exactly when it had begun.

As Jesse left the Pentagon, the guards were busy collecting the day’s secret waste. One of the bags, taken from the Joint Chiefs’ wing to the incinerators in the basement and burned, contained nineteen of the twenty existing copies of *FORECAST OF RUSSIAN MILITARY ACTION*.

## four

AIRMAN 2/C STANLEY SMITH was fifteen minutes late reporting for duty on the midnight to 0800 shift at the Officers' Open Mess, Hibiscus Base, Wednesday. It was unusual for Smith to be late, and Sergeant Ciocci, in charge of five cooks and food handlers, said only, "What held you up, Stan?"

"They took the bus apart at the main gate," Smith answered. Not only had the Air Police checked the ID cards and leave passes on every man aboard the bus, including the driver, but they had opened every suitcase and parcel.

"It's rough all over," said Ciocci. "The way they act out on the line, you'd think somebody was stealing those Nine-Nines. I cut across a hard stand coming from Barracks Thirty-one and the next thing I knew I was flat on my face and a grease monkey was kneeling on my spine and had a forty-five against the back of my head. They didn't let me up until Captain Kuhn came over from his quarters and identified me. Kuhn will be nasty tomorrow. They had to get him out of the sack." Captain Kuhn was mess officer.

"I guess they're nervous," Smith said.

"They got a right to be nervous," said Ciocci. "But why should they get nervous at one of their own sergeants? Makes me feel like I'm not wanted in the Air Force."

Ordinarily the mess hall's graveyard shift had little to do until the flight line came alive just before dawn. The mess was designed to feed six hundred officers simultaneously, but between midnight and 0500 only two tables, those nearest the kitchen, were set up. Between those hours they usually were called on to feed only Air Police officers coming off duty and pilots and navigators who had made a night crossing from England or Africa. Often there were hours when the mess hall, big as an auditorium, was entirely deserted. In those hours Sergeant Ciocci's detail played two-bit poker, or sampled the pies and drank coffee and shot the breeze in the kitchen. At 0500 they began sending loaves of bread through the slicers and cooking hundreds of eggs for the early morning rush. One of them, usually Smith, made up the box lunches for the morning missions, under Ciocci's supervision. The Air Force, always sensitive

about what a man put in his stomach during flight, insisted that these lunches be carefully prepared. Each cardboard carton, once filled, was sealed and stamped with time and date. Across the seal, printed in red capitals, was: *“THIS LUNCH MUST BE EATEN WITHIN SIX HOURS. THIS IS AN ORDER.”* The medics had discovered that food deteriorated rapidly in the rarefied atmosphere of the upper altitudes.

This was no ordinary morning.

A stream of civilians, some in flight coveralls, others in bright sports shirts and slacks, invaded the mess, shepherded by Air Police. Twice as many Air Police as usual seemed to be on night duty. Smith knew that the civilians, most of them, were factory pilots and tech reps and slide-rule artists searching for bugs in the B-99. The other civilians would probably be Special Investigations men. Since most of them ordered dinners, he guessed that they had worked through the night, wringing out the 99's out of sight and hearing, eight or ten miles up. A Colonel Lundstrom, a tall, blond man with the quiet dignity of assured authority, came in at two-thirty with Major Glick, the Chief Security Officer at Hibiscus. Smith had heard that Lundstrom was a wheel in Washington, and, since Lundstrom ate with Glick, it could be assumed that he was a wheel in security. Smith brought sandwiches for Lundstrom and Glick, and hovered about them with freshly made coffee, but he never heard a word of their conversation. One of the posters on the wall behind Lundstrom read, *“The Biggest Gap In Security Is An Open Mouth.”* It showed a beefy, garrulous officer yakking to a girl in a booth of a cocktail lounge. Lundstrom in no way resembled the officer in the poster.

At four-thirty there was a flap. Brigadier-General Conklin, the base commander, came in with two other generals and a pink-cheeked captain, an aide. One of the generals was built like a barrel and was smoking a cigar. Smith recognized this three-star general as the Commander of SAC, by legend a hard character incapable of smiling, and he was not smiling now. The other general had four stars, and Smith knew he must be Keatton, the Air Force Chief-of-Staff. Both generals appeared rested and were cleanly shaven, and Smith guessed that they had been napping on a plane, probably a plush super-Connie with leather lounging chairs, office, and berths, and had shaved before landing. Conklin was unshaven and weary. He had not slept, except to drop his head on his desk for a few minutes when his eyes would no longer remain open, since his two B-99's of the 519th Wing vanished Monday.

Such heavy brass had never been seen on the graveyard shift before, but Sergeant Ciocci knew what to do, although he was a bit flustered as to whom to address, the base commander or the commander of the whole damn' Air Force. He compromised by bracing rigidly at attention, and speaking towards a point between them. *“Sir, I guess you'll want to eat in the Sky Room. I'll have*

it set up right away, sir.” The Sky Room was a private dining alcove, for chicken colonels and general officers only, partitioned off from the mess hall.

“No, we’ll eat right here,” Keatton said. The generals and the aide sat down around the end of Table No. 2 and ordered; two scrambled, two sunny side up. Smith hurried into the kitchen and brought coffee. They would want coffee while waiting for their eggs and toast. It was a big flap, but he and Ciocci could handle it.

While they ate, Smith’s training compelled him to linger, attentively, close to the table. The generals would think him alert, as he was. He overheard some talk of compression blowouts which meant nothing to him. Once Keatton, tapping his spoon on the table, said, “I would swear it was sabotage if it wasn’t for that one yesterday out of Lake Charles.” To Smith, the remark was informative, and a pleasant relief.

The generals finished a second cup of coffee, lighted cigarettes, and rose. Keatton called Ciocci and said, “Sergeant, that was a good breakfast. Thanks for the fast service.”

After they were gone Ciocci told Smith, “Say, he’s a right guy, isn’t he?”

“Yeah,” said Smith. “He looks human.” Except for a few glimpses of Conklin driving or walking around the base, these were the first American generals he had ever seen. He had never heard a Russian general or marshal thank a mess sergeant, who after all was nothing more than a servant, for anything, or even nod to one. Camaraderie between officers and men, he had been taught, led to slovenly discipline. On the base, he noted, they even played baseball and swam together. He had set this down as a weakness in the American military system.

At five o’clock Operations phoned. Twenty-four flight lunches would be required for the morning missions. Since each B-99 carried four officers, as well as three enlisted men, that meant six planes were going out. The enlisted men would receive an identical flight lunch from the airmen’s mess, except they wouldn’t have to pay. Officers paid forty cents a meal. It didn’t matter whether they sat down to a prime steak in the Open Mess or bought a carton with sandwiches to take into the air. It was always forty cents.

Smith, without being bidden, began to slice meat and cheese for the sandwiches. After a few minutes Ciocci joined him and started to pack, seal, and stamp the cartons. Each carton contained two sandwiches, an orange or apple, half-pint container of milk, and a slice of pie or cake.

At six o’clock a lieutenant and two sergeants, all with sidearms hooked to their belts, arrived to pick up the cartons. The lieutenant produced mess chits in payment, and counted the cartons that his sergeants carried to their jeep.

“No coffee?” Smith asked. He kept a dozen quart thermos bottles filled on a rack alongside the big urns.

The lieutenant glanced at his list and said, "No coffee."

"Coffee's free," Smith reminded him.

"Well, I'll take a jug for myself and the gang in the security shack."

Smith lifted a thermos from the rack and handed it to him.

From then until eight, business was brisk. At eight the fresh kitchen crew took over. The bulk of the breakfasts would be served between eight and nine.

Smith tucked two thermos bottles under his arm and started back for Barracks 37 and sleep. He wondered whether his colleague at Lake Charles had been more successful than he, that morning. A few steps outside the mess hall he encountered Captain Kuhn. As Ciocci had predicted, Kuhn looked sulky. "Where are you taking that coffee, Smith?" the captain demanded.

"Over to the boys in Thirty-seven," Smith said. He was surprised. He had been carrying a thermos or two back to the barracks every morning for months. Kitchen duty held little reward of rank or pay, but it was understood that the men who worked in the mess halls enjoyed certain prerogatives, such as eating all they wanted, when they wanted, and toting snacks to their barracks.

"Oh, okay," said Kuhn. He understood this, too.

Smith walked on, reflecting on the constant danger, and his luck. Suppose Kuhn had ordered him to return the bottles to the mess hall? There could have been trouble, everything might have got screwed up. He had had only one other close call, on the day of the toothache.

It had been during basic training, and one of his back teeth hurt and his jaw was swollen, and he had gone to the post dentist, a captain, chubby and in his forties, like Kuhn. The captain, after finding a cavity festering under the gum line, treating and filling it, had taken a look at his other teeth and spotted the steel incisor.

"Say, that's funny," he'd said.

Smith, with his mouth pried wide, couldn't ask what was funny.

"Didn't know anybody in this country stuck stainless steel into a man's mouth," the dentist said, touching the metal with one of his tools.

Smith had tensed and jumped.

"That didn't hurt, did it?"

Smith, with the captain's hand out of his mouth, had enough presence of mind to say, "Yes, sir, it did, a little."

"I thought only the Russians used stainless steel teeth," the captain said. "Who put that one in for you?"

"I don't remember his name. A dentist in Chicago. It was during the war."

The captain seemed satisfied. "Oh," he said. "We had all sorts of shortages during the war. And all sorts of substitutes. Guess that was it."

That night, with a screwdriver and hammer, Smith had smashed out the stainless steel tooth. It showed that no preparations could be too careful, or

even careful enough. The little slips could kill you.

When Smith reached his room, Phil Cusack was still asleep. Smith put the thermos bottles in his closet. Cusack wouldn't disturb them. Cusack didn't drink coffee, and anyway he understood that Smith didn't like anything in his closet disturbed. Smith was exceptionally careful about Cusack.

## 2

As Airman Smith fell asleep, Robert Gumol was waking in his hotel room in Havana. It was a horrid process, accompanied by retching and pain. Gumol had had hangovers before. He had had a beaut, only a few weeks previously, in Atlantic City. But nothing like this. It was so bad that he tried to will himself back into the merciful paralysis of sleep. His condition wouldn't allow it. He was inordinately thirsty, and his throat burned and was so swollen that he had trouble breathing. His eyes, also, were swollen, and the lids glued together. His lips were numb and puffed, his stomach in noisy turmoil. He knew he could not get back to sleep until he had a drink of water. If he could only get aspirin and water into himself, and keep it down, he might get back to sleep and wake up at some future time with sufficient strength to take a shower. By then he would have the shakes, but if he could only sleep a little longer, and shower, he might be able to hold down a whisky sour, or maybe some kind of an absinthe drink, and get through the morning.

Something else was wrong. Somewhere out of the miasma of the night before something was very definitely wrong and his inner mind told him it would be best not to waken. He stretched out one numbed hand and felt the bed beside him. The señorita was gone. He sat straight up in bed and opened his eyes. The room was empty and so was the bathroom. The last thing he remembered was her fingers on his forehead, softly kneading. Then, some time later, he had heard a man's voice speaking Spanish, as if far away, and the man's voice was what was wrong, because no other man should have been in the room.

He got out of bed, lurched to the table in front of the French doors opening on the balcony, and swallowed a tumbler of water. The water in the ice bucket—what a fool he had been to drink champagne on top of rum—was still cold. He put his hands into the bucket and splashed water on his face and felt it roll cold down his swollen naked belly and trembling legs. He shook his head. Where was the brief case? Under the mattress, of course. If it was still under the mattress everything was going to be all right, because money could cure anything, even a hangover. With enough money you couldn't be too unhappy for too long. He lifted the corner of the mattress. The brief case wasn't there. He lifted the three other corners. It was gone. With an effort that left him



gasping and wet with sweat, he dragged the mattress off the bed. The brief case was still gone. He staggered into the bathroom and threw up.

Had Gumol's mind been working normally, he would not have taken the action that he now did. He would have written off the \$385,000 as the inevitable penalty for allowing lust to black out his thinking processes. He would have caught a plane back to Philadelphia, announced to his wife that the Cuban deal was half completed, raided another safe deposit box, and departed again. All five boxes were loaded, and they were all in his name, and after all he was president of the bank. He could go to Mexico, Haiti, Guatemala—perhaps he should have chosen Guatemala in the first place—almost anywhere. But Gumol's mind was not only inflamed by the ebbing fires of alcohol, but by a more potent drug. He didn't realize it until later, but this was no ordinary hangover he suffered. He had been expertly mickey-finned, and he acted unreasonably, stupidly. His rage at his own weakness and carelessness he now deflected towards the girl. She had seemed such a companionable, merry girl, with such a funny accent and so supple and willing, and really pretty, even though her hair was bleached. The dirty, traitorous little whore! He'd get her! He picked up the phone in numb and shaking fingers and when the operator answered, he shouted, "Give me the manager! I've been robbed!"

### 3

At thirty-seven, Raoul Walback's life divided into a succession of small and pleasant acts which when performed each day were woven into a protective screen against the savage and unpredictable world outside the big house on Massachusetts Avenue. His world could not be awry so long as the maid knocked on his door at seven-thirty exactly, bringing the morning paper and freshly squeezed orange juice, the glass bedded in a silver bowl of shaved ice. He read the first section of *The Post and Times-Herald* in bed, and took the second section to the bathroom, for the sports news and stock quotations. At eight o'clock, having shaved, he stepped on the scales and marked his weight on a chart. He always kept under 180. If he went over 180 he confined his lunch to chicken or tuna salad, with no mayonnaise, and a glass of skimmed milk, and skipped his five o'clock cocktail. Raoul's doctor always congratulated him after his semi-annual checkup. "Raoul," his doctor always said, "you're going to live forever."

Now Raoul wasn't sure. If the forecast was accurate, truth was that if he remained in Washington he probably would not live for five more days. Being conversant with the inertia of big government, he had little faith in the ability of his colleagues to budge the Pentagon. And being a complete realist, aware of the importance of his own life, he did not plan to remain in a primary target

area. So this morning was different from other mornings. He could not concentrate on the paper, for he was concerned with what to tell his mother at breakfast, and how to handle her. She was a widow, he an only son, and besides this they had the ties of mutual tastes and prejudices. But Henrietta Walback's comprehension of the world outside northwest Washington had changed little in thirty years. For instance, Henrietta—she liked him to call her by her first name—did not understand security. To confide a secret to Henrietta was the same as setting it out, in mimeograph form, in the lobby of the National Press Club. So he must try to inveigle her to Front Royal without excitement, or the revelation of what impended. Otherwise she would get on the phone and spread the news to her friends. This would cause confusion, if not outright panic. And it would be traced to him, which would be unpleasant.

There were roses, as always, in a thin-stemmed vase on the breakfast table. As always, he sniffed them in appreciation before sitting down, and waited for his mother to say, "Aren't they lovely this morning?"

After he said yes, they were lovely, she began her discussion of who was out of town, and who wasn't, and of the Christmas receptions and parties.

He started after the decapitation of the breakfast eggs. "Henrietta," he said, "I'm taking off until after the holidays. What say we drive up to Front Royal for Christmas?"

She looked at him in disbelief. "Did you say Front Royal—now—in in December?"

"It'll be lovely in the mountains. There'll be snow, perhaps. We'll have a white Christmas, just us two."

"Raoul, you must have lost your mind. Front Royal is absolutely frigid in December. There's no heat in the lodge except the open fireplaces. The place isn't ready for us. We'd have to take blankets and goodness knows what else. Besides, I'm going to a very important luncheon Friday—the wife of the British ambassador will be there—and next week my calendar is full. So is yours, if I remember. And I have to start planning for our January dinner. We'll have to hold the guest list to twenty-two unless you'd prefer to have it buffet. I think buffets have become gauche. They're so *easy* to have. Anybody can have a buffet. Anyway, you'd better let me know soon whom you want to invite."

Raoul saw that indirection was impossible. Shock treatment was required. "What would you say," he asked, "if I told you that an H-bomb was going to drop on Washington Monday morning?"

Henrietta applied butter and marmalade to a thin sliver of toast. "Why, I'd say ridiculous. I was talking to Genevieve Snavelly only yesterday afternoon at the Comptons' bridge. She's the wife of the Senator from Mississippi, you know, and she and the senator were gone all summer and most of the fall on a

trip around the world. The senator is on some sort of committee. You should see the lovely silk brocades and shantung gowns she brought back from Hong Kong. Got them for nothing, really absolutely nothing. Anyway, Genevieve told me that nobody speaks of war any more. Not only that, but she met a Russian refugee in Tokyo who told her that he didn't believe the Russians had an H-bomb at all. Just a lot of bluff. She said she had the most wonderful time everywhere and that some of the hotels in Turkey and Lebanon and places like that were as modern as the Statler, and that almost everyone she met spoke English. Imagine."

Raoul smiled. No use trying to shock Henrietta, because Henrietta's mind was equipped with a built-in censor to block unpleasant realities, just as Gus, the chauffeur-butler, shooed peddlers from the door. Henrietta heard and read only what she wanted to hear and read, and therefore she was as serene and happy as any woman in Washington. He would have to try something else. "To tell you the truth, Henrietta," he said, "I was hoping to take Katy Hume to Front Royal with us."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Walback. "So that's how it is. I should have guessed. Well, of course you'll need a chaperone. I'll be delighted. Such a lovely girl. So healthy-looking. And, really, from quite good family, isn't she?"

"Her father was a very distinguished scholar," Raoul said.

"Do you know anything about her mother?"

"Nothing, except that she had one."

"I believe she said her mother was from Virginia. That's a good sign, isn't it?"

"Infallible. This morning I'll drop by the bank, and then I'll call on her."

"I think that's very nice. When do you want to leave?"

"Tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow morning! I couldn't possibly be ready by tomorrow morning! Why, I'll have to send regrets to half a dozen people."

Raoul realized that Henrietta could be rushed only so fast. "Well, we'll make it Friday. There's a lot of shopping I have to do, and that I can do better in Washington than in Virginia. We'll have to take both cars because we're going to have quite a load. Gus can drive yours."

Henrietta said nothing, although this sounded like a very considerable expedition. When she thought it over, she was certain that Raoul planned to marry the Hume girl quietly in Front Royal, and, blessed boy, wanted his mother to be there. It would be a very proper elopement and would cause quite a stir in her set. She would pretend surprise, and not buy presents until she made up her mind as to what Katharine needed.

That morning Katharine had phone calls from Colonel Cragey, Felix Fromburg, and Simmons. She realized, with some pride, that they automatically and without any spoken agreement regarded her as the clearinghouse for their information. Simmons was senior, but the group's vigor centered in her. At noon Raoul arrived carrying a pigskin dispatch case. "Going somewhere?" she asked.

"Depends," he said. He dropped the bag on her desk, sat down in her swivel chair, and swung around to face her. "Hear anything?" he asked.

"Yes. Nothing good. Nothing even hopeful, except from Steve Batt. Navy won't interfere in Clumb's action, but Navy will send a hunter-killer group into the North Atlantic if and when the ships can be detached from present duty. They're helping the Air Force look for B-Ninety-Nine survivors."

"What about Cragey?"

"Poor fellow. He bumped into the wrong General in G-2. The General was a classmate of Clumb's at The Point. Cragey's on the way home to Charlottesville, more or less in disgrace."

"He could be worse off," said Raoul. "And Simmons?"

Katharine detected an unusual tenseness in Raoul. She wondered about the reason. She lighted a cigarette and stretched her legs out on the couch before she replied. "Simmons said that most of the people in authority at State are out of the city. Simmons got the brush from one who wasn't. Now he's writing memos. He doesn't believe he can get any action, because it's hard to get action in State without meetings and conferences, and with Christmas coming next week it's difficult to get people together."

"And Fromburg?"

"He's beside himself. Waited all afternoon to see the FBI's counter-espionage chief. Finally he talked to an assistant who just happened to be looking around for more people to do field security checks. Welcomed Felix with open arms and tried to put him to routine snoopin'. Felix refused. Says he'll wait in his chief's outer office until eternity if he has to. That's exactly how long he may have to wait."

"I had somewhat the same experience in CIA," Raoul said. "We're not getting anywhere and we're not going to get anywhere. Not in time. The people of this country are going to catch hell, Katy, and they deserve it. They're selfish, and stupid, and blind. We're in the fumbling hands of the bourgeois. The solid middle class is up on the pedestal. It's solid—all right—through the ears."

Katharine had never heard Raoul speak this way before. As a matter of fact, she had never heard him express any clear-cut social or political opinions. His use of the word bourgeois angered her. It was a propaganda word. British and French aristocrats had found it useful, in the nineteenth century, in

expressing contempt for Americans. The Communists had adopted it for the same purpose in the twentieth. She took off her glasses, like a small boy who has been called a fighting word. "I've never thought about it much," she said, "but I guess I'm middle class and I suppose that makes me bourgeois."

"Quite the contrary," Raoul said.

"Don't think this country is selfish or stupid, because it isn't. Complacent we may be, and overly optimistic, and even blind. The people of this country haven't been conditioned to its desolation. There has been no fighting on this soil for a hundred years. Total catastrophe is outside their experience and beyond their imagination. Except for the few of us whose job it is to think of nothing else. A Frenchman or a German or an Englishman whose guts have been wrenched apart—or his family wiped out—by a one-ton bomb has some idea of what thirty million tons of TNT might be like. Not much, but some. He doesn't understand radiation, perhaps, but he understands the thermal effect, and blast. And there are survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki who understand all of it. We understand none, except for a handful of us—those few million veterans who actually have heard and seen and felt and smelled war. So for most of us the danger is theoretical, not real. You can tell a child, over and over, that a rattlesnake is dangerous. But if the child has never seen any kind of snake, doesn't know what one looks like, he may try to pet a rattler. Perhaps that is stupidity."

"Now, Katy," Raoul said, "I didn't come over here to get into a philosophical argument. Mother and I are going to our place in the mountains Friday. We want you to come with us?"

"Why?"

"Because I love you and I want you to be safe."

The merit of evacuating the big cities, when attack seemed near, had been discussed by everyone in the Pentagon. The idea was not foreign to her. Indeed, it had been agreed that for the inhabitants of cities like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Washington, flight was the only practical form of civil defense. Yet, now that she was being asked to run away, the thought was stunning and abhorrent. It was one thing to speak dispassionately of mass evacuation, and to expect to be part of it. It was quite another thing to sneak off. That wasn't flight, but desertion in face of the enemy. It was like clawing your way aboard the first lifeboat to leave a sinking ship. She said, "Raoul, you can't mean it."

"Certainly I mean it. We may be able to ride out this thing in Front Royal."

Katharine sat up straight and looked at him, and he looked different, and she knew he would never look the same to her again. "You're a fool," she said. "You can die in Front Royal, too. A little slower, perhaps, but you'll die. If the wind is from the northeast you'll be blanketed by fallout from Washington or

Baltimore or both. If it's from the northwest you'll catch it from Pittsburgh. The wind doesn't blow that won't kill you."

"You're wrong," Raoul said. "I've thought of everything. There's a deep cellar under the lodge. My father used it for hanging game and storing wine and cheeses and vegetables. An old-fashioned cold room. It'll be adequate protection against radiation, particularly if we spread a layer of earth between tarps on the floor overhead. And everything we need, we'll have. Stayed up last night typing a list." From his inside coat pocket he brought out folded pages. "Let's check it over."

"I'd rather not," she said.

He examined his list with satisfaction. "Canned goods enough to last a year. Went by a wholesale grocery house this morning. A truckload of stuff is on the way now. Whisky, cigarettes, medical supplies, knives, axes, candles, ammunition, fishing tackle, even mousetraps. When we get up there Friday, first thing I'll do will be buy a side of beef and load up the freezer with meat."

She laughed at him. "How long do you think you'll have electricity in Front Royal—or any other small town for that matter? Who's going to worry about hauling coal so Front Royal will have its electricity? And I suppose your lodge has an electric kitchen, hasn't it? Hard to cook on an electric stove without current."

"Katy, you underestimate me. We have our own generator. Rural light systems are always uncertain. Another thing I'm going to do, Friday, is get the garage filled with drums of gasoline."

"You certainly have thought of everything, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes," he said. "Now most people would forget finances. But once New York is gone, the whole financial system of the country will crumble. Bonds, stocks, insurance policies, bank accounts—all useless. There'll be a general moratorium on debts, and only cash will be worth anything. So this morning I converted a hundred thousand in governments into cash. I have it right here." He tapped his dispatch case.

She shook her head. "Wrong, Raoul, dollars won't be worth their weight in canned beans."

"Beans or dollars," he said, "we'll have 'em both."

Katharine got up from the couch and started to pace, as she always did when angry or excited. "One thing you haven't thought of—people."

"What do you mean, people?"

"The people around Front Royal aren't going to like you very much, Raoul. You'll have everything and they'll have nothing. They aren't going to like you at all, and maybe they'll start spreading the wealth, beans or dollars or whatever you've got. Then there'll be other people—city people like me—who will escape the blast and fire and swarm out over the countryside. They'll be

hungry. They'll want part of that side of beef."

Raoul's mouth set, and she saw how thin, like a skate's, his mouth could be, and how flinty his eyes. He said, "They put a foot on my property and I'll shoot 'em down like rabbits!"

"Will you, now?"

"Yes, I will. We owe it to ourselves to stay alive. We're the ones who have a right to live. I'm not a snob, social or intellectual. It's just an old law—survival of the fittest."

"Not we," she said. "Only you."

Raoul looked up, startled, and slipped the list back into his pocket. "Katy, this isn't the time for you to try to be a heroine. Think it over. I still have an awful lot of things to buy. I'll be back tomorrow. At one, say? Lunch at the Mayflower?"

She said, quietly, "When you come back, tomorrow or any time, I won't be in."

After he was gone she felt nauseated, as if she had picked a firm, ripe fruit from a ribboned basket, and bitten into worms.

## 5

At ten o'clock that morning a B-99 had taken off from a SAC base near Corpus Christi, Texas, on an interesting mission. In its belly was a concrete replica, in weight and size, of a twenty-megaton H-bomb. Its flight plan called for it to fly out over the Gulf for fifteen minutes, at low altitude, turn 180 degrees, and then arrow back to shore. It would pass inland between Galveston and Sabine Pass at an altitude of less than a thousand feet, and maximum speed. It would stay on the deck for another hundred miles, then climb to 55,000 feet, and fly on a plotted zigzag course to Kansas City. It would simulate the bombing of Kansas City from 65,000. The mission, in type of terrain to be crossed, speed and altitudes maintained, and duration, approximated a flight from a SAC base in Turkey across the Black Sea to the Russian coast between Tuapse and Sochi, then on to Gorki on the Volga. It was a very practical mission. The B-99 was to attempt to sneak in from the Gulf at less than a thousand feet to avoid the eyes of coastal radar, which is subject to blindness when a plane hides behind the curvature of the earth. It was primarily a test of fuel consumption and speed at this inefficient low altitude, and of Texas radar defenses as well.

Operations at Corpus Christi was in touch with this plane on its flight out over the Gulf, and radar picked it up as it made its turn for the dash back to the coast. Radar lost it before it raced over the shore line at 600 knots, its afterburners flaming, but Corpus Christi, of course, kept in touch with the

aircraft commander. Over Lufkin, Texas, the B-99 began to climb, as if Russian coastal defenses had been evaded, and the danger now was interceptors. Thirteen minutes later the pilot's voice, recorded on tape at Corpus Christi, said, "This is Georgia Peach . . . am approaching Red River at Angels two five . . . repeat two five . . . two five thousand feet . . . speed . . ."

They never learned what his speed was, because that was the last message Georgia Peach sent.

In a few minutes, at Corpus Christi, at Fort Worth, and the other big fields in Texas, they knew they had another. They had a vanishing jet bomber like the three from Hibiscus and the one from Lake Charles.

But this one was not quite the same.

It was over land, not water. It was witnessed. And there was a human survivor, although the B-99 itself was shredded into bits of metal that fell like silvery rain over a five-mile area not far from Texarkana. Except for the eight engines. They came down like smoking meteors.

This B-99 was making a contrail, a clean white chalk line across the pale blue blackboard of the winter sky, so that many eyes were turned up to it, and saw it happen. Most of them agreed that they saw a red flash and then an explosion. Or perhaps it was two explosions, a small one and a big one later. The witnesses spoke of a ball of orange fire and a black cloud where there had been no cloud before, but, being eyewitnesses, none of their stories were exactly alike. Some told exactly what they saw, but most related what they thought they should have seen, or allowed their memory to be influenced by the tales of others.

All agreed that out of the cloud a number of specks fell. When it was five or ten thousand feet above the ground—the guesses of the witnesses naturally differed—one of these specks changed shape. A filmy white parachute mushroomed above it, and, swinging gently, it floated to earth. The survivor, Master Sergeant George Lear, radarman, fell within five hundred yards of the 3-X ranchhouse and received immediate first aid. Both eyes were blackened, his scalp lacerated, his hands and face burned, his body bruised, and he was stunned and suffering from shock. But he was alive, and by the time the rescue helicopters and intelligence teams arrived on the scene he was able to talk.

Georgia Peach was fitted with ejector pods, and to this Lear owed his life. An ejector pod is a plastic capsule which encloses an airman's seat. The front section is open so he can perform his duties. If it becomes necessary to abandon the aircraft, he pulls a lever at his side, a cowl drops to complete the closure of the capsule, and an explosive charge ejects the pod into space, exactly as a shell is fired from a gun. It is a desperate and dangerous means of escape, but it gives a man a chance. The pod protects his body, and prevents him from being pulverized by a six- or seven-hundred-mile-an-hour blast of



air. However, within ten seconds, at very high altitudes, he must remember to put on his oxygen mask. Then he must remember not to leave the pod until the speed of his fall is slowed by heavier atmosphere. And after he pushes the pod aside in mid-air he should allow himself to fall to within ten thousand feet of earth before pulling his parachute ripcord. After that, he should look around for a hospitable spot on which to land, guide himself to this landing by manipulating his shroud lines, and remember to absorb the shock by rolling like a cat as his feet touch.

Master Sergeant Lear was the first B-99 crewman called upon to do all these things and he didn't remember any of them. All he knew was that suddenly there was fire all around him and a tremendous noise and he was kicked hard in the rear. The next he knew he was holding on to his shrouds, swinging like a pendulum. That was all he knew. All.

A tremor ran through the communications ganglia of the Air Force. A hundred questions, a few answers, a few commands whined and hummed over the wires. From Hibiscus to the Pentagon, thence to the SAC command post in Omaha, finally to Fort Worth, the teletypes chattered an admonition from General Keatton. The intelligence teams standing by at the Texarkana hospital should rush, by fastest plane, all of Lear's clothing, and his parachute, to the Wright Field research laboratories.

The intelligence officers had already thought of this, and when the order came the clothing was packed and ready. While Master Sergeant Lear couldn't tell them anything, his clothing might tell them much.

## 6

From the moment that Corpus Christi reported that it had lost contact with a B-99 bearing the operational name of Georgia Peach, until a jet fighter was flying to Ohio with Lear's clothing, Major Price stayed close to the communications center in Air Force. There was, really, nothing else for him to do. Until he was re-assigned to other duty by General Keatton, or someone countermanded General Clumb's order dissolving the Intentions Group, he was a spectator.

He sent his secretary home at four, and then sat at her typewriter, attempting to phrase a personal message to Keatton that could go through official channels from the Pentagon to Hibiscus. Nothing he wrote made much sense, when he imagined the Chief-of-Staff, snowed under by the mounting emergency, reading it. Finally he condensed all that was ludicrous into one sentence. "*OPERATIONAL PRIORITY X CLASSIFICATION TOP SECRET,*" he wrote. "*FROM MAJOR PRICE, DETACHED DUTY, TO GENERAL KEATTON X I THINK RUSSIANS WILL ATTACK US MONDAY MORNING X*

*DO BE CAREFUL.*” He laughed, ripped the paper out of the typewriter, and tore it into shreds. Then, out of habit, he dropped the pieces into the carton on which was stencilled: “Secret Waste.”

At dusk, frustrated and edgy, he left the Pentagon and drove back to Georgetown. He idled his car down Dumbarton, although this was not the quickest way home. Katy Hume’s apartment was on Dumbarton, and in recent months, with more and more frequency, he had felt a compulsion to use the street. Now, he looked up at her apartment. Her lights were on. Raoul Walback’s big blue sedan wasn’t parked on the block. Jesse Price dropped in to see Katy whenever he could think of an excuse, but he made it a point not to intrude when Raoul was there.

He needed to talk to her. She had, he realized, become a necessity to him. When a day passed without seeing her, he felt out of sorts and lonely. He parked around the corner and walked to her apartment.

When she answered his knock he sensed at once that something was wrong. When he had left her the night before she had seemed tired, physically, but still vibrant and full of fight. Katy had two things he greatly admired in a woman as well as a man, drive and bounce. Now the drive and bounce seemed missing. The corners of her face were etched with tiny lines as if she were suppressing physical pain. She looked listless, tired, beaten. She didn’t say she was glad to see him, or offer him a drink. All she said was, “Don’t tell me about the one today. I heard it on the radio.”

He put his big hands on her shoulders and said, “Come on, Katy, snap out of it. I think we’re going to get an answer out of this one.” Her shoulders were round and warm. Quite beyond his volition, as naturally as if she belonged to him, he pulled her close. Surprisingly, she put her face against his chest, and he could feel her body seeking his, molding herself to him. He crushed her. He kissed her hair, her eyes, and then she lifted her open mouth to his. Finally she moved her lips away and whispered, “I can’t breathe. I’m not going to run away, Jess. We’ve got all night. We’ve got a lifetime of nights, if you want me.”

He said, “I want you.”

She kissed him again, hungrily, for she had suddenly remembered something. A lifetime could mean fifty years—or five days. She said, “Why didn’t you ever do this before?”

“Never thought you wanted me to.”

“You could have tried.”

“I don’t poach, and Raoul had signs all over the place: ‘Posted—Keep Off.’”

“I guess he did, didn’t he?” She walked over to the couch and sat down, tucking her legs under her. “Today I ripped the signs down.”

He followed her to the couch and sat beside her and she let her head fall over on his shoulder as if it were the only natural place for it to rest. The lines of tension and weariness were erased from her face. She looked assured, ready. He sniffed at her hair. “You smell like a woman,” he said, and kissed her again.

She thought of the first time she had been kissed on this couch, when she was fifteen, or maybe it was fourteen, by the boy who lived across the street, and bore the improbable name of Gaston, and who in two years had seemed much too young for her. There had been others, quite a few when you got right down to it. But it was much too cramped for adult love-making with a man as big and sort of wild as Jess. She didn’t want to let him out of her arms but she wished he would pick her up and carry her into the bedroom. That’s what she wanted, but at the same time she hoped he wouldn’t because their first night should be a big thing. She supposed it was Victorian, but if they went to bed together now it would be a little too sudden, a night that might tarnish, and that they might prefer to forget later. If there was to be a later, after Christmas Eve. She said, finally, “We’ve got to stop because when you make love to me I can’t think and I have to think. Don’t you want to hear about Raoul?”

“No.”

She held him away. “I really don’t want to talk about Raoul, but we do have to talk about the forecast, and the B-Ninety-Nines, and Keatton. I don’t know how you feel, but right now, more than anything else, I want to live. I want to live a long time. Raoul was up here today. He asked me to go away with him to his place in Front Royal. With his mother. You see, come next Monday, he wants to be sure that he’ll go on living. I turned him down. I despised him for it. But if you asked me to do the same thing right now, I’d say yes. Isn’t that strange?”

“No. It’s not so strange. I feel the same way. And Monday you may find yourself somewhere safe, or safe as you can get. I won’t ask you. I’ll take you. Because I’m damned if I’m going to die now that I’m just beginning to live.”

“Tell me about that bomber that blew up over Texas,” she said.

He rose, straightened his jacket, and felt in his pocket for a pipe. “Okay,” he said, “back to earth. But let’s not be sensible adults too long, Katy. If all we’ve got is a few days—at least only a few days before the lights go out—we’re going to fly.”

“Sure,” she agreed. “We’ll fly.”

“There are two new and interesting facts about the loss of this last Nine-Nine. The first four all blew within eighteen to twenty-five minutes after takeoff. This one blew fifty-nine minutes after takeoff. Why? The complete communications log from Corpus Christi tower hadn’t come in when I left the office, but when it does I have a hunch it’ll tell us something.” Jesse Price

lighted his pipe and stared out of the window, not at anything except the image building in his own mind. “Second thing is, a man survived. If there had been structural failure, and sudden decompression of the crew’s quarters, he and everyone else would have been sucked out through that hole, squeezed into sausages. He wouldn’t have been shot out in his pod. In decompression, death is almost instant.”

“Shot out in a pod? Is that what happened? It wasn’t on the radio.”

“It won’t be,” he said. “The enemy hasn’t been informed, as yet, that the B-Nine-Nine has been modified for escape pods. Anyway, this indicates to me that it was an internal explosion, and that the explosion triggered this radarman’s pod. So before he could burn or disintegrate when the second explosion—all that fuel—came, he was shot out into space.”

“What’s that mean?”

“Means it could be sabotage.”

“Jess, you’ve got to go to Hibiscus and tell that to Keatton!”

He laughed. “Honey, General Keatton must have figured that out about four hours ago.”

“You don’t know what he’s figured out, Jess. And maybe if you could get in to see Keatton you’d get a chance to tell him about Clumb, and the forecast.”

Jesse shook his head. “You don’t understand. At this moment Keatton is the busiest man in the world. His air force is blowing up around his ears. He won’t have time to see me, and if he did see me and I started telling him about our brawl with Clumb, and the forecast, he’d throw me out.”

“Unless you showed him that blowing up SAC was part of the plan. You said yourself that the only way they could get away with it was to put SAC out of action. Aren’t they doing it?”

Jesse thought it over and shook his head again, no. “They can’t blow up SAC. You’ve got to be practical. Five planes in two weeks? That’s nothing. We could lose that many in five minutes through one error in navigation at a refueling rendezvous. In one raid on Schweinfurt, the Eighth Air Force lost ninety-nine B-Seventeens. That didn’t stop them from smearing most of Germany before they were through. Anyway, Keatton has half the technicians in the Air Force down at Hibiscus. One more man won’t help, and I don’t see what one man can do.”

Katharine stood up, stepped to the window, and whirled, so that she stood directly before him and his eye could not evade her angry face. “You make me sore! You want to know what one man can do? I’ll tell you. One man, name of Klaus Fuchs. Came to this country to work at Los Alamos. Among other things, he worked on the original planning for a thermonuclear weapon. Then he left us, with everything neatly filed in his head. He went back to Europe and

turned it all over to the Russians. If it wasn't for Klaus Fuchs—and a few others—I wouldn't be wondering whether you and I will be cinders by Monday night. That's what one man can do, and did!"

Jesse said nothing.

"I think you're better than Klaus Fuchs," she said. "I hope you are. Anyway, it's always been one man. It's never anyone else. It's always you."

He said, "You'll go with me?"

"Of course."

At midnight they sat side by side on an airliner leaving National Airport. They held hands, and kissed as soon as the overhead lights were out. The stewardess was certain they were newlyweds.

At Jacksonville they got out to stretch their legs and in the grimy terminal building Jess bought a paper. There was nothing new from Texarkana or Hibiscus or Washington. But there was a two-column editorial, captioned: "WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE B-99?", on the front page. The lead paragraph read: "Americans have been understandably disturbed by the mysterious loss of four of the new B-99 jet bombers. Now comes the news that a fifth has blown up over Texas. The Air Force, while conducting extensive safety tests of the eight-engined intercontinental bombers at Hibiscus Base, has made no announcement as to the cause of any of these mishaps. Since security measures are notoriously stringent around bases of the Strategic Air Command, and since the missions of the five doomed planes originated at three separate bases, the possibility of widespread sabotage seems remote. The inescapable conclusion is that the B-99, perhaps in some small detail that can quickly be remedied, is defective."

The editorial said that thirty-four airmen had already died and others would certainly die unless the cause of the disasters was discovered.

It spoke of the present equable international situation, with the Russian divisions pulling back from the Western Europe borders, and the Chinese Communists quiet in Southeast Asia. The renewal of strict censorship of Moscow dispatches was not necessarily ominous. It might only reflect internal conflicts within the Kremlin, and a power shift in the Presidium.

The editorial concluded: "Why not ground the B-99 until it is proved safe? Let SAC replace the B-99, for the time being, with the B-47's and B-52's, efficient aircraft presently in mothballs."

Jesse was silent as they walked back towards their plane. Katharine said, "Well?"

"Maybe that's the answer," he said. "The Russians aren't going to destroy SAC. They're going to let the American people do it."

## five

THREE IN the morning is an awkward hour for a man and a woman, unmarried and carrying only weekend luggage, to arrive in Orlando, or anywhere, by plane. The hotels will accept them, of course, but only with a leer, even when they request separate rooms. Katharine Hume and Jesse Price were both stimulated with the heady wine of fresh love, but they were aware that they needed sleep, and would have to sleep, eventually, and that it was best they sleep now, before the business of the day opened at Hibiscus Base.

They spoke of this problem as they waited for the airport bus. “I know we have to sleep,” Katy said, “but I don’t want to go to a hotel. I’m not prudish, or anything, but when we go to a hotel I want you to be able to walk up to the desk, look the clerk in the eye, and sign Major and Mrs. Jesse Price. You are going to marry me, aren’t you?”

“Certainly I’m going to marry you.”

“Well, why don’t you ask? You haven’t, you know. But don’t ask now. Wait for the right time. And I want it to be romantic, with a proper setting. Like under a frangipani tree in the moonlight.”

“I’m not a very romantic guy,” he said. He leaned over, his bristles brushing her cheek, and kissed her.

“Blackbeard the pirate!” she said.

By the time the bus reached the city they had decided to taxi on to Hibiscus. If her brother was listed for a morning mission he’d be up early. If he wasn’t, they’d wake him. Clint lived in the Bachelor Officers’ Quarters so she could not, of course, stay with him. But he undoubtedly would have married friends living on the base, and perhaps one of them might put her up. No problem existed for Jesse. “If there isn’t room in the BOQ or transient quarters,” he said, “all I need is a sack and six feet of floor.”

It wasn’t quite that easy.

At 4:00 A.M. the taxi dropped them at the guardhouse, a one-story structure of concrete block painted white, of the main gate. Over the gate was a gay orange-and-blue sign: “Welcome to Hibiscus A.F.B.—Home of the 83rd Air

Division, SAC.” Under the gate stood two Air Police. Jesse noted that they carried tommy guns in addition to their sidearms. Inside the guardhouse was a second lieutenant of the Air Police and four or five enlisted men. All, even a man bent over a typewriter, were armed. Hibiscus was in a condition of alert.

The lieutenant, tall, thin, deeply tanned, and very young, looked them over carefully, almost angrily. He unbuttoned his holster. A sergeant, standing at the other end of the room, stark and bright with tubular lights, lifted a carbine and brought it to rest on the long counter so that it almost, but not quite, pointed at Jess’s middle. The lieutenant spoke. “I don’t know who you people are. But if it’s one of those penetration stunts this is the wrong time to try it.”

Katy said, “Oh!” In spite of her knowledge of war on the theoretical and strategic plane, she had never before encountered armed and hostile soldiers. They looked formidable, and dangerous, not at all like the immaculate Pentagon guards, whose weapons seemed only part of a uniform, like officers’ dress swords.

Jesse understood the lieutenant’s nervousness. Special Investigations teams kept security taut on SAC bases by attempting penetrations, so there was always a running battle between the uniformed Air Police, and the civilian-clad SI. The SI tried to crash the gate in ambulances and fire engines and phone company trucks. Occasionally they landed in an aircraft feigning distress. They posed as newspapermen and doctors, distraught wives and lawyers, and even, on occasion, adopted the identity of general officers. Air Police had been eaten out, and even dismissed from the service, for allowing themselves to be fooled by these teams, and the lieutenant, Hans Fischer, had no intention of allowing anything like that to happen to him. So Jesse, when he spoke, did so with care and precision. “We’re not from SI,” he said. “This lady is Miss Hume. She represents the Atomic Energy Commission, with an assignment in the Pentagon, and is here to see her brother. Her brother is Major Clinton Hume of the Five-Nineteenth Bomb Wing. I’m Major Price, attached to the Joint Chiefs of Staffs. I’m here to see General Keatton.”

From the other end of the room the sergeant said, loudly enough to be heard but not sufficiently loud to be called down for open insolence, “Now I’ve heard everything.”

Lieutenant Fischer said, “If you were here to see General Keatton his aide would have called and left your name. And you wouldn’t be coming in a taxi. You’d be in a staff car, or aircraft. You’ll have to do better than that, mister. Why don’t you two just go away and come back after eight o’clock, when I’m off duty?”

“Can’t,” Jesse said. “Our taxi’s gone. Want to see my ID card? We’ve both got all sorts of credentials.”

“I’ll bet you have,” said Lieutenant Fischer. “They always do.”

“Now look, Lieutenant,” said Jesse, wishing he had worn not only his uniform but decorations, “I was in the Air Force when you were in grammar school.”

“I’m not in grammar school now,” the lieutenant said. “I’ve had a post-graduate course. One of the lessons was not to get conned by the SI.”

Katy saw that the back of Jesse’s neck was becoming red, and she felt that if he said much more things might get even more complicated, and that it was best she intercede. “May I call my brother?” she asked.

“I’m not getting anybody out of the sack at this hour.”

“Well,” said Jesse, “what do you want us to do?”

“I don’t care what you do except don’t try to get on this base.”

“I’m hungry,” said Katharine. “Please, Lieutenant, may I call my brother?”

The lieutenant inspected her, considering the possibilities. She really didn’t look like a spy, but then, a spy wouldn’t look like a spy. Worse than a spy, she might be a WAF officer assigned to Special Investigations. There was only one way to find out. “I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” he said. “I’ll call the duty officer at the Five-Nineteenth. If you do have a brother there, and if he comes down and identifies you, then you can go in.”

“What about me?” said Jesse.

“Know anybody who can identify you personally?”

“Yes,” Jesse said. “General Keaton and General Conklin.”

“Major,” said the lieutenant, “you’ve got me over a barrel. You know I can’t call any generals. Nobody on this base has been getting any sleep, hardly, and if I woke up a general I’d find myself in Alaska checking Eskimos in and out of igloos. I’ll go this far. If there is a Major Hume, and if he comes down here and identifies his sister, then you can go along to the mess hall or his quarters in his custody. I’ll send two of my men to watch until you’re positively identified by an officer who knows you personally. But don’t try to go near the flight line or any of the hangars, because I’m going to give my boys orders to shoot you if you do. And before either of you go on the base, I’ll have to examine your bags. Now as a starter, let’s see your credentials.”

Forty-five minutes later Jesse and Katharine were eating breakfast with Clint Hume. They sat at one end of a long table in the Officers’ Open Mess, while at the other end, carbines in hand, sat two of the lieutenant’s men, steadfastly watching. Jesse began to doubt his conviction that the B-99 that had exploded over the Red River, and the others as well, had been sabotaged. No saboteur could get on a SAC base. Treason? He could imagine one treasonable or demented airman. Three, on three separate bases, seemed beyond the bounds of credibility.

The problem of quarters had been quickly solved. Jesse could squeeze into Clint’s room at the BOQ. Katy could stay, Clint was sure, at the home of



Lieutenant-Colonel Gresham, his aircraft commander. On Hibiscus Base married light colonels rated a three-bedroom, two-bath house, since an Air Force survey showed that by the time an officer reached the rank of lieutenant-colonel he usually had at least two children. The Greshams, however, had no children, and therefore had a guest room. Clint was a combination navigator-radarman-bombardier. For the next three days he would be taking a refresher course in new radar—he gave no further explanation—and Katy and Jesse could use his car.

“I’m glad you won’t be flying,” Katharine said.

“Frankly,” said Clint, “so am I. Lots of the boys think the B-Nine-Nine should stand down until the trouble is located and corrected. Oh, we fly when we have to, but nobody likes it.”

“So you’re convinced something’s wrong with the aircraft?” Jesse asked. Clint seemed a serious, thoughtful man, not handsome, who looked over thirty-five, although Jess knew he was thirty-two. Clint lacked Katy’s pyrotechnic quality of mind, but Jess put him down as a solid citizen, his opinion not to be disregarded.

Clint shrugged. “I like the B-Nine-Nine. She does everything you ask her to do. From the first prototype, she was never anything but airworthy. I flew in the prototypes when they were tested at Eglin. But what else can it be? Some part in the aircraft is dying before its time.”

The airman who had served them hovered, a pot of steaming coffee in his hand, near Jesse’s shoulder. He was a stocky, handsome man with wide-set, intelligent gray eyes, and he held his shoulders like a soldier. “More coffee, sir?” he asked.

“Thanks, yes,” Jesse said. When the Air Force was getting men of this caliber as cooks and kitchen helpers, he thought, it couldn’t be treason.

From the kitchen doorway a sergeant called, “Hey, Smith. Time we started on the flight lunches.”

The airman, Smith, filled Jesse’s cup and departed. Jesse and Clint were finishing their second coffee when Colonel Lundstrom, the Chief, Special Investigations, whose command post was in the Pentagon, came into the mess hall. He recognized Jesse and walked towards their table and Jesse rose and introduced Katy, and her brother, and then said, “Colonel, do you mind identifying me so I can get the guns out of my back?”

Lundstrom turned to the Air Police. “I know this officer personally,” he said. “You men can go back to your post.”

“They’re real careful on this base, sir,” Jesse said.

“Apparently not careful enough,” said Lundstrom. The colonel’s eyes were sunken, and he looked as if he had lost ten pounds since Jesse had seen him in the Pentagon a few days before.

Airman Smith walked into the kitchen, cleared a wide, wooden, knife-scarred worktable, and began to make sandwiches and pack the flight lunches, his hands sure and adept as those of an assembly line workman who can do his job blind, drunk, or with his thoughts in another continent. Now, at last, he was beginning to comprehend the full implications and importance of his assignment. Snatches of conversation—like that between the two majors—had been informative, and a pattern was forming, subtly taking a new shape, like an optical illusion if you stare at it long enough. The American officers were beginning to grumble and complain, openly. They confessed fear, without shame. He had even heard one say, “Nobody is going to make me go up in one of those streamlined flying coffins.” Yet Smith’s conclusions were not precisely accurate. The Soviet espionage schools could turn out facsimiles of Americans, just as the *Zim* factory produced a car that looked exactly like a Buick, but the convictions of childhood, imbedded deep in the subconscious, remained Russian. In Russia overt dissatisfaction, rarely if ever voiced, could only be a prelude to revolt. He had no way of knowing that Americans would gripe and growl and shout defiance of authority, and then go ahead and perform their duty. It was Smith’s conclusion that SAC was on the verge of mutiny. He understood that such a mutiny, like that of the Czar’s sailors in the Baltic Fleet in 1917, could be decisive. He resolved to keep on destroying aircraft until SAC cracked. In the catalogue of Soviet heroes, when all was over, his name would be printed bold as Zhukov’s. Greater, even. Zhukov had only succeeded in conquering the Germans. His goal was the acquisition of the world.

Sergeant Ciocci said, “Stan, how many you got finished?”

Smith counted them. “Eighteen.”

“Okay. Make up two more. Five missions today.”

Smith packed two more cartons and Ciocci examined, sealed, and stamped them, and in a few minutes the security detachment from the flight line came in to pick them up. The flight-line lieutenant, looking at his list, said, “Three coffees today.”

Ciocci turned to Smith and said, “Which ones you got filled, Stan?”

“Those on the end,” Smith said, pointing. Ciocci took three thermos bottles from the rack and handed them to the lieutenant’s men. The lieutenant counted the cartons, paid Ciocci with chits, and the lunches were stacked and carried away.

Just before he left the mess hall at eight Smith asked a favor of Ciocci, for now it was necessary to plan ahead. “Sergeant, is it okay if Cusack works for me tonight? I’ll take Cusack’s duty Saturday.” Smith’s roommate was a swing

man. He worked three days a week, and two nights, Fridays and Saturdays.

“It’s okay with me if it’s okay with Cusack,” Ciocchi said. “You crazy, giving up your long weekend? Oh, I get it. You got another girl?”

Smith winked and said, “Man wasn’t made to be monogamous.”

Ciocchi wasn’t exactly sure what the word monogamous meant, but he was sure that Stan did have another girl. For a food handler, that Stan was a smart apple, a smooth character, all right. Stan was no square.

### 3

At nine, that Thursday morning, Felix Fromburg was received by Albert Osborne, Deputy Chief, Counter-espionage Division, Subversives Branch, Federal Bureau of Investigation. Osborne’s office, on the fifth floor of the Justice Department, overlooked Pennsylvania Avenue. He was standing at the window, looking down at the massed traffic, crawling like two thick, lethargic, mottled snakes, when Felix entered. Osborne pretended not to hear him, and when he turned to his desk he said, curtly, “Be with you in a minute, Fromburg.” He sat down and displayed preoccupation with his mail, while Fromburg stood. In the FBI, as elsewhere, there are feuds and jealousies, and petty men.

Felix Fromburg had been given the job that Osborne wanted.

Contrary to popular belief, counter-espionage is not a glamorous profession. Even for the active operatives, it is tedious and frustrating, for it is more rewarding to keep an enemy agent under surveillance, thereby unravelling the net of which he is but a single strand, than to make a spectacular grab and get your name in the papers. Surveillance means riding the subways and busses, not the trans-Atlantic airliners and Orient Express. It means fidgeting, all day every day for months, in a darkened room, with an Eyemo camera and parabolic mike aimed at a door across the street. It means wasting weeks of waiting for a phone to ring—on a tapped line. And administrative jobs, in CE, are worse. Osborne had been through it all, and when the FBI was asked to furnish an experienced CE man for an inter-departmental conference group to sit in the Pentagon, Osborne badly wanted the post.

Instead, Osborne was elevated to deputy chief of division, which meant more money but was a dead end. Fromburg soared around in the stratosphere of government, privy to high level military plans and policy, while he, Osborne, still grubbed in the cellar of administration. He knew that he was certainly more personable than Fromburg, and probably more efficient as well. Fromburg was somewhat undersized and taciturn and not very aggressive. Osborne doubted that Fromburg’s presence in the Pentagon would enhance the

FBI's prestige.

So Osborne could not help being secretly pleased when he learned that Fromburg's Intentions Group was in trouble. The story, in somewhat garbled form, had been relayed to him by Ginter, his assistant. Osborne scrawled his initials on the last of the morning's incoming memos, sighed as if he knew the coming interview would be distasteful, looked up, and said, "I was really very much distressed, Fromburg, to hear about your hassle with the Pentagon."

"It's your hassle as well as mine," Felix said, quietly.

"I don't think we want any part of it."

"Now, look," Felix said, "we've had hassles before, but this one is different. That forecast—the one Ginter must have told you about—it's really vital. It was drawn up partly on the basis of information supplied by your division, and I think you, speaking for the Bureau that is, have a right to blast it out of Clumb's desk."

"The right, perhaps, but neither the position nor the inclination. In the first place, as you know, Fromburg, liaison between the Bureau and the Pentagon isn't on my level. It would be up to the Director, or even the Attorney General."

"Well, will you take it up with the Director?"

"I will not! Certainly the Pentagon has the utmost faith in General Clumb's judgment, or he wouldn't be in the job he holds. I can't very well recommend to the Director that he challenge the judgment of a very senior officer attached to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, now can I?"

"This isn't a matter of protocol," Felix said. "I believe this country is going to be attacked Monday."

Osborne tapped a pen on his desk, thoughtful. "I won't say that's preposterous," he said, "because we have been attacked without warning before. But I will say that it is most presumptuous of you to try to force your personal opinion upon me, and upon the Bureau, and upon the whole executive branch of government. You have failed to implement your directive. You were instructed to sit in with that group and answer questions when required, and act as their security officer. You aren't supposed to engage in a crusade, or stick the Bureau's neck out. Felix, I'm really afraid you've compromised your status."

Felix said, calmly as if asking for the afternoon off, "Does that mean I'm fired? I rather hope so, because it would give me a chance to get my family out of the city before Monday."

He really believes it, Osborne thought, incredulously. He really believes the Russians are going to start dropping bombs in our laps Monday. Yet firing Fromburg without charges or an investigation was out of the question. After all, there were the Civil Service regulations. But it would be better if Fromburg

left Washington, because if he kept on milling around he might get the Bureau into trouble. “Fire you? Don’t be silly,” he said. “Plenty for you to do, and I want to say that Ginter may have been off base when he suggested that a man of your experience and seniority do field security checks. Now, I take it that you’re impressed by the exodus of some of the Russian diplomats and consuls?”

“I am.”

“Frankly, I’m not,” said Osborne. “It could be nothing more than coincidence, or a result of this new shakeup in the Kremlin. So far as I can see, there has been absolutely no change in their main policy, conciliation, non-aggression. Why are you so suspicious?”

“No reason,” said Felix. “I’m no more suspicious than I would be if the Capone mob, or the Jersey syndicate, all started studying to be scoutmasters.”

“You can forget the sarcasm. I just wanted to tell you that I have an assignment along the lines in which you’re interested. That is, people getting out of the country. There’s a Pennsylvania banker, name of Robert Gumol, down in Havana. Claims that he was rolled for three hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars. I want you to go down there.”

“Sounds like a job for Treasury.”

“The bank examiners are working on it,” Osborne said, “but that isn’t the point. His wife—they live in Upper Hyannis—called our agent-in-charge in Philadelphia last night. Said she wanted to report him missing. She hasn’t heard from him since he arrived in Havana and thinks he may have been kidnapped by the Commies. She believes he’s had money dealings with the Commies for years. He and his father both. She used to hear them talking, sometimes.”

“Could be desertion,” said Fromburg. “And yet—” He recalled the Tass man’s flight to Mexico.

“I don’t know what it is,” said Osborne. “Up to you to find out. Ginter will get together the file on this case. Have my girl draw up some travel vouchers. You ought to be able to leave for Havana at, say, three.”

“I’ll be ready,” Fromburg said. The thought of activity was welcome. Anything was better than waiting around, frustrated and helpless, in a vacuum.

That evening, while his wife, Sarah, helped him pack, and the children had come in from play and were monopolizing the bathroom and being unusually confusing and disorganized, he wondered what to do about his family. For fifteen years, in the Fromburg household, sudden trips, never explained until his return and sometimes never explained at all, had been common procedure. Sarah accepted these conditions of his employment, and expected them. He and Sarah had been sweethearts since their childhood together, grandchildren of Jewish immigrants, in a section of Baltimore, little better than a slum, not

far from the Pennsylvania station. The white steps in the row of red brick houses on their street were of cheap pine, and were not replaced until rotten and hazardous. In Baltimore white marble steps are respectable, white limestone steps acceptable, and whitewashed pine a certificate of poverty. That they had burst out of this environment into the sunlight of security, comfort, and even luxury that goes with a well-paid government job was always a little wonderful to both of them. At twenty Sarah had been petite and vivacious. As she neared forty her eyes were still bright, but her skin was darkening and wrinkling like a prune. Except to Felix she was not a particularly attractive woman.

Ever since the end of World War II, Fromburg's duties had become increasingly secretive as he was assigned to the more sensitive areas of counter-espionage. It had been Sarah who had decided that Felix should never tell her anything of his work. "If there should ever be a leak," she'd said, "you'll never be worried that it was me." That's the way it was, and had always been, but now, even as he realized it was necessary to tell her everything, the habit of secrecy inhibited him. He considered suggesting that she take the children to visit her mother over the holidays, but Baltimore was a primary target also. Sarah had a sister in Pittsburgh. That was just as bad, perhaps worse. Sarah was tucking his white saddle shoes into the corners of the suitcase when he spoke. "I wish to God I could take you and the children to Havana with me, but I can't."

She straightened, startled by the calm gravity of his voice. "Take the children away from home at Christmas? Why, sweetheart?"

Felix tried to explain, but the phrases would not form themselves. All he could say was, "Yes, out of Washington on Christmas. Out of Washington before Christmas Eve." He grabbed her by the shoulders.

"But why in the world—" And then she knew. "Do you mean it, Felix?"

"I mean it."

"When?"

"I believe on Christmas Eve."

"Why hasn't an evacuation been ordered?" Two hours a week, Sarah worked for Civil Defense. Not as a spotter. Glasses couldn't correct her eyesight, except for reading. All Sarah did was sweep out the Civil Defense shack, far down the river, and keep things neat.

"Because—" he knew the futility of explaining to her the intricacies of government—"because opinion is divided. The big boys don't believe it. Most of them haven't even heard of it, and probably won't. Now don't argue, Sarah. Just trust me. Get the kids out of the city. I don't know where. Try to find a safe place. You know as much about it as I do."

She said, "All right, Felix. I'll take them away in the car Sunday morning.

When I find a place I'll wire you. But where?"

"Care of the consul-general. I'll have to check in there."

That's the way he had left his family. It wasn't until too late, when he was aboard the night non-stop for Havana, that he began to wish he had told Sarah to follow him to Cuba instead of driving off, with the children and the responsibility, into the unpredictable countryside.

#### 4

General Keatton and Colonel Lundstrom had taken over the base commander's working space at Hibiscus, and so Brigadier-General Charles Conklin was using his exec's office when Jesse Price arrived to check in, as courtesy required. An officer without orders does not come to live in somebody else's bailiwick without making his presence known, particularly when that bailiwick is approximately in a state of siege.

Conklin was only four years older than Jesse, and but for the caprices of two wars their rank might have been identical. In 1943, as lieutenants, they had flown B-24's to Africa, wingtip to wingtip. Conklin's curse was a snub-nosed, freckled face that refused to age, and golden hair that refused to gray and insisted on curling no matter how closely cropped. His nickname was Buddy, after Buddy Rogers, the actor who for two generations had managed to remain a juvenile film star. That Buddy Conklin was a brigadier-general at thirty-nine, in spite of these manifest handicaps, attested to his courage as a pilot, his great skill as a tactician, his executive ability, and his luck.

They had not seen each other since before Korea, and when Jesse walked into the administration building at nine in the morning, showered, shaved, and in fresh uniform, but still groggy after only three hours' sleep, he was not at first recognized. Conklin sat at a desk in a corner of the exec office, determinedly diminishing a pile of papers before him, reading teletype dispatches, and giving quick decisions on the telephone and intercom system. Busy as he was, his desk was like a small and peaceful island around which surged and eddied a frenzied tide. Hibiscus was in a flap, and had been since Monday. Conklin noted the presence of a strange officer in the room and said, "Yes, Major?"

"General, I'm Jesse Price. Do you remember—"

Conklin got on his feet and stretched out his hand, embarrassed. "Of course. Jesse Price. I'm sorry. Didn't know—"

Jesse grinned. "It's the patch, isn't it? Might as well be wearing a mask."

"Looks very distinguished. Don't worry about it. Should have recognized you anyway because I knew you were here. It's in the morning security report. With a woman. Who is she, your fiancée?"

“No. . . . Yes, of course she is. At least I think so.”

“You aren’t sure?”

“It happened in a hurry. Just yesterday.”

“Well, congratulations, but you won’t find this a very romantic place right now.”

“Didn’t come for romance,” Jesse said. “Came to see General Keatton.”

“Courier run?”

“No. Pentagon business.”

Conklin frowned, no longer boyish or even very friendly. “I’ve got half the Pentagon in here with me now. I don’t advise you to disturb General Keatton today, unless its priority operations. This B-Nine-Nine thing is getting weirder by the minute. Look what came in just a while ago.” He shoved a strip of teletype paper across the desk.

It was the report of the munitions experts at Wright Field. Burns on the clothing of Master Sergeant Lear had been caused by high explosive, probably of a plastic variety sometimes used in mines, shell noses, and bombs. The burns had not been caused by flaming fuel, or by the propellant powder that fired the ejection pod.

What had been in the back of Jesse’s mind, irritating as a forgotten name scratching at the skin of conscious memory, now burst out. “I think I’ve got your answers,” he said. “Take me in to Keatton.”

That laboratory analysis from the Wright laboratories was one new factor, among others, that Keatton was considering in his improvised command post at Hibiscus. It was the first tangible fact that definitely pointed to sabotage, and yet it was by no means conclusive. A B-99’s defensive armament included rockets whose warheads contained the same type of explosive that had seared Sergeant Lear’s clothing. Corpus Christi was being asked whether Georgia Peach carried such rockets on its last mission.

At that moment, Keatton’s most troublesome problem centered in Washington. Pressure mounted to ground the B-99. It was reflected in the compendium of newspaper editorials and radio commentary wired nightly from the Pentagon. It assailed his ears as well as his eyes. Within the hour he had been called, long distance, by two influential members of the House Armed Services Committee who were being harassed, in turn, by constituents with sons among the B-99 crewmen. Keatton understood, in full, their concern. The Congress would be back in session again after New Year’s, the Administration majority was thin, and at times non-existent, and there could be a shift in power on such an issue as the B-99. There had been another inquiry, of greater gravity, from the White House. What, if anything, was Keatton



planning to do? The general had told a presidential assistant that he could not and would not act until the facts were established. The assistant had said that was all the President wanted, but that time was also a factor. The White House was being buried in mail. The country demanded an explanation.

Now Keatton had a fact—if it was a fact—and yet it was questionable whether the fact, if and when proved, should be made public. Brigadier-General Platt, his public information officer, insisted that the news should be released at once, but Colonel Lundstrom was furious. Lundstrom pointed out that to hint that the B-99's were being sabotaged would instantly warn off the saboteurs, and compromise his efforts to nail them. Keatton was aware of another possible complication. Announcement that Georgia Peach had been sabotaged would start an outcry for war, and jeopardize activities of which he knew nothing, but which might be going on at any time through the Department of State. A cry for war might stop the latest negotiations on disarmament and endanger the peace.

It was even possible that the Corpus Christi B-99 had blown for one cause, the plane from Lake Charles because of another, and the three lost out of Hibiscus because of still a third.

The commanding general's suite at Hibiscus was on the third floor of the long, concrete administration building. Its thermopane picture windows, of double thickness with a vacuum to deaden the ear-torturing wail of jet engines and afterburners at full power, overlooked the flight line and the dazzling white runway ribbons that faded into an infinity of white sand in the hazy distance. The building trembled. Jets were firing up. Abruptly Keatton rose from the desk, turned his back on Platt and Lundstrom, and faced the window.

He had never been able to resist the takeoff of aircraft.

One by one, five B-99's slid from the hard stands out onto the runway. One by one, at two-minute intervals, they took off. They were colossal, and yet their size was minimized by their grace, like heavyweight fighters perfectly proportioned. Their bodies were gray sharks with white underbellies and tapered tails, their wings slender and rakish as fins. Keatton was moved, as when he had sent out his final B-17 mission from Foggia, over the Alps into Austria.

The B-99 was the last of the big boys. They were untried in battle, their electronic insides a national secret, and yet they were already obsolescent, and probably obsolete. In Keatton's lifetime the airplane had been born, a flimsy kite of sticks and cotton, had grown to maturity, shrunk the world, decided the greatest of wars, and finally developed into this sleek and lethal creature, its size the largest of its genre, like the dinosaur. And, like the dinosaur, it must bow to evolution. The rockets, ten times faster, were upon it. The latest reports from Wright Field, and the testing mats at Patrick Base, on Cape Canaveral,

were astonishing. The Intercontinental Ballistics Missile was no longer a dream of the future. Keatton suspected that if he lived to the age of retirement, these hard stands, if used at all, would support only the ICBM, for the twilight of the heavy bomber was at hand. In time, the ICBM might be supplemented by the IBV—Intercontinental Ballistics Vehicle—which would carry a man in place of the heavier mechanical pilots, would drop a bomb instead of itself being a bomb, and was recoverable.

So he watched the flight of the dinosaurs with pride and pity. Impressive anachronisms they were, their cost heavy not only in dollars. Each had cost the taxes contributed in a year by six or seven thousand clerks and mailmen and laborers, or perhaps by one large corporation. In man hours the cost could hardly be computed. Before the first prototype left the ground, there had been years of theory and planning and testing, then the construction of new factories and retooling, and finally the miracle of mass production. Man hours. Years and years of training for the airmen and ground crews so that eventually one man, in his radarscope, could not fail to see the target. Expensive and obsolete they might be, but at this period in history they were worth it. They were the shields of civilization. Their existence insured the peace. So to Keatton they were beautiful, and he was thankful that at this moment he stood where he could watch their flight.

He heard the door open and the voice of Buddy Conklin saying, “General, Major Price is here to see you.”

He turned, unsurprised, to greet Price. He had lived long enough to always expect the unexpected. “Hello, Major,” he said. “What’s the panic?”

Jesse said, “Sir, I know what’s blowing the Nine-Nines.”

“What?” the word cracked flat and emphatic, like a ruler slapped on the desk.

“Pressure bombs.”

Keatton’s eyes contracted into blue specks. “Pressure bombs?”

“Like the Germans planted on the Cottontails in Italy. Remember, sir?”

“No. I remember hearing that the Cottontails had a lot of trouble, but that was before I was transferred to the Fifteenth. Tell me about those pressure bombs, son.”

Jess looked around the office and noted the blackboard on the rear wall. “Do you mind if I use this to make a sketch?” he asked.

Keatton sat down on the edge of his desk. “Go right ahead.”

“Those bombs,” Jesse said, “were simply explosive devices activated by a simple altimeter. They looked like this.” Jesse drew a foot-long cylinder and divided it in half with a chalk mark. “On this side,” he said, “was an ordinary bellows. In the middle, a battery and fuse. On the other end, explosives. You sneak the pressure bomb into an aircraft. As the plane rises and the outer air

grows thinner the air inside the bellows expands. It keeps on expanding until the end of it makes electrical contact with the battery and fuse. It's as easy as turning on a flashlight. Then up she goes."

"Very simple," Keatton said, "and ingenious. What happened with the Cottontails?"

"The Cottontails," Jesse said, "were a hard luck B-Twenty-Four group based down on the heel of Italy near Lecce. Everything they did went wrong and the Germans began to harass them. The Luftwaffe always liked to pick on stragglers, whether it was a single plane or a tough luck group. They planted an agent in the Cottontails' base. Planes began to blow up on the way to target. They usually blew just as the Fifteenth was forming up over the Adriatic, at between eight and nine thousand feet. Finally they caught the spy—I don't know how. They found one of these pressure bombs. They took the spy out on the end of the runway and shot him. After that, the Cottontails became a pretty good group, but it was really hell on morale when their aircraft were blowing."

"It's not very good for morale now," said Buddy Conklin. They all looked at him but that was all he said.

Keatton asked, "What makes you think pressure bombs are being planted in the Nine-Nines?"

"It's the time factor mostly. I can't get it out of my mind. The three planes from this base and the one from Lake Charles all disappeared between eighteen and twenty-five minutes after takeoff. That means they all probably blew up—I am assuming that's what happened to them—somewhere between eighteen and twenty-eight thousand feet at normal rate of climb. But the one from Texas was up an hour before it blew. It just occurred to me that the Texas plane's flight plan must have called for low level at the start of his mission—ducking under radar or waiting for escort or something like that. If my hunch is right he blew at the same altitude, too. That's right, isn't it?"

"Exactly right," said Keatton.

"Then the analysis from the laboratory at Wright triggered my memory. Same kind of plastic explosive you find in a mine—or a booby trap—and I remembered the Cottontails."

Buddy Conklin asked a question. "Where did the Kraut spy stick these pressure bombs?"

"In the wheel nacelles, under the wings."

For a moment they were all silent, a mental picture of the B-24 and the B-99 forming in the mind of each, and each estimating the action he now must take. It was Colonel Lundstrom who spoke first. He addressed his words to Keatton. "I think, sir, that we'd better send a warning to every SAC base."

"Yes," said Keatton. "That right now." The SAC commanding general was back in Omaha, working with his staff on the enormous task of reconverting to

B-47's and B-52's, if and when the order came. Keatton added: "Authorize SAC to stand down for twenty-four hours. There will be complete inspection of all aircraft. Particularly in the wheel nacelles and other openings accessible to ground crews. You'll write up the order for me, Lundstrom. I want it circulated out of Omaha immediately."

Buddy Conklin looked up at the clock over the door as if it had shouted at him. With a single quick movement he stepped to the desk and flipped up a key on the intercom. A voice came out of the little box. "Tower."

"This is Conklin. Recall the mission!"

"What's that?" The man in the tower spoke like a southerner, and he spoke slowly.

"This is General Conklin. Recall today's mission. All five aircraft. Now, damn it!"

"Yes, *suh!*"

Conklin held the key open and they could hear the man in the tower speaking into the microphone in a clear cadence, an urgent drawl. "Hibiscus Tower to Cornell flight. You are to return to base immediately. . . . Hibiscus Tower to Cornell flight. You are recalled. Return to base immediately. . . . Hibiscus Tower to Cornell One, Two, Three, Four, and Five . . . General says come on home. . . . Hibiscus Tower . . ."

Conklin let the key fall. The administration building was air-conditioned, but sweat beaded his forehead. He looked at the clock again. "Twenty-six minutes from takeoff. That what you make it, sir?"

"I didn't time it," said the general. "I saw them off, but I didn't count time on them."

They waited, watching the clock. Jess started to fill his pipe, discovered that his fingers wouldn't behave, and thrust it back into his pocket.

In three minutes Conklin again pressed the intercom key. The voice, shaky, said, "Tower."

"This is Conklin. Did they acknowledge?"

"Sir, I can't seem to raise Cornell two and Cornell three. Others are on the way home."

"Keep trying," Conklin said. "Let me know if you get them." He closed the circuit and for an instant placed both palms on the desk, and swayed and seemed about to fall. Then he straightened. His face was white and wet and suddenly he looked very old.

Jesse wanted to speak to General Keatton. He had to tell Keatton all else that was on his mind. "General," he began, "the reason I'm here—" He closed his mouth. Keatton wasn't listening. The general was staring through the window, watching for his aircraft, waiting to count his chicks as they came home to roost. Like England, like Italy.

Conklin said, “Jess, come on into the exec office with me. I’ve got to get air-sea rescue going. Lots of other things. Since you’re here, you might as well make yourself useful.”

When they were out in the hallway Conklin put a hand on Jesse’s shoulder and said, “I think we’d better leave the old man to himself for a while. Every time a plane goes in, he dies a little too.”

## 5

Since he was still under twenty, Phil Cusack regarded Stan Smith as a man of considerable sophistication as well as mature years. Most of the time Smith was taciturn, but once in a while he opened up and spoke learnedly of women, poker, and the ways of rich civilians in big cities, subjects fascinating to Cusack. So Cusack was careful not to antagonize his roommate, and the one thing that made Smith really sore, in addition to having anyone mess around with the gear in his foot locker and closet, was to be prematurely awakened out of sleep. But on this day the news was so big that Cusack shook Smith’s shoulder and woke him up, although it was not quite two o’clock in the afternoon and Smith rarely arose before three. “Say, Stan,” he said, “guess what?”

Smith stirred and growled, rolled over on his back and opened his eyes, and then, surprisingly, sat up in bed without swearing. “Okay, I’ll guess,” he said. “What?”

“Two more Ninety-Nines are gone, and all planes are standing down.”

Smith came out of bed as if his backbone were a bent spring, suddenly released. “We’re standing down? SAC’s standing down?”

“I don’t know. Hibiscus is.” Cusack had never seen Smith move so quickly.

“So there’s been a mutiny, eh?”

Cusack was puzzled. Who in the world ever gave Stan the notion that the aircrews were about to mutiny? Sure, there’d been a lot of griping, but there was griping when nothing went wrong except you served their eggs over lightly when they asked for sunny side up. “No, there hasn’t been any mutiny,” Cusack answered. “All that’s happened is that all missions have been called off for the next twenty-four hours. I hear there’s ape sweat out on the flight line. No off duty for ground crews. They’re practically taking those airplanes apart.”

“Looking for something, I guess. Maybe bombs, maybe sabotage?”

“Yeah,” said Cusack, “maybe bombs. Maybe only a loose nut. How would I know?”

Smith found that he was disappointed. For a moment, there, he had thought

his job concluded. He'd thought he wouldn't have to do another. It was like hearing your number called out in a raffle, only the last digit was wrong. It was a letdown, but still the news was encouraging. It showed the extent of their alarm. To convert alarm to despair or panic, and to ground SAC permanently, perhaps only a few more lost planes were needed. He considered lying low for a while now, and allowing his friends in Louisiana and Texas to finish the job. After all, he had done the bulk of the work, and probably taken most of the risks, thus far. He discarded the thought. Masters, Johnson, and Palmer might not have his freedom of action, and efficiency of operation. He would press on to victory, alone if necessary. The greater his personal effort and risk, the greater his eventual reward. They would make him a marshal of the Soviet Union, no less. He would become the youngest marshal in Russia's history, perhaps the youngest marshal in all history since Napoleon. With his knowledge of the United States, they might appoint him military governor after the capitulation. He would order the execution of the American war criminals, ride in chauffeured Cadillacs and private planes, possess chic and beautiful women like the one he had seen in the mess with the two majors. He would sit on the Presidium, in later years. If he did his job, and if he lived and received his just reward, he would be at the top, among the rulers. "Phil," he said, "how would you like Saturday night off?"

"I'd like it fine," Cusack said. "If I had Saturday night off I'd go to Orlando and get me a girl. What's the catch?"

"No catch," Smith said. "You just take my shift tonight and I'll work for you Saturday night. Ciocci says it's okay."

"It's a deal," Cusack said. "I've got nothin' to do tonight. What's with your Saturday night gal? You got another?"

"Don't know yet," Smith said, and winked. "Let you know in the morning." He shaved, dressed, obtained a twenty-four-hour pass from Captain Kuhn's clerk, and walked slowly towards the administration building, thinking of his timing. Betty Jo would be home with the car shortly after five o'clock. It was a three-hour drive, at conservative speed, from Orlando to the point on the beach between Ponte Vedra and St. Augustine where the submarine would be waiting according to his original instructions. If he left Betty Jo at ten he would be at the beach at one. That was the best hour. At one in the morning very few cars would be on that road, and nobody on the beach.

Stan Smith walked past the administration building and leaned on the fence separating the flight line from the unrestricted areas of the base. The aircrews and grease monkeys were having a ball, all right. They were swarming over the planes like ants around beetles. Smith smiled. They wouldn't find anything today. They'd never find anything, never. That crazy American sergeant with the Russian colonel's epaulets bouncing on his shoulders had known his way

into SAC's bombers, all right. What was his name? Horgan. Smith wondered how long he had been dead. At four o'clock he sauntered over to the bus stop behind administration and left for Orlando.

Within the administration building Brigadier-general Platt had finally whittled out a news release, and edited it until he hoped it would suit Keatton, and appease Congress, the public, and the press. It was a simple statement of fact:

"General Thomas Keatton, Air Force Chief-of-Staff, has ordered a twenty-four-hour halt in operations of the B-99 intercontinental bomber to facilitate search for possible faults in the aircraft. General Keatton emphasized that there is as yet no proof of either structural failure or sabotage. However, B-47 and B-52 type bombers now in reserve are being prepared to replace the B-99 should extensive modifications prove necessary."

Platt showed the draft to Keatton and said, "Do you think this is all right, sir?"

Keatton read the release. "You are sure it's necessary?"

"I am, sir. If you're busting a couple of thousand planes out of mothballs you can't keep it a secret for long, and news of the stand down will leak, too. So we might as well tell it first, and tell it straight."

Keatton initialed the release. "I don't think it's going to please anyone this side of Moscow," he said, "but at least it shows we're doing something. Gives us a chance to breathe."

## 6

At eight o'clock that evening PFC Henry Hazen called for Nina Pope. The Pope house was a two-story example of a type of architecture known as St. Augustine Ugly. That is, it was neo-Spanish with New England Victorian influence, its walls pink stucco and its roof red tin. Nina's father sat in the living room, his head tilted back against the greasy upholstery of the only comfortable chair, his shoeless feet up on an unstable table. Bill Pope's coat, belt, and holster hung on the walnut clothes tree. His belly protruded over his waistband. I'd like to see that big tub of lard on the obstacle course, Henry thought, but what he said was, "Evening, Mr. Pope. Nina home?"

Deputy Pope didn't bother to answer. He shifted in his chair and the table creaked under his feet and he looked at Henry with eyes blank and hostile.

Henry smiled. He wasn't afraid of Pope any more. He imitated the voice of a drill instructor. "I said: Is Nina home?"

"Why don't you yell upstairs and find out?" Pope said.

Henry called, "Nina."

“Coming right down,” she answered, and he heard her footsteps on the stairs. They had been out together each night of his leave, and each night she had worn a different dress. This night it was blue organdie, with silver sandals, for dancing.

She said, “Goodnight, Dad,” and she took Henry’s hand and they started for the door.

Pope’s feet hit the floor and he said, “Where d’you think you goin’?”

“Dancing,” she said.

“Where?”

“Jax Beach.”

“You’re lyin’. Every night you’ve been out with this trash you’ve said you were goin’ to the movies—” he mimicked her voice—“or dancin’. Think I’m stupid? Bed full of sand every morning. You’ve been layin’ out on the beach with him.”

“So what’s wrong with swimming?” Nina said.

“Swimming! That’s a new name for it.”

Nina said, “You’re a dirty old man!” For a long time, for years, she had been wanting to say that, and now it had burst out of her.

Pope got out of his chair. Henry stepped in front of Nina and loosened his shoulders and spread his feet a little. He hoped that Pope would swing on him. If Pope swung Henry knew what he was going to do. He was going to break his arm and then smash his windpipe with the edge of his hand. Of all the courses in the Marine Corps schools, judo had been most beneficial for Henry.

Pope decided not to swing. He said, “I don’t want no more layin’ on the beach.”

Henry turned his back on him and said, “Let’s go, Nina.”

They drove to Jacksonville Beach on A1A, not speaking of what was in their minds. They went to Millie’s and danced and drank beer, but the beer seemed tasteless and there was no rhythm in the music. Finally Nina said, “I guess I’ll get myself my own room tomorrow. I can’t stand him any more.”

“I wish I could take you to the Coast with me,” Henry said.

“Wouldn’t I look good on a troop transport? I can wait, Henry. It isn’t so bad waiting if you’ve really got somebody to wait for. You’re somebody, now.”

He looked at his watch. “Almost twelve. Let’s go back to our place.”

“Do we have to go back there, Henry? It scares me. Why can’t we go somewhere else?”

“It’s just our place.”

“You really want to go back there because you think that thing will come out of the ocean again, don’t you?”

“I keep thinking about it,” he admitted.



She said, “All right, if you have to. But I hope we never see it again.”

He paid the check and they drove south again, past Ponte Vedra and on along the unlighted, deserted highway until they came to their place. There was a soft south wind, and it was a night unusually warm for the season. Henry parked, as usual, off the road so that the car was shadowed by the fronds of palms. She took off her shoes, and Henry found the swim suits and blankets in the back seat, and they got out and climbed over the dunes to the sea. That night, while they undressed, she did not tell him not to look.

## six

SMITH WATCHED his speedometer carefully once he was headed north from St. Augustine on A1A. The shell road leading to the beach would be easy to miss, and there were few check points beyond the last cottage. There was the place on the road where pocked asphalt gave way to conquina. Then, several miles beyond, was a jog in the otherwise uncurving highway, a cluster of billboards, and finally a spring and drinking fountain. It was exactly three and three-tenths miles from the spring to the shell road. He had been careful to measure it, several months before, in daylight. He drove very slowly on the last three-tenths until his headlights picked up a break in the solid wall of palmetto. He turned into the shell road and allowed the wheels to follow the ruts. When the breakers gleamed ahead he switched off his lights, shifted into low gear, and crept out onto the hard-packed beach. He saw no other tire marks. He swung in a circle, and re-entered the path so that his getaway would be quick. He stopped the engine, took a flashlight from the glove compartment, and tested it once again. Now it was necessary to make a reconnaissance, as he had been instructed to do, but before that he would rest for a moment and think. He had been taught that the time to meet an emergency was before it happened. It had been taught that the most minute flaw in a plan always developed into a disastrous crevasse in the stress of crisis. He must reconstruct everything he had already done, and he must be certain that future action was safe.

He had stayed with Betty Jo, as planned, until ten. She had been glad enough to see him, and delighted when he told her he wasn't going to remain in Jacksonville with his friends. He was just going to pick them up downtown, drive them to Jacksonville, and return immediately. He would be back, he told her, about five in the morning. She should leave the door open and he would slip in and get some sleep and then they would have breakfast together before she drove to work. He looked at his watch. It was one-ten. The timing was just right, and the beach apparently deserted. But he had to make sure.

Smith got out of the car and walked north along the beach, following a

wavy line of small shells, the signature of the last high tide. Now the tide was low, the moon in its last quarter. It was considerably darker than the night he had landed, but still the night was crisp and clear, the visibility good, and the moonlight bright enough so that the figure of a man, say a surf fisherman, would be visible at a quarter mile against the white sand. He paced off three hundred yards, stopped, scanned the beach and the crests of the dunes to the north, and then turned south. He walked leisurely and confidently. He passed the shell road, its entrance blocked by his car, and went three hundred paces to the south and surveyed the beach again. There was no doubt of it, it was all clear. He returned to the car, took the flashlight from his pocket, pointed it at the sea, apparently barren of ships and life, and gave the signal. Two shorts—three longs—two shorts. He repeated it, dit dit, dah, dah, dah, dit dit. He waited for the space of two breaths, and the answer came, one long, one short.

## 2

Nina and Henry had dressed and were walking at the edge of the surf when they saw the reflection of headlights in the sky far to the south. They paid no attention until they saw that the car was moving very slowly, barely creeping. When it soundlessly turned into the shell road, Nina whispered, taut with fear, “What if it’s Father?” Before he could answer she broke away from him and ran for their hollow.

Henry doubted that her father could have tailed them, or somehow discovered their place. It wasn’t plausible. Even if it was her father, he was damned if he was going to run. So he followed her, without haste, and joined her in the hollow between the dunes just as the car’s lights went off. Nina stepped close to him, pressed herself against him, and said, “You don’t think it’s Father, do you, Henry?”

“I don’t give a damn if it is,” Henry said.

“Maybe it’s only a fisherman,” she said, finding composure in his strength.

“Not at this moon and this tide,” he said. “It’s probably just a guy and girl doing the same thing we’re doing.”

The car, lights extinguished, ran out on the sand and made a tight circle, tiny shells crunching under its tires. Henry saw that it was a new Chevy, two tone. White and green, he thought, although color was deceptive in the moonlight. It entered the shell road again, and its motor died. They waited for something else to happen and when nothing happened Nina said, “I guess you’re right. Just a couple, smooching.”

But after a minute or so a man got out of the car and walked to high-water mark, then turned north, towards them. He following the line of shells, his head moving from side to side as if he searched for something. Nina shrank

lower. "Don't move," Henry whispered. "So long as you don't move he won't see us."

When the man was directly opposite, Henry saw that he was in Air Force uniform.

"What's he doing?" Nina asked, after he had passed.

"Maybe he was down here fishing just before dark," Henry said, "and lost his wallet or maybe a ring or something. Now he's looking for it."

"Think we ought to go out and help him?"

"No." Henry's reply was instinctive and immediate. In the back of his mind he didn't believe the Air Force man was looking for anything but people. In the back of his mind was the shock and terror of that other night when the armed men had swarmed over the beach, and a car had been landed from a submarine. Maybe something was going to happen again. If anything happened again, this time his own action would be different. Maybe he was going to get another chance.

The man kept on going for perhaps two hundred yards beyond their hollow. He stopped and looked around. He's looking for people, all right, Henry thought, excitement growing inside him. The man then returned, walking at a steady, even pace. He kept on going south. He's doing a patrol, Henry thought. A reconnaissance. They watched him until he turned again, and went back to where he had left the car. When the flashlight signalled, Henry was not greatly surprised.

He peered out to sea. If there was anything out there you couldn't tell it under the waning moon. But he did see, distinctly, the answering signal. "They're coming again," he told Nina, and put his arm around her shoulders.

This time they never did see the submarine, but eventually they saw the boat.

Before they saw the boat they could hear its motor. Then a thin white bow wave appeared, and then the slim, dark shape itself. It was no landing barge this time. It was, Henry saw, a gig, or launch. It idled just outside the breakers, picked an incoming wave, and rode it towards the shore. When it broached on the sand, four men jumped out and held its gunwales. A fifth climbed over the side, holding a box or package in his arms. The Air Force man was at the water's edge, by then, waiting. When he received the package it appeared an extension of his arm. Held thus, it looked like a suitcase.

The two men were together for only a few seconds. Then the Air Force man walked quickly back towards the shell road and his car, and the other man climbed back into the boat. His four companions walked the boat into deeper water, waited for an interval between breakers, and pulled themselves over the side. Its engine started, it breasted the crest of a wave, and soon was free of the surf and heading back out to sea. Henry was still watching it, straining for a

glimpse of the mother ship, when he heard the car's starter whine, and the murmur of its engine. The car's lights came on as it moved along the shell road, just before it turned into the highway. When Henry stared out to sea again, he was not sure he could see the boat at all, and soon there was nothing. There were only the swells, the moon, the rustle of the south wind in the rice grass and palmettos, and the girl's frail shoulder cupped in his hand. He said, "Come on, let's go!"

"What are we going to do?" Nina said. "Where are we going?"

He said, "We're going to Mayport."

The Navy carrier base, and an auxiliary field capable of receiving the fastest jets, was at Mayport, at the mouth of the St. Johns twenty miles or so up the coast.

### 3

The man who landed to give Smith his resupply was the German navigator, Karl Schiller. His black, waterproof coveralls were uncomfortably hot, and his face was dripping sweat as he handed Smith a suitcase wrapped in plastic, except for the handle. "So we meet again," he said.

"Surprised?" Smith asked. He could see that Schiller was grinning.

"Somewhat," Schiller said. "It seems that you're doing well. We've been hearing about you, you and your friends."

"Yes. Are there any further orders?"

"No change for you."

"And when I've used these up?"

"Nobody has told me a word." Schiller winked. "But after that I don't think you'll have to worry."

"Then I won't be seeing you again?"

"No. We were to wait for you here until Sunday. After Sunday, we have other business. *Auf wiedersehen*, Smith. Have you found a hole?"

Before Smith could ask what he meant Schiller had turned his back and was sloshing out to the boat. Smith walked back to the car. He opened the trunk, placed the suitcase inside, and then shut the trunk carefully. He looked beyond the beach. The boat was already past the breakers, moving swiftly to sea. It had all gone smoothly and quickly as he expected. He got into the car, stepped on the starter, and eased it along the twisting shell road. When a canopy of palms blacked out the moon, he switched on the lights. A few more yards and he was on A1A, headed back for St. Augustine, and then Orlando.

As he drove, he evaluated Schiller's words. Schiller had been cryptic, and yet he had certainly indicated something big was coming. Whatever it was involved Schiller's submarine. It would not come on Sunday, because the

submarine had received orders to remain on station until then. So it would probably come Monday. What could a submarine do? Smith had learned more from the American press and news magazines than he ever had been told in Russia. For one thing a submarine could fire guided missiles, either V-1 type jets or V-2 type rockets, with nuclear warheads. That was it. Why else would Schiller ask, "Have you found a hole?" For all he knew, the target for Schiller's submarine might be Orlando. It might even be Hibiscus, although this seemed doubtful, for Hibiscus was set out in an area of wasteland, woods, and lakes, an isolated and difficult target.

Anyway, he himself was doing the job at Hibiscus. By Monday, action by the Red Navy and Air Force against SAC might be superfluous. What was Monday? Christmas Eve.

#### 4

Ensign Higginbotham was officer of the deck, on the dog watch, that morning at Mayport. Higginbotham had been on duty at Mayport for three months, and in this time he had drawn O.D. in the small hours with disturbing regularity, and in all that time nothing whatsoever had happened. Mayport was the quietest of installations. Every week or two a carrier put in from the Mediterranean, or the Caribbean, to swap air groups and refuel. The new air group flew in from Mainside, Jacksonville, and the planes were trundled directly onto the hangar decks by small tractors. Refueling was the concern of the carrier captains and the oilers. All the permanent party at Mayport had to do was keep the place shipshape, so that this exchange could proceed smoothly. That, and catch sea trout in the turning basin, or take the crash boat out after king mackerel beyond the jetties. By reputation, Mayport was happy duty.

Now Higginbotham was faced with the wildest sort of emergency, covered by no rules or regulations of which he had ever heard. Before him stood a tall young Marine, accompanied by a frightened girl in a wrinkled blue frock, carrying high-heeled shoes in her hand, and they had sworn to him that they had just witnessed what could be an enemy landing on the coast, or rendezvous with an agent. Not only that, but they claimed to have seen something even more fantastic in June of the previous year, involving a submarine, a landing barge, and an automobile. Higginbotham could not tell the Marine to go home and sleep it off. The Marine was undoubtedly sober. He could not tell him to inform the FBI or the police. This had happened at sea, and the sea was Navy territory and business. Besides, there *had* been a submarine contact reported from New Orleans only the past evening, and everyone was jittery about the disasters to the Air Force bombers, and the Marine claimed that it had been a

man in Air Force uniform who had received the suitcase. So Ensign Higginbotham knew that he had to do something, and he had a premonition that whatever he did would be wrong.

At that moment the only vessels in Mayport were *Coral Sea* and her escorting destroyers, preparing to take aboard her aircraft at first light and sail back to the Mediterranean to rejoin the Sixth Fleet. The two carriers of Task Force 9.1, nucleus of the Atlantic Fleet's hunter-killer group, were in the Gulf, cooperating with Air Force in the search for downed B-99's. As a matter of fact almost everything afloat, in the Atlantic, was engaged in the same mission. In any event, Higginbotham could not order so much as a rowboat to sea. His authority did not extend beyond the sleepy limits of Mayport, and even in Mayport it was confined to those desolate hours when no other officers—he was junior to everyone on the base—were awake. There was only one thing he could do, and the thought appalled him. He would have to get Captain Clyde out of bed.

Higginbotham's fingers edged towards the telephone gingerly as if it were a dozing rattlesnake. Even when he had a full night's sleep, Captain Clyde was terrifying. Clyde was a bitter, bull-necked and bull-throated man who hated shore duty and who, having been passed over, was condemned to it for the balance of his service. Higginbotham's fingers jumped the last few inches and closed on the telephone. He lifted it to his lips and said, "This is the O.D. Let me have Captain Clyde."

The base operator said, "What?" He sounded unbelieving.

"I said give me Captain Clyde. Yes, at his quarters."

The captain answered the phone almost at once, as if it were beside his bed. "Well?" Captain Clyde wheezed.

"This is Higginbotham, O.D., sir. There's a Marine here who says he's seen a landing on the coast." This was a very inadequate way to put it, Higginbotham knew, and he waited for the captain to blow him off the phone.

Incredibly, the captain simply asked, "What kind of landing?"

"From a boat, sir. He thinks the boat came from a submarine. He says they gave a suitcase to a man in Air Force uniform."

Higginbotham waited for the captain to come fully awake and start screaming. Instead, Captain Clyde said, quite calmly, "I'll be right over." Then he hung up.

Captain Clyde, clad in a skivvy shirt, white trousers, and leather sandals, was in his headquarters building in two minutes, "All right, Marine," he demanded. "Right smartly, what's this all about?"

Henry Hazen told his story again. As he talked, the captain made notes. Twice he looked at the girl for corroboration. Although she was embarrassed, standing there barefoot, and frightened, she managed to tell exactly what she

had seen.

Once the captain interrupted to say, “Higginbotham, has *Coral Sea* taken on fuel?”

“Yes, sir. Finished at twenty-three hundred.”

When Hazen stopped speaking the captain said, “Thanks, Marine, you’ve done well. Even if nothing happens, there’ll be a commendation in your jacket. Now you’d better take your girl home.”

Before they were out of the office Captain Clyde began to act. He called Mainside, the Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, and asked for patrol planes and helicopters. He called the blimp base in Brunswick. He informed the captain of *Coral Sea*, and the admiral aboard, and suggested that the ship be prepared for anti-submarine action. He called the Eastern Sea Frontier, Norfolk. He called the police in St. Augustine and the State Highway Patrol and the FBI. He even cut across service lines and channels and called Air Force in Washington.

He called for coffee and sandwiches and prepared to stay up the rest of the night.

Then he turned to Higginbotham and said, “Ensign, can you navigate a crash boat?”

Higginbotham said, “I think so, sir.” He had actually been at the wheel of the crash boat several times, on fishing expeditions, but he had never taken it out of sight of land.

“Well, rout out a crew and take out the crash boat. I relieve you of O.D.”

“Yes, sir,” said Higginbotham. Sensibly, he didn’t ask where to take the crash boat or what to do when he got there. The crash boat carried no armament but it did have a good radio. It was a million-to-one chance that he would find the submarine, or whatever it was, and if he did see something all he could do was call for help. But he was elated. For the first time since being commissioned, he had a real command, and the possibility of action.

An hour later, conning the crash boat through the jetties, he found time to marvel at the captain’s astonishing behavior. He did not know, of course, that Captain Clyde, then a gunnery officer aboard the battleship *Nevada*, had been sleeping soundly in the Moana Hotel, Honolulu, on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941. Clyde had heard gunfire, but it had sounded like target practice, and Clyde had covered his aching head with a pillow and gone back to sleep. When he finally did get up, his ship had sortied from her berth in Pearl Harbor. The Navy officially had forgotten this, Captain Clyde could not. But he could see that nothing like it ever happened to him again.



At 4:34 A.M. a teletype alarm went out to stations of the Florida State Highway Patrol and was relayed to what few cars and officers were on duty at that hour of lightest traffic. It read:

*LOOK OUT FOR AND ARREST MAN DRESSED IN AIR FORCE UNIFORM, RANK UNKNOWN, DRIVING LATE MODEL GREEN AND WHITE CHEVROLET HARDTOP. SUITCASE IN TRUNK OF CAR. NO OTHER DESCRIPTION. THIS MAN IS WANTED BY FEDERAL AUTHORITIES AS A POSSIBLE ENEMY AGENT. HE IS PROBABLY DANGEROUS AND MAY BE ARMED.*

The alarm was heard by Officer Huidekoper, a bulky road patrolman of middle years, who was sitting in his fast scout car, its lights on and engine idling, outside an all-night drive-in on the outskirts of Deland, a quiet college town south of Orlando. Huidekoper was eating a double pork barbecue roll, with French fries on the side, and washing it down with an extra rich chocolate frostee shake.

The alarm had a bizarre ring to it. He had never been asked to look out for an enemy agent before, and had never even imagined such a thing. The dispatcher repeated the broadcast. Huidekoper took another bite out of his barbecue and decided that headquarters in Tallahassee had been taken in by a practical joker. Anyway, it was hopeless looking for a car unless you knew the license number. He laughed out loud. A green-and-white Chevvy! He saw at least a dozen every day. Why, he had seen one pass only five or ten minutes before, with its left tail light out. He had almost gone after it to warn the driver, but just then the car hop was bringing his snack. Certainly it was nothing to report. He hadn't noticed whether the driver wore an Air Force uniform or a pink kimono. It would only cause confusion, and possibly get him laughed at, if he called the dispatcher. Of course if he did call it would be a cinch to intercept the Chevvy he'd seen. Twenty cars could converge on it before it hit the outskirts of Orlando, if you included the county and city police. Huidekoper finished his frostee, dropped the container to the ground, yawned and decided to drive Route 11 to Daytona, where he knew he could get breakfast for free.

## 6

Stanley Smith drove the Chevrolet quietly into the carport alongside Betty Jo's house and left the lights on while he unlocked the luggage compartment and brought out the suitcase. For the first time, he noticed that the left rear tail light was smashed, and not burning. He swore quietly. The woman was careless. Because of that light, he could have been stopped by the police. Anything that attracted attention was dangerous.

He took the suitcase into the house, peered into the bedroom, and saw Betty Jo was sleeping, her flaccid face looking grained and misshapen against the pillow. She was no doll without her makeup, he thought, but she had been useful, and would be useful again. He undressed, crawled into bed without waking her, and was soon asleep.

The sunlight was streaming into the room when he awoke. Betty Jo was dressed and standing at the side of the bed, a tray in her hands. "Orange juice, hot cakes, maple syrup, bacon, marmalade, and coffee," she said. "How would you like this kind of service every morning?"

"I'd like it fine," he said. The woman was marriage-crazy.

"Wouldn't it be nice if you were here all the time? Have you ever thought about getting out of the Air Force, Stan?"

"Lots of times. But I've still got a year and a half to do."

She set the tray at the foot of the bed, saw the suitcase on the floor within reach of his hand, and said, "Is that yours?"

"No. Belongs to one of the fellows I drove to Jacksonville. He forgot it. I'll get it to him when he comes back."

"Oh. Do you have to go back to the base today, dear?"

Smith sat up, drank the orange juice, and said, "Yes. I'm on twenty-four-hour pass."

"What about tomorrow?"

"Can't see you tomorrow. Have to work Saturday night. I swapped nights with Cusack. You know, my roommate. Maybe I'll see you Sunday."

She kissed him, and turned to the mirror to use her lipstick. She had to leave for work. He said, "Say, Betty Jo."

"Yes?"

"You've got a busted tail light."

"Oh, have I?" she said. "I didn't see it."

He could tell she was lying. "You sure have. Get it fixed."

"Okay, I'll get it fixed today, dear," she said. She started to kiss him again, remembered her lipstick and barely brushed his hair with her mouth, and left.

It was a relief to have her out of the house. He finished breakfast, put the tray on a chair, and lay back on the pillow, staring at the ceiling, thinking. Getting the stuff off the submarine had been simple. Getting it on to the base was quite another matter. They were examining everything that went through the gate. He suspected that they would even be fluoroscoping all incoming mail and express parcels.

So the plan to follow was the one he had conceived first, the simple and open way, so matter-of-fact and meshed with routine that suspicion would be impossible. Every Friday afternoon Ciocci came to the city to requisition supplies for the mess. When Ciocci returned to Hibiscus this Friday afternoon

he would have a passenger, and an extra package. Even if the package was inspected, which seemed improbable, its contents would appear normal. He got out of bed, opened the suitcase, and counted the bombs. Five, as before.

At ten o'clock Smith took a taxi downtown, and went shopping. He bought what he needed, five standard one-quart thermos bottles covered with imitation leather, and made sure they were packed in their original cartons. He returned to Betty Jo's house and opened the store's package carefully, for it would have to be rewrapped. He removed the five thermos bottles, each heavy as if filled with fluid, from their padded niches in the suitcase. He compared them with the bottles he had just bought. They looked identical. A thermos bottle was a thermos bottle. Whether you bought them in Stockholm, Sweden, or Orlando, Florida, they were the same. Only minute examination of their bottoms would show any difference. It was necessary that the thermos casing of the bombs not be airtight, for their trigger was the weight of air. The five from the submarine he dropped into the store's cartons, and carefully rewrapped them. The five empties he placed in the suitcase.

At one o'clock that afternoon Smith appeared at the parking lot, opposite the courthouse, that Ciocci always used. The blue Air Force pickup truck was there, as usual. Smith climbed into the front seat, put his package in the back with the other bundles, and waited for Ciocci. In an hour Ciocci returned to the lot, arms laden. Smith got out and helped him and said, "Saw your truck. How about a ride back to the base, Sergeant?"

"Sure," said Ciocci. On the way back to the base Smith listened to the latest poop on the missing bombers. The consensus of opinion, based on what the mess attendants and cooks had been hearing at meals, was that all of SAC would soon be back flying the old 47's and 52's. Most of the command pilots believed there was something radically wrong with the 99. "What makes it worse," Ciocci said, "is that they can't figure out what it is. That's why they're shook."

At Hibiscus main gate the guards stopped them and they showed their passes and ID cards and Ciocci exhibited his requisition list. "Been buying crockery and junk for the mess," he said. "Want to look?"

An Air Police sergeant checked the license plate and base number on the truck and examined the requisition list. He peered into the back of the truck, and estimated the time it would take his detail to go into each one. Behind the truck a line of vehicles began to grow. The sergeant waved Ciocci on.

The bombs were on the base.

Smith helped Ciocci unload at the mess hall, and set his own package aside. "That one yours?" Ciocci asked.

"Yes," Smith said. "This one's mine."

While Smith was carrying his package from the mess hall to Barracks 37, General Keatton was holding his sixth or seventh conference of the day—he had lost count. This one was with Jesse Price and Katharine Hume, and it was bizarre as a meeting of California flying-saucer fans. Keatton knew Miss Hume vaguely, from the Pentagon. He knew she represented the AEC on the Intentions of the Enemy Group and therefore, despite her sex and age, must be of some stature. Since she had arrived at Hibiscus with Price he also assumed she was the major's girl. The girl was doing most of the talking. She spoke with the detachment and technical knowledge, and in the military jargon, of a skilled staff officer presenting a problem to a class in the National War College. She was telling him that an attack on the United States was already in motion and that it was up to him, Keatton, to save the country.

Keatton would have called this melodramatic nonsense, except that he was all but convinced that the girl and Price were right. After a man has witnessed the explosion of a hydrogen bomb, and the performance of the new guided missiles, he can never look upon the world in the same way again. To Keatton, no prophecy could be more melodramatic than what he had already seen.

Keatton's day had progressed from seeming trivia—a report of a suitcase being brought ashore, mysteriously, on the north Florida coast—to this apocalyptic forecast from the full red lips of a striking blonde—and yet he was aware that there could be a link between the two. He had joined with the Chief of Naval Operations in a request to press and radio that the Marine's story not be made public. Lundstrom had said, "If we can keep it quiet for a while, that airman in the green-and-white car is going to try to get on this base, or maybe Mac Dill or Pinecastle, with that suitcase. When he does, we're going to know it." Press and radio had agreed, and the incident was not being publicized.

Now Price was urging him to keep the B-99 in operation, for when the attack came, the 99 would be the only aircraft certain to get through. "So long as you don't ground the Nine-Nines," Price was saying, "they can't win, and if they can't win they won't strike."

"You may be completely right," Keatton said, "but the decision is not entirely in my hands. I can be overruled. I am giving orders to SAC to resume normal operation tonight. But if we lose one more plane, I'm afraid I'll have to start replacing the Nine-Nines with reserve aircraft. After all, we know what's happening to the Nine-Nines, we're only guessing about the Russians."

"It has to be sabotage—pressure bombs," Jesse said. He realized that he had overextended his credit with the general. He had been able to present the group's theory—this alone had seemed impossible only a few days before—now he was pressing his case too hard. Now he was bankrupt of influence.

“No, it doesn’t, son,” the general said. “You aren’t aware of all the facts. That Nine-Nine from Corpus Christi was carrying air-to-air rockets. Explosives in the warheads are like that which burned Lear’s clothing. Maybe the rockets were defective. Ordnance is working on it now. And we’ve examined every aircraft in SAC. Thus far, no pressure bombs, no tampering.”

Jesse knew that the interview was over. He said, “Yes sir. There’s just one more thing. Can I remain here for a while on detached duty?”

“Yes,” Keatton said. “I’m sure you can help Buddy Conklin.”

“Thank you, sir,” Jesse said. When he and Katy were outside he said, “Well, at least I’m still in the Air Force.”

## 8

As protocol required, Felix Fromburg, upon his arrival in Havana, had gone first to police headquarters to express an interest by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the robbery of Robert Gumol, banker from Upper Hyannis, Pennsylvania. He was introduced to the chief of police, and passed down the chain of command to José González, a lieutenant of detectives who had been placed in charge of the case, a man of much humor who could no longer be surprised at the lengths to which the American *turistas* would go to achieve disaster.

“This robbery is unusual,” said González, “only in the amount of money involved. Shorten the sum by three zeros, and I am sure it would be of no concern to anyone, even to Mr. Gumol himself. In fact, I have a feeling in my stomach that Mr. Gumol wishes he had not mentioned the matter, even for three hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars.”

“Understandable,” said Felix, “if a shortage shows up in his bank.” He felt *en rapport* with González, who, like himself, was rather small and physically unprepossessing. González’ brown face was marred by smallpox scars, but his mind was quick and logical.

González was thoughtful. “I doubt that it will be a shortage. It is something else—something queer. Now that you are here, I am convinced it is very queer.” One jet eye was hidden in a wink. “I know something of the FBI, my friend, and I know which division is yours, and I know your division is not interested in robberies, except of paper of greater importance than money.”

“That’s true,” said Fromburg. “Still, this particular money could be part of something else. Do you think you’ll catch the woman?”

“A certainty,” said González. “But we’ll catch her man, her pimp, first. The very size of the robbery—you call this type a ‘rolling,’ do you not?—insures its solution. Fives, tens, even twenties the man may spend without me knowing. But within an hour after he shows his first fifty dollar bill, I will

know. He will never get to the hundreds, or the thousands. He will show himself, I think, within three days.”

González took Fromburg to Gumol’s hotel, and they went up to his room, unannounced. Gumol was seated in front of the opened French doors, a highball glass in his hand, staring out over the water. It was not yet the heat of the day but he was shirtless, his face was bright with sweat, and a river of sweat inundated the patches of gray on his chest and flowed across his thick and waxy middle.

Fromburg introduced himself politely and showed his credentials. An unpleasant-looking ape, he thought, and unhealthy, and smelly as a Skid Row stumblebum. Yet his questions, at first, were as diffident and respectful as any banker, and upright citizen, could expect. How had this unfortunate thing occurred? Would he please describe the woman? Had he mentioned having this large sum of money with him? And then:

“By the way, was this your money, or did it belong to the bank?”

“It was mine. Personal funds.”

“Did you draw it out of your account before you came to Havana?”

“No. Took it out of my safe deposit box.”

“Were the serial numbers of the thousand dollar bills registered?”

Gumol’s fingers twisted a knot of hair on his chest. “Why, no, I don’t believe so.”

“That’s going to make it difficult to trace them,” Fromburg said. “Of course you know the banking regulations concerning registration of thousand dollar bills?”

“Now look here, I don’t see why the FBI should be interested in this. I don’t think you have any right—”

Fromburg smiled. “Only trying to help you, Mr. Gumol, as we try to help any citizen.”

And he kept on pumping the questions. If it was true, as Gumol insisted, that the money was to be used for a Cuban business deal, then what was the deal? With whom? Was the money part of Gumol’s income? Had he paid taxes on it? How long had the money been in the vault? How much more cash did he possess? Would it be helpful if the Treasury Department was called in to refresh Gumol’s memory?

At the end of four hours Gumol seemed to break. “All right! All right!” he said. “Now, I’ll tell you the truth. Truth is that I’m running away from my wife. Maybe that’s a crime, maybe it isn’t. She’s a vicious, jealous old harridan. Made my life miserable. I’ve been saving up for years waiting to make the break. Now, why don’t you people try to get my money back instead of trying to pin something on me? You’re law enforcement officers, aren’t you?”

“Well, Mr. Gumol, I’m glad you came out with it,” Felix said. “It makes our job easier, knowing all the facts.”

Gumol relaxed a little, and Fromburg calculated the measure of his relief. “However, there are just a few more questions.” He began to dig into Gumol’s past history. He began to ask about Gumol’s father.

At six o’clock that evening González was wearied, and left.

Fromburg kept at it. Several times Gumol refused to talk further. Each time Fromburg found that he could prod him into answers by hinting at publicity, or extradition. It became obvious that Gumol was deathly afraid of something. Somewhere back in the United States was something more fearful than the anger of his wife or an investigation of his funds.

More rum was brought. Fromburg drank just enough to keep the edge on his energy. He allowed Gumol to take three drinks to his one. He allowed Gumol to drink until his speech slurred and he weaved in his chair like an animal brought to bay after an exhausting chase. Food was sent up. Gumol revived somewhat, and spun lies as he ate.

At length Fromburg judged his target was wavering. He said, in the same tone as he used for the most innocuous of questions, “Your wife says you’ve been getting money from the Commies, Mr. Gumol. Is that true?”

Gumol’s mouth was slack, his eyes dull as if he had been punched. He shook his head. “Lies. Another one of her dirty lies. She’d say anything to get me into trouble. Why, it’s ridiculous. Can you imagine a banker being a Communist?”

Fromburg nodded. “Why, yes, I can,” he said. “I have known millionaires who were Communists, and well-paid editors who were Communists, and a few government people who were Communists. So it isn’t hard for me to imagine a banker being a Communist, and it certainly isn’t difficult to imagine a banker dealing with the Communists, even if he isn’t one himself. Perhaps your wife was referring to some deals in foreign exchange.”

Gumol didn’t speak at once. He was reflecting on how much could be learned from old records. “It is always possible,” he said cautiously, “that years ago, before the war you know, my father may have executed a few commissions for them. Perhaps that’s where my wife got the crazy idea.”

“Perhaps,” Fromburg said. He looked at his watch. He had been at it twelve hours. It was about enough for that night. In the morning he would have Gumol go back over the whole story, have him retell his whole life history. Fromburg was confident that after he had caught the man in enough lies, Gumol would break. Now he wanted to give him something to think about. He wanted to be sure that Gumol’s night would be sleepless, and that he would be terrorized by his own imagination. “Mr. Gumol,” he said, “I happen to know that you’re here because you’re afraid. I don’t blame you. I don’t think your

life is worth much, at this moment. Nothing's going to save you, except perhaps the truth. Now I'm going to leave you but I'm going to be in the next room, and I'll be back here for breakfast with you in the morning. Don't try to leave. Lieutenant González wouldn't like it."

Fromburg rose, stretched, and left. When the door shut, Gumol fell across the bed, buried his face in the pillow, and sobbed. After a few minutes he began to claw at the sheets in rage at his own stupidity.

## 9

That night Katharine and Jesse went out to the flight line to watch her brother's plane being readied for takeoff. Keatton had ordered an unorthodox emergency mission for six bombers from Hibiscus and thirty more from the other southern bases. Only elite crews were chosen. They were to range far out over the ocean, the Caribbean, and the Gulf, and scan the seas, outside normal shipping lanes, with their radar. The B-99 was not designed or equipped for anti-submarine patrol for it burned fuel at a fantastic rate at the lower altitudes, but it had an important asset—tremendous range. By proceeding to remote search areas at normal altitudes, and then dropping closer to the sea, their radar might, conceivably, find submarines cruising on the surface halfway across an ocean.

The mission was heartening proof to Jesse that Keatton was taking seriously the Intentions Group's forecast, but he watched the preparations for another reason. He had forgotten how many things went aboard an aircraft in the final hour before takeoff.

There were oxygen tanks. "They look like bombs themselves," he told Katy. There were flare guns, freshly charged flashlights, map cases, box lunches, thermos bottles, newly inspected rubber rafts with their compressed air cartridges for inflation, bulky cameras, cases of film, fire extinguishers, binoculars, extra radar tubes, first aid kits. There seemed no end to the equipment that could hide a pressure bomb.

Jess said, almost to himself, "But the cabin is pressurized."

"What's that?"

"I was just thinking that all that stuff is going into a pressurized cabin, so how could a pressure bomb work? But as soon as I asked myself the question I had the answer. Sea level pressure isn't maintained in the cabin. They just try to keep it at a bearable level. They don't even start to pressurize the cabin until they're over ten thousand. When the Nine-Nine is at twenty-five thousand, pressure inside the cabin is held to about twelve. So if a pressure bomb is sneaked into the cabin, it must be set around there, just a little bit higher than the ones in Italy."



He would tell General Keatton about it, if he had another chance to see Keatton alone. He would certainly talk about it to Colonel Lundstrom. Of all the security officers now on the base, Lundstrom had been most impressed by his pressure bomb theory. Lundstrom, too, had been in Italy and recalled the tragic legend of the Cottontails.

At eleven the planes were ready. Clint sauntered over to say goodbye. He squeezed Katharine's shoulder and said, "See you people at breakfast. Or maybe brunch. Depends on our fuel consumption. A Nine-Nine doesn't like to cruise around and around at under thirty thousand feet."

"Yes," Jesse said. "We'll see you at breakfast." He tried to make the tone of his voice as casual as the words. It was difficult. All his life, it seemed, he had said casual goodbyes which in a few hours were solidified as permanent, by death. He had lost so many friends. He hoped he would not lose this brother-in-law-to-be, who also promised to be a good friend.

Then Clint was gone. The great engines fired up and Jesse and Katy and the Air Police got off the flight line and found shelter in the lee of a crash truck and shielded their ears against the torturing roar. The mission took off. In the strange hush after, Katharine said, "Do you think he'll come back?"

Jesse said, "Don't beat yourself up, Katy."

"I don't think you can quite understand how I feel about those big brutes," she said, "because you're not a woman. To me, those planes are monsters."

They walked over to Clint's car and he helped her inside and he pulled her to him and kissed her. When she responded he knew that she had Clint off her mind, at least for a while. It was an hour before he drove her back to the Greshams'.

## 10

Since this was his night off, Stanley Smith stayed in Barracks 37 and played poker. To have reported for work in the mess hall when he was not required to do so, or even visited the kitchen, would have caused comment and brought him unwelcome attention. He could wait. He planned to take three of his thermos bottles to work on the following night, and two more Sunday night. That should finish SAC.

(It was not a night off for Masters, on a SAC base near Corpus Christi. Unlike Smith, Masters had never been able to ease himself into a position where he always had access to the flight lunches and coffee containers. Things had been quite difficult for him, and risky. But on this night he was determined to make a big effort, for it was his night of midnight to 0800 duty, when he would have his best chance of planting the booby traps. When he reported at the mess hall he carried a thermos bottle under each arm.)

## seven

WHEN SMITH awoke Saturday morning he yawned, stretched, and saw that Phil Cusack was sitting on the other bed, watching him. Cusack was dressed in his best blues, and was wearing his peaked cap. Smith guessed that Cusack had been sitting there for some time, hoping he would awaken. "Say, Stan," Cusack said, "you know I got cleaned in that game last night."

"Told you to get out when you were ahead. Table stakes is for men, not boys."

"How much did you win, Stan?"

"I don't know. Forty-fifty maybe."

"How about lending me a couple of bucks? I've got my twenty-four-hour pass for Orlando."

"How much do you owe me now?"

"Twenty-five."

Smith sat up. "Okay, I'll let you have another ten. Hand me my wallet. There, on that table."

Cusack brought the wallet. "Stan," he said, "I borrowed one of your ties."

"That's okay."

"Stan, do you know you've got five coffee jars stacked up in your closet? I thought you ought to . . ." Cusack stopped. Stan's face suddenly was like gray stone. "I thought you ought . . ."

"What about those thermos bottles?"

"Nothing. Except last night Ciocci was beefing. Says he's shy five thermos bottles because they got lost with them aircraft and now he doesn't have enough. Maybe I ought . . ."

"Shut up!"

"I was only going to say maybe I ought to take them back to the kitchen for you."

"Oh." Smith forced himself to relax. "You don't have to worry about it, Phil," he said. "I'll take 'em back when I go to work tonight. Only thing is, I don't like anybody messing around in my closet. You know that, don't you?"

“Sure, I know it. I was just borrowing that tie.”

Smith opened his wallet and brought out two tens, and handed them to Cusack. “Here’s a little extra dough,” he said. “You’ll need it.”

“Thanks, Stan,” Cusack said, grinning. “Say, you know any girls in Orlando?”

“A few. Why?” He wished Cusack would hurry up and get out.

“I just wondered whether maybe one of your girls wouldn’t know a girl?”

Smith realized that the situation had to be handled. It was necessary that Cusack get off the base, and necessary that he forget all about those thermos bottles in the closet. The way to make him forget was get him a girl. There was only Betty Jo, and Betty Jo wouldn’t go for Cusack. But Betty Jo would know plenty of other girls, and maybe she could find one of about Cusack’s age. “I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Phil. I’ll give you a note to my girl. Name’s Betty Jo Atkins. Works at the Sea Trout. She’ll get you fixed up.”

Smith got out of bed, found a pad of Air Force stationery, sat down at the table, and wrote the note: “Dear Betty Jo—This will introduce my roommate, Phil Cusack. He’s a good kid. Wants a date. Take care of him, will you? Love, Stan.”

He slipped the note into an envelope, wrote her name across the face of it, and handed it to Cusack. “She gets off work at five. You know where the Sea Trout is, don’t you?”

“Sure. Thanks a million, Stan.” While Cusack was trotting down the steps of Barracks 37, whistling, he unfolded the two tens. They were new bills, but Stan’s fist had crushed them into a moist, twisted knot. Stan was a wonderful guy, all right, but about some things he sure was funny.

## 2

Clint Hume was back in time for a late breakfast, as he had promised. He showed up at the Gresham house with Red Gresham, his aircraft commander, shortly before eleven. The long-range search had been back since nine, but debriefing had required almost two hours. It had been difficult to determine what the electronic eyes of the B-99’s had seen, if anything.

Katharine and Jesse and Margaret Gresham were waiting, sipping orange juice and listening to the radio in the kitchen. Jesse was contemplating, aloud, a peculiar facet of American manners. In times of tension and crisis people kept their radios going all day and most of the night, to the neglect of television. He rarely had been out of earshot of a radio for the whole week. People knew, instinctively, that a radio program could and would be interrupted for a news flash. It was different with television, which might be showing a film at the moment, or be engrossed with an expensive and complex

dramatic production or situation comedy which on no account must be blighted by a news bulletin.

Clint Hume and Gresham, heavy-eyed and unshaven, sat down at the table and Gresham nodded at the radio and said, "What's the news?"

Jesse laughed. It was easy for a man to lose his perspective in their business. He said, "Red, if there's any really important news in the world it's probably right in your head."

"Not mine," Gresham said. "Clint's. Unless he had spots in front of his eyes. He can't seem to make up his mind."

Clint Hume said, "We'd been more than halfway to Europe, and were coming back when I picked up what looked like a whole fleet of ships on my screen. Fringe area. Just when the pips came into the hundred mile circle, they disappeared. Just faded away. Never saw anything like it before."

"How many pips?" asked Jess.

"Oh, more than a dozen. About nine hundred miles due east of New York. I don't know whether it was some freak reflection, or what. That's what I can't make up my mind about."

"Anybody else see them?"

"No. We had the northeast quadrant and they all seemed to be in our sector. That's the trouble. Anyway, we sent on the sighting to Washington, followed by a question mark."

The music on the radio faded away, and an announcer's voice said: "We interrupt this program for an important news bulletin. Radio Ankara has just announced that it has learned, from a reliable diplomatic source, that two well-known marshals of the Red Army and an admiral of the Red Navy have been executed. Marshals Jullnick and Kuznoff, and Admiral Zubarov were arrested on November fifteenth, secretly tried as enemies of the state, and shot in Lubianka Prison, according to the official Turkish radio. There has been no confirmation of this report from Moscow. The Associated Press and United Press have received no dispatches from their correspondents in Moscow for the past twenty-four hours, indicating that a most rigid censorship has been imposed. For further developments, keep tuned . . ."

Margaret Gresham turned down the radio's volume and asked, "What's it mean?"

Red Gresham smiled and said, "Sounds like everything's S.O.P. in Russia."

Katharine Hume frowned, wondering how a military purge fitted into the Soviet puzzle, and traced watery circles on the yellow plastic tabletop with the tips of her fingers.

Jesse Price said what he was thinking, "Wish Clark Simmons were here to tell us."

Clark Simmons believed he knew what was going on, and theoretically he was in the spot where his knowledge could do the most good, except that it was a Saturday, with only one more shopping day until Christmas. Simmons was one of eight men around a conference table in the office of the Under Secretary of State in Washington. The conference was considering two cables just decoded. One, from the embassy at Ankara, gave the source of the report of the purge. An economic advisor in the Russian consulate-general in Istanbul, enamored of a Turkish girl, had refused to return to Moscow when ordered. He had sought and received the protection of the Turkish government, and in return told what secrets he knew. The other cable came from Moscow. The Russian government would not discuss the purported death of Marshals Jullnick and Kuznoff, and Admiral Zubarov. It was true that the men had not been seen in Moscow for two months, nor had their names been mentioned in the press.

Clark Simmons had not yet attempted to voice his opinion. Since his judgment, at the moment, was being questioned in the Department, he was hoping that one of the others would broach what he had in mind. It would be best if he supported a theory, rather than advanced one. But nobody was seeing it his way, and finally he knew he must speak. "All of you seem to believe that this shows further weakness in the regime," he said. "I disagree. I have had some dealings with Jullnick and Zubarov. Kuznoff I never met. Jullnick and Zubarov, on the whole, struck me as moderate men. At a time when Stalin and Molotov were hostile without any reservations, they were as friendly as they dared be. When the great thaw came, they supported our efforts towards full inspection of atomic armaments. It is my opinion that some momentous decision, of which we know nothing, was taken around the middle of November. These three men were not politically ambitious. They had no connection with the conduct of international affairs on the highest level. They were concerned strictly with military matters. So their disagreement must have concerned military action."

Walter McCabe, the Special Assistant for Eastern Europe, challenged him. "Simmons, we're all aware of your belief that war is imminent. You're just twisting the facts to fit your theories. Look at the record. The Soviet Union is always least aggressive after some internal eruption like this. Look what happened after Stalin's big Army purge. He appeased Hitler. What happened after Stalin died, after Beria was executed, after Malenkov was deposed? Periods of sweetness and light. Takes 'em time to shake down after one of these purges. I think we can rest easy for a while."

"Rest easy?" Simmons asked. "May I quote a bit of Lenin. 'The soundest

strategy in war is to postpone operations until the moral disintegration of the enemy makes the delivery of the mortal blow both possible and easy.’ ”

McCabe leaned across the table, angry. “I’m not morally disintegrated!”

“When you rest easy you are,” Simmons said. “And what about SAC? How do you think the morale is in SAC today?”

“I think you’re in over your head,” McCabe said.

The under secretary looked at his watch. He was already late for another conference, and he had promised his wife, whom he hardly remembered having seen all during the week, that he would take the afternoon off and help with the last-minute shopping. How could she be expected to select presents for some of his government friends whom she didn’t even know? The under secretary said, “Well, it’s an enigma. We’ll just have to wait and see.” He was usually an optimistic man, but at this moment he felt disturbed, inwardly. Every conference on Russia seemed to end with him calling it an enigma. This was hardly an original description, but what else was there to say?

“And another thing,” said Simmons, with a desperation apparent to all of them. “Why have they stopped all outgoing press messages—stopped them completely? That sort of thing hasn’t happened for many, many years. It’s something new, and to me very ominous.”

He looked around the table. The others were rising. McCabe had already drifted away. The under secretary said, “Sorry Simmons,” and turned his back. There was always so much to do, in the Department, and always so little time, particularly on Saturdays, and the worst Saturday of all was the Saturday before Christmas.

#### 4

The matter of time concerned Jesse Price also. He wasn’t seeing Katy Hume often, and when he did see her someone else was always present. What did a man do when he loved a woman, and she him, and both believed their personal world might very well end in less than forty-eight hours? The only sensible thing was to take her away to the safest possible place and enjoy what hours remained. Habit would not permit this. When a department store is bankrupt or a newspaper suspends, the clerks remain at their counters and the reporters at their typewriters until the last bell rings, or the last edition is off the press, although they know their presence is of no possible use to anyone. It is simpler and more comforting that way, for it is habit, even though it enjoys the loftier name of duty. So Jesse Price, when breakfast was done, drove Clint Hume back to the BOQ and then returned to the administration building to see whether Buddy Conklin had any odd jobs for him to do.

Conklin was back at his old desk in the commanding general’s office, and

the whole wing of the building seemed subtly different. The atmosphere of high command, with its tensions, was missing. The only star on the base rode Conklin's shoulder. Conklin called, "Major Price." Jesse walked over to his desk.

"You never checked out in multi-engined jets, did you, Jess?" Conklin asked.

"I've never even flown a jet trainer."

"Too bad. We could use even one-eyed pilots for ferry duty today."

"What's up? Where's all the brass?"

"Two more Nine-Nines blew out of Texas this morning. By tomorrow night we're scheduled to bring in reserve aircraft from Arizona and New Mexico."

"The General's grounded the Nine-Nines?"

"No. Not yet. He's on the way to Washington to fight it out. I think he's beginning to believe in your theory that grounding the Nine-Nine is what the enemy wants. Can't say that I do. Those two in Texas today—after tearing apart every aircraft in SAC, after all the security. I'll tell you, Jess, I'm shook. I've lost five aircrews out of my division already. That's enough for me. I hope I never have to ask another man to climb into a Nine-Nine. Not until I know what's wrong."

Momentarily, Jesse Price felt a sense of failure, but this was displaced and overwhelmed by the realization of what his intervention with Keaton—others would call it meddling—had accomplished. As certainly as if he had lined them up against a wall and shot them, he was responsible for the death of fourteen airmen that morning. Had it not been for him, the two aircrews out of Texas, had they been up at all, would have been flying in the proved 47's and 52's. "If I've been wrong—" he whispered, not to Buddy Conklin, but to himself.

Conklin read what he was thinking, accurately. "Don't ride it, Jess. That pressure bomb idea sounded like the answer to me when I heard it. Just didn't pan out. Anybody can look good by keeping his mouth shut. Now snap out of it!"

Jesse turned away. It was going to be tough, living with himself, living by himself. If he had been wrong, he no longer would be welcome in this Air Force, or perhaps anywhere.

"Major Price!"

Jesse straightened and faced the desk. "Yes, sir."

Conklin's face was bleak, the freckles standing out like orange stains on blank white paper. "Major, you have been assigned to temporary duty on this base and by God I've got plenty of duty to do, without time off for mental flagellation or self-pity. My exec is a pilot. I need him on the ferry run. You

will relieve him for the time being. Find me some more ferry pilots. Get 'em out of spare crews, wing staffs, anywhere. Arrange for their transportation west. And now."

"Yes, sir," Jesse said, his mind working again. Work was what he needed, lots of work. And he knew he still had at least one friend on the base—the commanding general.

## 5

Phil Cusack waited until after the lunch-hour rush was over before he entered the Sea Trout Restaurant. Five or six waitresses were trotting around, all dressed in sea-green uniforms and hats. He tried to guess which one was Stan Smith's girl. He couldn't. To Phil, a shy boy who had never been successful with girls, they all seemed equally pretty, voluptuous, and unattainable. There was an older woman behind the cashier's counter. He waited for a moment when she was unbusy, and then approached the counter and said, "Is Betty Jo Atkins here?"

The cashier nodded towards the rear. "Last three tables."

Cusack walked back there, picking out the last girl, admiring her wide hips and heavy, round breasts. In his part of West Virginia, she was the type of girl that men fought over. He caught her attention and said, "Are you Betty Jo?"

"Yes." She appraised him. He was probably the boy who had left his suitcase in the car. If so, he was lucky. Stan had forgotten to take the suitcase back to the base with him and so she had put it in the luggage compartment of the car, thinking that if Stan didn't come for it she would take it out to Hibiscus. He had never allowed her to drive him out to the base. He claimed the Air Force didn't like it. She had never seen the base, and the suitcase might be a good excuse for her to go out there.

"I'm Stan's roommate. I've got a note for you."

She accepted the envelope eagerly. Probably Stan had got off somehow, or changed his duty hours again, and would be in to see her tonight. It would be awfully lonely, the whole weekend without him. She read the note, her face showing disappointment.

"Gee, I hope it's not too much trouble," Cusack said.

She glanced at him again. He was no dream boat. His face was blemished and he had cut himself shaving. He wasn't old enough to have rank, money, or experience. She would bet he didn't even have a car. She looked around the room. Two other girls, moving in the short, skipping steps a waitress uses to skirt tables and maintain balance, were watching her, and appraising the boy. "You know this is Saturday night," she said. "Most of the girls are all dated up Saturdays. They've all got steadies."



“Oh,” he said. That was all, really, he had expected.

“Tell you what,” she said, thinking that she ought to make some effort or it might displease Stan. “I’ll ask around. I’m off at five. You come back here then and I’ll see what I can do.”

“Sure,” Cusack said. “Thanks a lot. I’ll be back here at five.” He left the restaurant and walked slowly towards the center of town. Christmas decorations were strung over the streets. People were fighting their way into the stores like stuff was being given away. Women hurtled into him, and jostled him, and jammed packages into his ribs. He felt lonely, an outsider. He hadn’t bought any Christmas presents for anyone, and he was sure nobody back home had bought any for him. But there’d be quite a Christmas at the base, with a tree in the gym. It’d be the biggest Christmas he had ever seen. He found refuge in the first movie he saw, chewed licorice, and waited for the hours to pass. Since it was Saturday the theater was full of kids, and was showing a Western and a comedy. Phil, hunched back, watched the screen, but he really didn’t absorb what was going on, nor was he disturbed by the kids around him, their holiday excitement bursting out in horseplay and giggling. He was dreaming of a girl, a waitress in a sea-green dress—any one of them would do.

When Betty Jo Atkins left the Sea Trout at five, Phil was waiting for her on the pavement outside. She said, “I’m sorry, but all the other girls are busy tonight.”

“Thanks for trying,” he said. He felt awful. Somehow, he had built up the idea that she surely was going to get him one of the girls.

Betty Jo was surprised by the impact of her words. He looked pathetic. She really ought to do something for him, it being just before Christmas and everything. She could ask him to her house. There wasn’t anything wrong in that, was there? Stan couldn’t very well get sore. Besides, this boy’s company was better than no company at all. Saturday nights were for fun. “Phil,” she said, “how would you like to come out to my house for dinner?”

“I’d like to,” he said.

“Car’s parked around the corner. Can you drive?”

“Sure.”

“Okay, let’s go.” She took his arm. He was somebody to talk to, anyway. He could be worse.

## 6

After the lodge was in order, Raoul Walback checked what he now called the “survival list” with his mother. He had been able to convince her of the necessity of leaving for Front Royal largely, he felt, because she was a

compulsive shopper. Henrietta went on buying sprees the way some people went on alcoholic binges, and often for the same reason, boredom. Her closets were filled with dresses she had never worn, and she collected shoes the way a lifelong philatelist buys stamps. She was a devotee of auctions, and fancied herself an expert on Oriental rugs and English bone china. As a result, the house on Massachusetts Avenue, except for Raoul's bedroom and study, was slowly but inexorably solidifying, like the dreary interior of a museum.

Flight to Front Royal gave Henrietta a valid excuse for wholesale buying, far beyond the necessities Raoul had contemplated. While she didn't really believe it was necessary to leave Washington, it was an exciting game. She said nothing to her friends, except to cancel her engagements. She maintained this extraordinary silence only because she didn't wish to expose herself, and Raoul, to ridicule. She embarked upon the game with the same enthusiasm as when planning a large dinner party. On Thursday she had sent a preliminary load to Front Royal with the chauffeur, thereby salvaging the family plate, a magnificent service of flat silver, and objets d'art which she judged would have value, no matter what the future. She raided an expensive Connecticut Avenue food store, buying tinned hams, imported cheeses, chutney, olive oil, dates, English toffee, and teas and Bovril by the case.

Henrietta was sorry about the Hume girl. Raoul had told her that Katharine had decided, at the last minute, that her place was with her brother in this time of danger, and so the Hume girl had not come to Front Royal, but gone to Florida. Henrietta didn't believe Raoul had told her all the truth. But if the Hume girl was too stupid to appreciate Raoul's offer of their safe haven in the mountains, then she was too stupid to be Raoul's wife.

Now, in Front Royal, Henrietta discovered discrepancies in Raoul's list of staples. He had forgotten, of all things, soap powder and detergents. How on earth could he expect her to have the laundry done unless she had soap powder? Neither had he considered a reserve supply of dust clothes, dish towels, furniture and silver polish, and roach powder. She detested bugs and she knew the old lodge. It would be overrun. And somehow she simply had to find a maid.

So on Saturday afternoon Raoul had driven to Winchester, where there were larger markets, to supplement their purchases. While he was loading the grocery cart with soap powder, he noticed a man whose face was familiar plucking jars of condiments from the fancy food shelves. The man was buying enough pepper, relish, mustard pickles, and horseradish to last a family for a year. Raoul was sure he knew this man, knew him from Washington, had chatted with him at diplomatic parties. The man bent over to inspect a lower shelf, and his posture stimulated Raoul's memory. It was Svirski, First Secretary at the Polish embassy. Svirski, he remembered owned a summer

cottage near Riverton. But this was not summer, not the season for the diplomatic colony to be stocking its country house larders. Svirski had remained eight years in his post in Washington despite the periodic purges within the Polish government. After Raoul had paid for his purchases and a boy had carried them to his car, Raoul considered Svirski's presence and his actions. Then Raoul went back into the market and bought an extra supply of salt and pepper. It was going to be a long winter. Svirski was no fool, and neither was he.

7

Stephen Batt usually spent his Saturday afternoons in the garden of his house on the Severn. The house was old-fashioned, with frame wings and extensions tacked on to the central brick nucleus which had been built by his grandfather, the Admiral. Steve himself had converted the cellar into a game room and home workshop. On this Saturday, instead of rooting in the garden, he worked in the cellar.

From the sounds that came from down there, you would think he was tearing the house apart. Before dinner, Laura, his wife, decided to go down cellar to see what he was doing. Her first impression was that he *was* tearing the house apart, or at least he was digging at its foundations. Batt was wearing old suntan trousers, souvenirs of the South Pacific, now grimy to the hips. He had been wielding a pick and shovel. In the center of the game room rose a pyramid of stones and dirt. In the game room wall was a dark hole, or tunnel. Her husband obviously had just crawled out this hole. Laura asked, "Have you gone mad?"

"It'll hold four of us," Steve said, rubbing his arm across his face.

"It'll hold four of what?"

"People. You, me, and the boys." The Batts had two sons, four and seven.

"Why should it hold us? What are you planning to do, bury us all alive?" Laura was not actually alarmed. Steve was the most sensible of men. Still, it was most unusual that he should be tunneling under the house without telling her about it first.

"Now just a minute, dear," Steve said. "Let me explain." She had been in Crabtown, on a last-minute Christmas shopping expedition, when he returned from Washington at one o'clock. He had immediately gone down cellar and started digging, and had become so engrossed in the excavation that he had forgotten both the time and Laura, and hadn't heard her re-enter the house. "You've heard about the Civil Defense recommendations, haven't you?" he asked. If he put it on that basis she might not get too excited.

"What's Civil Defense got to do with you ripping out that lovely

panelling?”

“You know. Civil Defense recommends that every home have a shelter with three feet of solid earth over it. Protection against fallout. I thought that with just a little effort I could dig us a real shelter.”

She said, “I think you really are mad! A few years ago when things were critical, before all the conferences and everything, you never paid any attention to Civil Defense. I was the one who talked about a shelter then. Now, all of a sudden, you’re behaving like a mole. What is it, Steve?”

“I’ve changed my mind.”

She walked across the room and put her hand on his arm and said, “Steve, what are you driving at?”

“I thought we’d better have a shelter, that’s all. Isn’t safe, being so close to Washington and Baltimore. With a north wind we’d even get fallout from New York and Philly.”

She examined his face to see what he was thinking. He never could hide his feelings from her. Then she asked the question, hating it: “Steve, you think there’s going to be a war, don’t you? Real soon.”

It was necessary that he tell her. Secrecy be damned. Her life, and the lives of their sons, depended on her knowing, preparing. “In my best judgment,” he said, “I believe there will be war. However, I hope I am wrong. My best judgment does not coincide with that of my superiors.” There had been serious conferences in the Navy’s corridors in the Pentagon that morning. The Navy admitted it was worried. It was worried about the dozen pips that had appeared, and then vanished, on the radarscope of one of the Air Force bombers dispatched on long-range search the night before. The Navy was concerned about the Marine private’s story of a landing on the coast, and by the unmistakable sighting of a submarine in the Gulf.

Yet for all these things there could be logical and innocuous explanations, the Navy had recognized. SAC’s radarmen were trained to seek out enemy cities, not identify submarines from the bright pips on their screens. It could have been malfunction of the radar set, or freak skip waves called the Heaviside Bounce, which sometimes causes a radarman to see an object two thousand miles distant as if it were right under his nose. And these so-called submarines had vanished immediately. Batt had pointed out that a flotilla of submarines, cruising at night on the surface, would have its radar operating, and would instantly dive at the approach of aircraft believed hostile, or merely inquisitive. Still, the Navy was skeptical. The international situation had often been more critical, and there had just been another purge in the Soviet high command. As to the Marine’s story, it was just too fantastic. It was the opinion of elderly admirals that this young Marine had found himself in an awkward position with the girl’s family, and that he and his girl had concocted the tale

to appease an angry father. True, the story had been accepted by a senior captain at Mayport, but nothing ever happened at Mayport, and unconsciously, perhaps, the captain welcomed a little attention and excitement.

The Navy had agreed, however, to delay the sailing of *Coral Sea* to the Mediterranean. A change in the carrier's loading was ordered. A group of fighter planes, just taken aboard, was ordered back to Mainside. It was being replaced by subhunting helicopters and dive bombers. By nightfall the *Coral Sea* would sortie, steam northeast, and receive additional orders at sea. In addition the hunter-killer task force, scattered over a tremendous area in the Gulf, was ordered to rendezvous near Key West. These concessions Steve Batt, backed by Admiral Blakeney of the Eastern Sea Frontier, had won.

"But you do believe it, don't you?" Laura insisted, watching his eyes.

"Yes, I do."

"All right, Steve," she said. "You keep right on digging. I'll start clearing away this mess."

She went to work with shovel, bucket, and broom. He went back into his tunnel. He was thinking ahead, telling himself he would have to accumulate much new lore within the next forty-eight hours. Who would determine the amount of radioactivity sustained in Annapolis, the power and type of bombs used? What would be safe to eat and drink? If radioactive debris fell on the car, would it be safe to drive it afterwards? What would they do if the bombs had a U-238 casing? Or cobalt? Who would know? Who would tell them? Who would be left? Steve Batt, so aware of dangers to the national entity, had forgotten to learn the rules for personal survival. No one, he suspected, could truthfully say that the Civil Defense rules would be of any real use, but at least it would be best to know them. Such rules were like an untested parachute. The parachute might not work, but if you had to jump, it was the only chance you had.

## 8

All that Saturday morning, and most of the afternoon, Felix Fromburg had been pounding questions at Robert Gumol in a hotel room in Havana. Now, at last, he reckoned that Gumol was weakening. As was inevitable in any lengthy interrogation of a man concealing truth, Gumol had contradicted himself, become flustered, and finally admitted lying. It was true, he confessed, that he had undertaken certain commissions for the Soviet government. Harmless ones, of course, all many years before. He talked for a long time about the financial problems of the U.S.S.R. prior to recognition by the United States in 1933.

Fromburg pressed him. Yes, Gumol said, he had received certain fees from

the Russian embassy since that period. Very small, really, in comparison with his total income, and all reported in his tax statements. Perhaps he had forgotten to list the source, but the fees were there. Fromburg should remember that Russia had been an ally. Was it not correct to accept commissions from an ally?

Fromburg demanded details. What kind of services had Gumol performed? Was he paid in cash or by check? When he said the fees were small, did that mean in hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands? And, finally, was Gumol registered as an agent of a foreign power, as the law required?

Gumol said, "I don't think I want to discuss such a question without advice from my attorney."

Felix knew, then, that Gumol had succeeded in hanging himself. He stood up, and lifted his tired arms, and stretched. "Mr. Gumol," he said, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to ask Lieutenant González to hold you on an open charge until I can have you extradited for violation of federal statutes requiring registration of those receiving pay from a foreign power. But that isn't quite all. Then I'm going to trot over to the Associated Press office. I know one of their correspondents here. I'm going to tell him what I'm doing, and tell him how you were rolled for three hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars. It'll be pretty big news in Philadelphia, and in Washington too, and maybe in Moscow."

Gumol's face, which during the day had grown progressively grayer and more unhealthy, now became veined and brick red. He gripped the arms of his chair, leaned forward, and shouted, "You can't do that!"

"I can, and I will. There's no question that you've violated a federal law. Maybe several."

"You don't know what this would mean to me!"

"I think I do. It'd insure quite a reception committee, wouldn't it? Led by your wife. Of course, once you're back in Pennsylvania no doubt you can get out on bond. Then what'll happen to you, Mr. Gumol?"

Gumol's heavy shoulders weaved. His mouth hung open but he seemed unable to speak. Once Fromburg had witnessed a bullfight in Mexico City, and when the bull was all in, its legs spread, horn-heavy, bleeding, beat, ready for the moment of truth, the bull had looked something like Gumol.

"You won't last long, will you, Mr. Gumol? They'll kill you quick."

Gumol held out his hands. They were clammy as soft clay, and shaking. "Listen, mister, all I want to do is save my life."

"You know how you can do it, don't you?"

Gumol's lips moved, but no words came out.

Felix said, "That was Russian money, wasn't it? You stole it, didn't you? Probably had it in a box in your bank, right? Did you leave any, Gumol? It

won't be hard to check, you know."

Gumol coughed and held his hand to his neck, and when he spoke his voice sounded half-strangled, as if he had swallowed a drink and fluid had gone into his windpipe. "Yes, it was Russian money, but you don't understand, mister. This thing is big. I guess I'm in deep. If you'll just promise me—"

Felix was a man of much inner calm, a characteristic which had advanced him in his profession, but for the first time in years he lost control of himself, and the situation. For the first time in his life he felt impelled to kill. He stretched out his hands close to Gumol's throat. "You son of a bitch, you tub of rancid lard," he said, "what did you do to rate that much money?"

"I didn't do anything. I swear it. It wasn't me."

"Then who was it? And what did they do?"

Gumol's chin fell on his chest, his head wavered, but he could not seem to speak.

Felix had to say it, his voice like an icicle held at the man's throat. "Mr. Gumol, I think you know something that is going to happen. If anything does happen, if it happens before you come clean, I can promise you this—I don't know where the first shot will be fired, but the second one will be right into your fat gut."

Gumol's face changed color again. From brick red it faded to gray, and then to chalk white and when he spoke he strangled again, and he had difficulty speaking, as if he breathed off the top of his chest and had little breath for words. "All right. . . . I'll tell you about it. Remember it was me who told you . . . they're blowing up the bombers. . . . There are four of them in this country . . . I mean the United States. I met one . . . his name . . . his name is —" Gumol's hands lifted and crept up across his stomach as if to hold in pain. "Smith—" He gasped. "The others are . . ." Gumol's chin fell again. He seemed, indeed, to be looking down at his stomach, open-mouthed in astonishment. But he kept on leaning forward until he rolled off the chair onto the floor. He choked, his hands clawed at his throat, saliva appeared at the corners of his mouth, his legs kicked with unexpected force. He relaxed, still. Long before the doctor reached the room, Fromburg knew that Gumol was dead.

To the doctor, a North American, it was very simple. "Classic coronary type," he said. "They come to Havana to live it up. They live about two years in two days and kick off. What's he been up to for the last two days?"

"Nothing," Felix said. "He hasn't even been talking very much."

"Well," said the doctor, "it's a wonder he lived as long as he did. Should've been dead a couple of years ago."

It wasn't that simple for Fromburg. He had everything—and he had nothing. Perhaps Gumol had left some useful documents or records at the

bank, but he doubted it. And why did the man's name have to be Smith? What Smith? Where? There were no scrambler lines out of Havana, so Felix was forced to telephone, in clear, from his own room. Since it was Saturday afternoon, only a few people, and none in authority, were on duty in counter-espionage. They promised to relay his information to someone who knew more about this Gumol matter, and send special agents from the Philadelphia office over to the bank. It seemed far-fetched that a suburban banker would know anything about sabotage of the B-99 bombers, but the Air Force would be alerted nevertheless. It was a shame that Fromburg's information was not more specific.

Felix called at Havana police headquarters, and at the embassy, which would have the duty of notifying Gumol's family, and arranging for shipment of the body back to Upper Hyannis. He returned to the hotel and packed his bag. Perhaps he had failed. Perhaps he should have been more observant of the man's condition, and been easier on him. Yet on the whole he felt he had done all he could. Late that night he boarded a plane back to Washington. At least he would be with his family before Christmas, and with them face what was to come. He had called Sarah, and told her to load up the car, and be ready to leave when he got home.

## 9

Phil Cusack thought that Betty Jo Atkins' house was really something, much nicer than the house of any girl he had known in Morgantown, and infinitely cleaner and more luxurious than his own family's unpainted two-story frame packing-case, with its torn green shades, uncarpeted, gritty floors, junk furniture, and primitive bathroom. Betty Jo's living room was furnished in modern, just like the quarters of the married officers on the base. Betty Jo had a fascinating lamp, shaped like a black leopard standing on its haunches, and the shade was painted like a tiger's skin. She had a combination television set and record-player. She had everything. Stan Smith was a lucky man to have her.

She could cook, too. She cooked a Hungarian goulash better than any he had ever tasted at a hunyak table in West Virginia. They ate on the glass-topped, wrought-iron coffee table in the living room. Then she brought in ice cream and beer.

They drank a second beer and sat side by side on the soft, white rug and watched a comedy hour. Then the "Hit Parade" came on and she shook off her shoes and pulled him to his feet and said, "Let's dance."

He wasn't much of a dancer anyway, and it was embarrassing, trying to dance on that deep rug. She said, "You'll do better if you hold me a little



closer.” She pressed close against him.

Phil didn’t do any better. Much as he tried to concentrate on dancing, he found that his feet were hardly moving at all. He was scared of what was happening, but he couldn’t control himself. He said, taking his arm from her waist, “I think I ought to go back to the base.”

Her hips and shoulders were still weaving. She said, “I thought you said you were on twenty-four-hour pass? You don’t have to be back until tomorrow morning, do you?”

“That’s right. But the last bus leaves at twelve. After that there isn’t another bus for the base until eight, maybe eight-thirty in the morning.”

“Aw, don’t worry about it. We’ve got a car. I can drive you back any time.”

“That’s real nice of you, Betty Jo, but I don’t want to put you out, cause you any trouble or anything.”

“It’s no trouble,” she said. “I want you to have a big time tonight. Tell you what you do. I’m out of beer. Take the car and get another six cans. Lots of places open on the Trail. Then when you come back we’ll talk it over.”

Phil said, “Okay.” He thought of Stan, and felt guilty, but what else could he say?

She found the car keys in her pocketbook and juggled them for a moment in her hand, thinking about the car. Again that day, she had forgotten to get the tail light fixed. The garages were open late, Saturday nights, but they’d all be closed Sunday morning, and Stan had said he might be in to see her tomorrow. If she didn’t have that light fixed when he came in again, Stan would be real sore. He was a bug about little things like that. “Tell you what you do, Phil,” she said. “My left tail light is busted. Drive on in to town and get it fixed for me, will you? Then pick up the beer and come on back. Here’s some money.”

He refused the bills. “I’ve got plenty,” he said. “I’ll catch it.” It made him feel better to be able to pay. It made him feel like an older man.

## 10

Lieutenant Hans Fischer, of the Air Police, had his own theory about the airman receiving a suitcase from a boat up the coast. It was Fischer’s theory that no submarine was involved, and that the airman wasn’t an enemy agent at all, but was engaged in smuggling dope. You will find young punks in the Air Force, as elsewhere, and Fischer had just succeeded in turning up two nineteen-year-old addicts. But he hadn’t laid hands on the pusher who sold them the heroin, and, until all Air Police at Hibiscus were placed on anti-sabotage alert, it had been his assignment to find this pusher, and he had not forgotten it. It was also Fischer’s belief that the smuggler’s car and suitcase

would not turn up at Hibiscus, if it turned up at all, but in Orlando. If the smuggler had a new car it indicated he was newly affluent. The pusher would not want to attract attention to himself by driving it on the base.

Fischer had been on duty almost all Friday night, and until noon Saturday. He had been told to take Saturday night off. Instead, he had come to Orlando and stationed himself within sight of the terminal for Air Force busses. If there was any dope pushing going on, it would likely be near this center of activity, and Saturday night was the time to spot it. He watched for a new green-and-white Chevy hardtop with an airman at the wheel. He saw six or seven cars that came close to answering the description, but they were all driven by civilians. Then he saw it.

A green-and-white Chevy, driven by an airman, turned into the big all-night garage and filling station just down the street. Excited, but walking at an even pace and pretending that his attention was elsewhere, so as not to alarm his man, Fischer strolled down the sidewalk. As he was crossing the concrete ramp, studded with gas pumps, Fischer saw the driver get out of the car. The airman was talking to one of the filling station attendants, and they were examining a broken tail light, when Fischer put his hand on his shoulder. "This your car?" Fischer said.

The airman looked up. He was a pimply-faced scrub of about the same age as the two addicts Fischer had nailed. He said, "No." His eyes took in Fischer's rank and the A.P. brassard on his arm and he added, "sir, Lieutenant."

"Who's it belong to?"

"Belongs to a girl." Again, belatedly, he added, "sir." Cusack couldn't imagine what crime he had committed. The lieutenant was probably looking for somebody else.

"Let's see your pass, ID card, and driver's license."

Cusack reached into his pocket and brought out his wallet, with his pass and ID card. The lieutenant, very tall, lean, and seeming somehow hard and faceless, although little older than the airman, said, "Where's your license?"

"Sir, I don't have a driver's license. I don't have a car, and this girl she asked me to come down here and get her tail light fixed."

"She wanted you to get her tail light fixed at this hour?"

"Yes, sir, at this hour."

Fischer told himself that this could be the right man. A fishy story and no driver's license. Probably the punk had just bought the car with the heroin profits. "What've you got in the trunk?" he demanded.

"In the trunk? Nothing. I don't know what's in the trunk."

Fischer said, "Open it up."

The garage attendant, who had been listening, interested, moved away. If there was going to be trouble he didn't want to get involved.

Cusack took the keys from the ignition. Fischer noticed how shaky he was, and how scared. Cusack opened the trunk. In the trunk was a new, brown leather suitcase, short and thick, more like a sample case, with a clear plastic cover. "Bring it out and open it up," Fischer commanded.

Cusack did as he was told. There was nothing in the suitcase except five thermos bottles, fitted into niches of a felt-covered wooden rack, and held firmly in place by straps. "Well, I'll be damned," Cusack said. He was thinking of the five thermos bottles he had seen in Stan Smith's closet, and had come to a quick conclusion. He'd bet that his roommate's money came from stealing and selling mess hall equipment.

Fischer took one of the thermos bottles from the trunk. "Pretty slick way to carry your junk," he said.

"My junk?"

"You're a junkie, aren't you?" Fischer unscrewed the top, drew out the cork, and held the bottle up so he could look inside. Empty. He smelled it. It smelled new. He said, puzzled, "Where'd you get these?"

"I didn't get them, Lieutenant. I don't know anything about them. Like I told you, a girl just asked me to drive her car downtown and get her tail light fixed. Now if you want to check with her . . ."

"We'll check with her later. Right now, we're taking this car and bag to the base."

"Sir, I can't take this car. It doesn't belong to me."

Lieutenant Fischer returned the bottle to its place, snapped the case shut, and returned it to the luggage compartment. The kid might be completely clear. Now that he'd talked with him, Lieutenant Fischer didn't believe he was the slippery, lying, hophead type. But he wasn't the type who would possess a girl with a new car, either. He seemed just a country kid, one who would have an awful lot of explaining to do, when you considered the FBI and police lookout, and the description of the car and suitcase. Fischer said, "Come on, get in the car. We're going back to the base. I'll drive."

Cusack climbed into the front seat and handed the keys to the lieutenant. Suddenly he put his hands to his face and said, "Oh, Lord!" He could imagine what Stan Smith would say when Stan found out about all this. He knew pretty well what Stan would do to him if he got Stan into trouble. He decided he'd better not mention Stan at all, not to the Air Police.

## eight

STANLEY SMITH reported for duty in the Officers' Open Mess, midnight to 0800 shift, a few minutes early. By the time Sergeant Ciocci and the others got there he had placed his three new thermos bottles in the rack, closest to the wall. He didn't want Ciocci to see him bringing in three bottles, because it would seem unusual. But on this first shift of Sunday morning Sergeant Ciocci did notice something.

He looked at the row of containers, counting them. "Ten," he said aloud. "That's funny. Last time I looked there were seven. We never had more than a dozen, and we lost five in B-Nine-Nines. That makes seven we should have left, but now we've got ten. Stan, what d'you make of that?"

Smith laughed. "They aren't having pups," he said. "You know I drink a lot of coffee and so do the other fellows over in Thirty-seven and I had a couple of bottles in the barracks and brought them in tonight. Maybe somebody else, on the last Saturday shift, borrowed the other and just brought it back too."

"Oh, sure," said Ciocci. "But I could have sworn we never had more than twelve. I was going to requisition five new ones yesterday. Forgot."

"We've got more than twelve," Smith said. "Somebody's always got one or two out."

"I guess so," said Ciocci, satisfied.

To Smith it was a bad omen. In all his operations, this was the first time he had come really close to slipping, and it made him feel jumpy, and apprehensive. Perhaps three was too many to do at once, but of course he didn't know for sure that he'd be able to destroy three. There might be no missions at all, and even if there were missions you never could know how many officers would draw coffee. And he did have his five bombs and he would like to use them, effectively as possible, before Monday, which he felt sure would be the day. D-Day they called it in the U.S. Army, X-Day in the Russian.

Ciocci looked out through the glass in the swinging doors that separated

the kitchen from the mess hall. He said, "We've got some early customers. Take 'em, will you, Stan?"

During the regular, daylight meal hours the mess hall operated like a cafeteria, with the officers serving themselves, except in the Sky Room. During these hours the long array of steam tables were always filled with hot food. On the midnight to 0800 shift cafeteria service was not practicable, for these were the hours in which all major equipment was scoured and cleaned. So on this shift the cooks and kitchen helpers waited on table. Smith walked into the mess hall.

The good-looking civilian girl who had been around the base for a few days, and who he believed must be an agent for Special Investigations, was seating herself at one of the tables. With her was the big one-eyed major, and Lundstrom, the colonel from Washington, a wheel in security, who never seemed to sleep. They ordered sandwiches and milk.

When they had finished eating the major paid out of his chit book and asked, "How about wrapping up a roast beef to take out? With pickle."

"Yes, sir," said Smith.

He cleared the dishes, went into the kitchen, made a sandwich, and brought it to the major. The girl was talking. "Jess," she was saying, "you've been at it all day. Why don't you get some rest and be fresh in the morning?"

"Can't," said the major. "Too much paper work. We've got twelve training missions scheduled. SAC says the crews have got to make up for the day they lost. Then the ferry operation starts tomorrow night."

"All right," the girl said. "I know there's no use arguing. I'll drive you both over to administration."

And they rose and left. Twelve missions, Smith thought. Twelve missions meant forty-eight officers flying. Certainly three out of forty-eight would want coffee with their flight lunches. It would be a big day, the biggest ever. They'd all be crazy with fear and frustration by this time tomorrow.

## 2

When Katy dropped them at administration, Jesse Price returned to executive office while Lundstrom continued on down the hallway to the office of the commanding general. Even at this hour, ten minutes to one in the morning, there was a pleasant pulse of activity on the base. The flight crews named for the morning missions were still sleeping, and yet preparations for the missions were underway. Engines were being tested, fuel trucks drinking from enormous underground tanks, armorers drawing rockets and 20 millimeter ammunition, radar maintenance men conducting their endless examination of equipment. Reports were coming in to the executive office,

orders flowing out.

At this moment, and until Buddy Conklin arrived to take over, Jesse Price was senior staff officer at Hibiscus. Under him was Captain Challon, the regular duty officer of the night, a lieutenant, two staff sergeants, and three or four airmen, one of whom shuttled between Jesse's desk and the communications center. It had been a long time since Jesse had been in a post of command. His last command had blown up on the runway at Okinawa. He enjoyed command. He enjoyed making decisions, even when they were routine and trivial. He hoped that the bird colonel who was Buddy Conklin's regular deputy, and exec, would tarry for a few days in New Mexico. The responsibilities of command divorced a man's mind from problems and fears about which you could do nothing. Whether you flew a plane or a desk, the commander's job was definite. It was right there in front of him—a course to steer, a message to send, an order to sign.

At 0140 a strange priority message came over the teletype from SAC headquarters in Omaha: *“ATTENTION COMMANDING OFFICERS ALL DIVISIONS AND WINGS—THE FBI REPORTS THAT A CONTACT MAN FOR ENEMY AGENTS BLAMES SABOTAGE FOR THE LOSS OF THE B-99 BOMBERS. HE CLAIMS FOUR MEN ARE RESPONSIBLE. THE INFORMANT, NOW DECEASED, SAID HE MET ONE OF THE MEN, WHOSE NAME IS SMITH. THE FBI HOPES TO HAVE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THIS BY MONDAY. MAINTAIN YOUR CONDITION OF ALERT.”*

Jesse called Challon to his desk and showed him the message. “Ever see anything like that?” he asked.

Challon, a young man from Chattanooga who had just returned from duty in the Midlands with dashing RAF mustaches, read the dispatch and said, “Never in my born days.”

“How many Smiths do we have on this base?”

Challon laughed. “I don't know, Major. I had two in my last crew, and I know a couple more right here in administration.”

The message was crazy, all right, Jess thought, and yet the FBI wouldn't send it along unless they had a few hard facts. A man's death was a hard fact. Jesse wondered whether “informant, now deceased,” had been killed while escaping, or had killed himself, or been murdered, or simply died of natural causes. It was intriguing as a who-dun-it, but it was no help, and there was nothing he could do about it. All he had to worry about was Hibiscus Base. Somebody else would have to take care of the rest of the world.

Hibiscus Base was running smoothly until Lundstrom poked his head into the office and said, “Major Price, will you come out here, please?”

Jess went to the door. Lundstrom said, quietly, “We may have something

downstairs in Air Police. Want to come down with me?"

"Yes." Jess turned to Challon. "Take over for a while, will you, Captain?"

As they walked down the corridor, Lundstrom said, "Remember that Lieutenant Fischer—rangy, tanned boy at the gate the day you got here? Well, he just brought in a green-and-white Chevvy, an airman, and a suitcase."

Jess looked at his watch. It was two-thirty. In thirty minutes the pilots and airmen would be roused for pre-flight briefing and check-outs. The first mission was due off at 0700. He began to think ahead.

### 3

The Air Police headquarters on the ground floor of administration included an interrogation room, its windows barred, and equipped with the bare essentials of furniture, including a wire recorder, a line of chairs, a stenographer's desk with typewriter. A small group of men were already there. They included Lieutenant Fischer, Major Click, the base security officer, a master sergeant of the Air Police with a stenographer's pad, two airmen with carbines, and the prisoner. On the table lay the oddly shaped suitcase, open.

Jesse Price was astonished. The prisoner, sitting stiffly in a straight-backed chair, blotches on his face purplish under the bright fluorescent rods of light, looked like a high school senior who had been picked up, by accident, in a raid on a juke joint. His mouth was half open, his eyes glazed, and he was dumb with fright. Colonel Lundstrom said, "What's this—juvenile delinquency week? What's the story?"

Lieutenant Fischer told what there was to tell. Airman 2/C Cusack claimed that the car didn't belong to him. He didn't know anything about the suitcase, hadn't seen it until he was picked up at the all-night garage in Orlando. He claimed that he had been working in the mess hall Thursday night, midnight to 0800. If that was true he had an absolute alibi, and was not the airman seen by the Marine.

"Shouldn't be hard to check up," said Lundstrom.

At first the sight of the five quart bottles nestled in their felt niches made no impression on Jesse, except that it looked like the luggage had been designed as part of an elaborate picnic outfit. Then their shape jostled cells of memory. The shape he had drawn on the blackboard in Buddy Conklin's office, to illustrate the pressure bomb used by the Germans in Italy, was the shape of a thermos bottle. The pressure bombs that had blown the Cottontails' old B-24's out of the sky had also been cylindrical, and a bit more than a foot long. "What's in those bottles, Lieutenant?" he asked.

"Nothing, Major. Nothing at all. I examined them all. Thought I might find heroin."

“Lieutenant, have you checked the ownership of the car?” asked Lundstrom.

“The sergeant did, sir,” said Fischer. “It’s listed to Betty Jo Atkins, in Orlando, like this airman said. She doesn’t have a phone.”

Lundstrom turned on the boy. “What’s the name of your commanding officer?”

Cusack’s mouth opened and closed twice before any words came out. “Kuhn, sir,” he said finally. “Captain Kuhn. He’s mess officer.”

#### 4

The orderly pattern of Captain Kuhn’s life had been badly disrupted for the entire week. Ever since Hibiscus lost its first two B-99’s, operation of the Officers’ Open Mess has become disorganized and complicated. There was a sudden influx of civilian technicians and factory men whom he was called upon to feed, and a procession of brass from Washington. His chit book system was in confusion, and he was sure his accounts would show a loss that he might have to make up out of his own pocket. Not a night passed without some panic or flap, such as providing flight lunches for generals, on five minutes’ notice. The whole business was unnerving.

Had Captain Kuhn been the brightest officer in the Air Force, he would not have been a captain, and a mess officer, at the age of forty-three. He wore battle stars from the Pacific and the Air Medal on his tunic, but his age in grade announced that somewhere in his career he had fouled up. When the telephone woke him, he looked at the clock, picked up the instrument, and, instead of saying, “Captain Kuhn,” he shouted, “Who in hell’s calling at this hour?”

A cold voice replied, “This is Colonel Lundstrom, Special Investigations. Get your fat ass out of the sack and be in the guardroom in administration in two minutes.”

Before Kuhn could say so much as, “Yes, Colonel,” the phone clicked.

As Kuhn tugged on his shirt and trousers, fingers fumbling, he was sure that SI had discovered a discrepancy in his mess fund. He didn’t make administration in two minutes, but he did make it in five, dishevelled and apprehensive. To Kuhn, Lundstrom’s face looked forbidding and bleak as the glaciers at Thule, Greenland, or the tundras of Alaska, or some other Air Force Siberia.

Lundstrom looked at him. Kuhn started to apologize, but Lundstrom said, “This one of your men?” He indicated Cusack.

“Why, yes, sir. I don’t know his name but he is one of my men. On the swing shift, I think.”



“Was he on duty Friday morning between midnight and oh-eight hundred?”

“Well, I’m not sure, sir. No, sir, I don’t think that’s his night.”

Cusack spoke. “Sir, it isn’t my regular night, but I swapped with one of the other men so I could have Saturday night off. Sergeant Ciocci said I could.”

“Ciocci’s on duty now,” said Kuhn. “He can tell us.” For the first time Kuhn noticed the open suitcase. “Say, those look like my thermos bottles.”

Until that moment, Phil Cusack had not been sure what crime the Air Police lieutenant, and later all this brass, believed he had committed. All he knew for certain was that one of the most exciting, fascinating evenings of his life had suddenly changed into incomprehensible horror and disaster. But now he was certain that Stan Smith had been stealing mess hall equipment, and specifically these thermos bottles, and that he, Cusack, was suspected. He didn’t want to get Stan in trouble, but he didn’t want to go to the federal pen, either. He said, his words directed at Lundstrom, “Sir, I didn’t steal those thermos bottles. Honest I didn’t.”

“Well, they look exactly like the thermos bottles we send out with the flight lunches,” said Captain Kuhn. “Same color, same size. Colonel, I think you’ve really got something here.”

“I doubt it,” said Lundstrom.

“If there’s any shortage in my equipment there’s been pilfering, that’s what. A man can’t watch everything.”

“Just keep quiet a minute, Captain,” said Lundstrom. He picked up one of the bottles and looked at it closely. On its base was stamped, “Made in U.S.A.” He lifted the suitcase, and inspected its workmanship. The suitcase was new, unscuffed, of top-grade leather, hand-finished, and unquestionably expensive. It was a very unusual piece of luggage. Pressed into the leather Lundstrom saw a name, Brno. “B-r-n-o,” Lundstrom spelled it out. “Ever hear of it? What’s it stand for?”

“B-r-n-o,” Jesse repeated. “Maybe it’s the initials of the manufacturer.” He tried pronouncing it. “Brno,” he said, and repeated, “Brno,” and magically the sound opened a door deep in his memory, and he knew the answer. “Brno isn’t the name of the manufacturer,” he said. “Brno is a town in Czechoslovakia. I’ve seen it—from twenty-five thousand feet. It’s on a river. We used to use it as a check point on some of our long strikes.”

Lundstrom’s fingers were gripping the edge of the suitcase as if it were a throat. “They do make nice leather goods in Czechoslovakia, don’t they?” he said, and looked at Cusack in an entirely different manner.

“Yes,” Jesse said. “Nice leather goods, but they haven’t sold any in this country in a long, long time.”

Cusack didn’t understand what these officers were talking about, but he

didn't like the way they stared at him, like he was a poison snake and smelled bad to boot. He didn't like the way that major's one eye bored into him. Once before, in a bar in Morgantown, he had seen two cops look at a man like that. The man had killed another cop. Cusack remembered, in detail, what the two cops had done to the man before they carried him away. "Colonel, sir," Cusack said to Lundstrom, "if it's thermos bottles you're after, I can take you to a whole lot of 'em."

Lundstrom was puzzled. This interrogation was making less and less sense. "Where?" he asked.

"Right in my room, sir. My roommate always keeps thermos bottles in his closet." The fear that he might be accusing Stan of something he hadn't done at all hit him. He added, "You see, he drinks a lot of coffee."

"Remember the Cottontails," Jesse said.

"Do you think—"

"Perfectly possible. They're certainly the right size."

"All right, Cusack," said the colonel, "where are you billeted?"

"In Barracks Thirty-seven, sir."

"Where's your roommate now?"

"At the mess hall, sir. Working. You see, it was him who wanted me to swap shifts. Usually he's off Friday and Saturday nights, but this week he wanted Thursday night off—that's really the graveyard shift Friday morning—and I swapped."

Lundstrom drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly. "He didn't, by any chance, have that green-and-white Chevvy Thursday night, did he?"

"I don't know, sir," Cusack said. "You see, it belongs to his girl. Betty Jo isn't my girl. She's Stan's. It just so happens that she couldn't find me a date tonight, and I was over at her house, and she asked me—"

"Never mind," said Lundstrom. "Let's go over to Thirty-seven. You come with me, Major Price. And you, Fischer. The rest of you stay here. We don't want any mob scene."

They drove in Lundstrom's staff sedan to the barracks. One airman was awake. Clad in pajama bottoms, and probably suffering from insomnia, he was reading through a stack of magazines in the recreation room. He glanced up, curiously, as Cusack led them upstairs. He started to ask a question, noted the colonel's eagles, and decided against it. With brass prowling around, it was best to keep your nose in a magazine and hope that the flap was none of your concern.

The closet of Cusack's roommate, Colonel Lundstrom noted, was immaculate, everything there and everything in its place, as a good soldier's should be. Dress shirts and jackets were clean and properly hung, chevrons neatly sewed. Trousers properly pressed. The shoes on the floor gleamed and

were aligned straight as a squad at right dress. In a corner, behind the shoes and hidden by the shadow of the trousers, stood two thermos bottles. They should not have been there.

Lundstrom said, "There they are."

Cusack looked and said, "Say, there were five this morning."

Lundstrom leaned over and picked up one of the bottles. He cradled it gingerly, like a man holding a new-born baby for the first time, in both hands. It was quite heavy, about as heavy as if filled with liquid. He shook it gently close to his ear. Nobody heard any liquid slosh around.

Fischer said, "Don't try to open it, sir. It could be booby-trapped. Let me take it over to ordnance and go into it from the rear. I had a course in stuff like this. Anti-sabotage."

"You take this one, I'll keep the other," said Lundstrom.

Fischer took the bottle. He understood that the colonel was keeping the other in case something happened to this one, and to him. Fischer said, "I'll do it as fast as I can, sir, with safety. Then I'll come back."

"Okay, Lieutenant," Lundstrom said. "Don't trip. Take it easy."

Jesse looked at his watch: 0415. Between 0530 and six o'clock, he guessed, the flight line would send over to the mess hall for box lunches for twelve morning missions. "How long will it take?" he asked.

Fischer was already out of the door. He turned and said, "Thirty to forty-five minutes, I hope."

After Fischer was gone Lundstrom turned to Cusack. "All right," he said, "sit down there on the bed and tell me everything you know about your roommate—what's his name?"

"Smith, sir. Stanley Smith."

The name clattered into Jesse's ears. "Colonel," he said, "did you see that dispatch about the FBI from SAC, the one just in a while ago?"

"Yes," Lundstrom said. "I saw it. And I've been thinking of it for some time. There's his name, right there, stencilled on the edge of his blanket."

For the first time Jesse noticed the blanket. It was, he thought, the difference in training. Thereafter, as Cusack talked, he kept silent. Cusack told everything he knew. That was apparent. It was little, but negative intelligence is also useful.

At five o'clock Lieutenant Fischer returned. There were lines of white close to his nose and under his lips, and his face was strained as if he had been running. Yet he was not breathing hard. In his hands he held a bundle wrapped in an oily length of cloth. He placed this cloth on Smith's bed, and unfolded it. The thermos bottle was there, in pieces, but there was no glass tubing, and the insides did not look at all as a thermos should look. Among the pieces was a small bellows, a tiny box, two tiny batteries, and a solid cylinder that looked

like a roll of Boston brown bread, before baking. “There it is,” said Fischer, touching the cylinder with his fingertip. “About the same explosive power as a one-fifty-five howitzer shell. Maybe a little more.”

Lundstrom said, “We’ll go back to administration. This is going to take a little planning. We’ve got to rig a little plant. I want to nail him in the act. Kuhn can give us his kitchen layout and S.O.P. Jess, you’ll handle communications and the alert, right? Do it in Conklin’s name, or mine, if you want. I’ll take the responsibility.”

“Right,” Jesse said. “Let’s get back. I’ve got a lot of work to do.”

In the staff car, Fischer had to ask Jesse a question. “Don’t you want to see us take him?”

“I certainly do,” Jesse said. “Nothing I’d like better. But I won’t have time. This isn’t the only base in the Air Force.”

“I’d forgotten,” Fischer said. He now knew the difference between a very senior staff major and a very junior lieutenant.

## 5

By the time Jesse Price was back at his desk he had in his mind a partial priority of calls to make and messages to send, and what subsequent action to take and recommend later. He was aware that the list would expand as the situation developed.

He first called Buddy Conklin and told him, quickly, that something big was happening, and to get down to the office right away. This was all he dared say, through a switchboard. It was not impossible that Smith had an accomplice on the base, perhaps in communications, perhaps in the staff itself. It was now 0505. It might be an hour before Lundstrom made his arrest. He could not risk a leak.

He sat at a typewriter and wrote a message, urgent operational priority, top secret, to SAC headquarters. *TO COMMANDING GENERAL FROM COMMANDER HIBISCUS—HAVE DISCOVERED PRESSURE BOMBS IN THERMOS BOTTLES OF TYPE PUT ABOARD STRATEGIC BOMBERS WITH FLIGHT LUNCHES. EXPECT ARREST OF SABOTEUR SHORTLY. SUBMIT THAT ALL BASES BE NOTIFIED TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS.*

Captain Challon had heard Price’s end of the conversation with General Conklin, and now Challon stood at his side, expectantly. But Jesse did not instantly act. He rolled the message out of the typewriter and re-read it, wondering whether he was justified, for the sake of saving a few seconds or even minutes, in assuming Buddy Conklin’s rank and authority and sending it. He had no precedent for such a crisis. Or had he? What did the co-pilot do when a radical decision, involving the safety of the aircraft, was necessary and

the pilot was back in the fuselage using the relief tube? The co-pilot made the decision. The worst thing a man could do was freeze at the controls. “Captain,” Jesse said, handing the message to Challon, “you leg this to the communications center yourself and see that it gets off immediately. And wait there until it’s acknowledged.”

Challon read the message on the way to the door, skipped once, awkwardly, and broke into a run down the corridor.

Jesse knew that wasn’t enough. You always had to allow for human frailty. A teletype operator catching a nap in the dead, unpeopled hours before the dawn; a messenger dawdling between offices, unaware of the importance of the slip of paper he carried; a duty officer away from his desk to answer a call of nature—any of these ordinary events, and others, could steal irretrievable minutes. At his hand was the Red Line phone. This was a direct line, equipped with scrambler, to the switchboard of SAC’s command post in Omaha. There was a Red Line phone in the offices of the commanding officer and his deputy on every continental base of the Strategic Air Command. It was for use only in absolute emergency. Jesse picked up this phone. The SAC operator in Omaha, sounding wide awake, put him through without question to the field at Lake Charles, and then to Corpus Christi. He was committed now. His hands were firm on the controls.

He had been in time. The morning missions from Lake Charles were already rolling on the runways. They would be recalled before or immediately after takeoff. In Texas, the morning missions were not scheduled for another hour.

Jesse then flashed the Red Line operator and asked for the SAC duty officer. He was told that his teletype message had been received and was already being relayed to all bases, overseas as well as on the continent. The SAC duty officer, a major like himself, but obviously a bit rattled, wondered whether he should get the SAC commanding general, a man of explosive temper, out of bed.

“I certainly would,” Jesse advised him, “and right now.”

“I guess I’ll have to,” the other man said, and hung up. He sounded unhappy.

At this moment the light on the intercom flashed and a voice said: “Tower to officer commanding.”

“Major Price,” Jesse said. “Go ahead.”

“Sir, we’ve got a request from a private plane to make an emergency landing.”

“Oh, goddamn!” Jesse said.

It would have to happen now. Unauthorized landings of any kind were forbidden on SAC bases. When it happened, passengers and crew were

welcomed by the muzzles of machine guns. It was an axiom of airline pilots that it was better to ditch in the sea than crash land on a SAC runway. Hyperbole, perhaps, but it conveyed the general idea. At any other moment, the security detail on the line knew how to handle a stray aircraft, but Jesse realized that Colonel Lundstrom had other plans for his Air Police on this morning. Jesse flicked the key on the intercom and shouted, "Tell him to go away!"

"I did!" said Tower. "I told him to go on to Tampa or Orlando Municipal. He said he couldn't. He hasn't got the altitude."

"Who's he?"

"He's a dual-engined Beech. Some oil company job. Pilot, co-pilot, and four big executives. Been down on the Keys, prospecting. For sailfish, I guess. He's lost one engine and he's only got eight hundred feet and he says he's got to land. He's coming in over the south end of Runway Three now and he says he wants to make it on this pass."

Whatever happened, Jesse knew he wasn't going to let the cripple foul up Lundstrom's arrangements. There wasn't going to be any alert, and jeeps racing out, and sirens screaming. He wasn't going to kill the six men in that cripple but he wasn't going to make it easy for them either. Later they could bitch to the Secretary of Air, but now he was just going to put them on ice. "Tell them they have permission to land, Tower. Then they're to brake and get off the runway. They aren't to approach the line, or the hangars. Nobody's to leave the plane. Anybody steps out of that aircraft, he's dead."

Jesse closed the key and opened another, to the security shack on the flight line. A Lieutenant Marble identified himself. "This is Major Price, acting exec," Jesse said. "There's a Beech with an engine out coming in on Runway Three. I've cleared it for emergency landing. I want you to get two men—just two—out there. People in the Beech have orders to clear the runway and not get out of the plane. I don't want that plane near the hangars or the line. They're supposed to have a crew of two and four passengers. Have your two men hold them out on the lot until you hear from me."

Lieutenant Marble said, "Just two men? That's dangerous, sir."

"You heard me."

"I'd like to have that order in writing."

"You'll get it. Now I don't want any big flap, any alert. I just want two of your men to get that Beech out of my hair."

"It may be one of those goddamn Special Investigations penetration stunts. I'll get reamed if they jump my men."

"You won't get reamed. I will. Get going."

Jesse looked at the clock: 0516. That damn' cripple had cost him at least three minutes. Where was Conklin? What was holding him up? Had this been

an ordinary morning, the Beech coming in through the darkness would have absorbed all his thought. He brushed it aside, now, as probably of no importance. Just so, when making your final run on the target, it was possible to forget flak batteries the instant you were past them.

He concentrated on his next move. It was best not to call Operations, or make any changes in scheduled missions. That would come later, but meanwhile he must do nothing to disturb normal routine, lest the man named Smith become frightened or suspicious. Also, Lundstrom would be acting on the assumption that preparations for the morning missions would proceed as scheduled, just as he would assume the flight line's Air Police would be available.

Now Jesse faced a problem of logistics. He had twelve B-99's out on the line, their wings packed with fuel, every engine and instrument tested for takeoff, the crews no doubt aboard, and engaged in pre-flight checks. Yet they were as harmless, except for defensive armament, as New York—Miami transports. Within an hour—perhaps in less time—he would know something, one way or another. He looked at the clock again: 0518. Where in hell was Buddy Conklin? How long would it take to bomb up? Two hours, perhaps, and every minute wasted now was an extra minute the twelve 99's would be earthbound. Who had the power to bring out the bombs? Maybe he did. He would find out.

He roused from sleep the elderly colonel in charge of the special weapons magazine. The magazine was simply a concrete bunker, air-conditioned and with internal temperature maintained at a constant level, buried in the ground under a bright green carpet of rye grass behind the ordnance building. Here the bombs slept. In a space no larger than a three-car garage was enough primordial power to sink Florida.

Jesse identified himself and said, "I am speaking for General Conklin. Colonel, this is a war alert. Can you break out twelve supers?" The supers at Hibiscus had a plutonium trigger, hydrogen core, and natural uranium casing. The trigger alone was a bomb with five times the power of that first one, the one that levelled Hiroshima. The yield of the supers at Hibiscus was fifteen megatons, about the same as the one tested in the Pacific in 1954. Blast and heat would destroy everything within fifteen miles of ground zero. Used above land, the supers would spread lethal radioactivity over an area of at least seven thousand square miles. Used on a seaport, the effect might be considerably greater, because salt water would be converted into radiosodium and radiochloride, and this deadly mist would shroud an area larger, but not exactly calculated. These were considered nominal supers.

The colonel said, "I can break out the supers. How soon do you plan to bomb up?" He asked the question as casually as if he had been invited to

cocktails, and wished to know the hour.

“Can you have them ready in an hour?”

“They’re ready now. But my crew is sleeping. I think I can make it in an hour, all right. By the way, is this really it?”

“It is either it, or close to it. We’ll know soon.” Jesse put down the phone and told Captain Challon, “Call General Conklin’s house. See if he’s on the way.”

He was adjusting his mind to his next move when the colonel in charge of special weapons called back. The colonel said, “Just checking. Just wanted to be sure it wasn’t a hoax. I’ll have the supers on the flight line in an hour. Loaded on dollies. On the hard stands.”

“Thanks, Colonel,” Jesse said. When the chips were down, all of SAC could move in a hurry. It was always like that. Even an old colonel could behave like he had a rocket in his tail. What next? Men. For maximum effort, Hibiscus had not enough crews. Many pilots had been dispatched to New Mexico and Arizona to bring in the second-line aircraft. He was reasonably certain, now, that the older planes would not be needed. The B-99 was proved a sound aircraft. The missing aircrews would be needed, and soon. He sent messages to the reserve bases ordering the Hibiscus men home at once.

Challon said, “The general’s wife said he left home at least ten minutes ago.”

So something must be wrong with Buddy. Maybe Buddy Conklin had moved too fast. Maybe Buddy was on the way to the base hospital. Jesse decided not to call the car pool, or Air Police. Everything must proceed as usual. No rumors of unusual activity must reach the mess hall. He started replanning the morning mission. The crews, already briefed for a milk run to southern California and back, would have to change their thinking in a hurry. Whatever happened, he was sure they would be flying east, not west. The moment for which they had been trained and conditioned for years—for some, ever since graduation from high school or college—was close. For the crewmen, the change would not come as too radical a shock. A day rarely passed during which they were not reminded that they could expect it that day, or the next. It would simply mean a shift of map cases, a new flight plan, reconsideration of load, course, and distance, and a real bomb instead of a concrete dummy. Of course it would also mean anticipation of sudden death, but for this they had been conditioned also, as deeply as men could be.

For their wives it would be different. If their wives had awakened when their men woke, they had already kissed them goodbye, not without fear, because of the previous B-99 disasters, but still fairly confident that their men would be home for a late dinner. Sometime later in the day, when the news broke, the wives would know that their men might never come home at all.



Now what? He messaged Limestone, Maine, asking them to prepare to load tankers for possible rendezvous with 99's from Hibiscus. The people at Limestone would have seen the first message from SAC, and very likely would soon get orders from SAC, but he wanted to be certain that the Hibiscus bombers, which had a chance to be first away from the continent, would not lack fuel if it was decided to send them on to enemy targets. At least Limestone would know what was being planned, although they would have to get the execute signal from higher headquarters later.

He looked up at the clock: 0522. He swung in his chair to call Challon, and Buddy Conklin came into the office, hatless, hair uncombed, no insignia of rank on his open shirt, dripping sweat and with his hands and face smudged with grease. "The damn' car!" he said. "Sorry it took me so long. Choked gas line. That damn' car is a lemon."

Jesse told him what had happened, and what he had done thus far, realizing as he spoke how much authority he had assumed, for an acting executive officer. Even with Lundstrom's backing, he wondered whether he had gone overboard.

Conklin said, "Good going, Jess. As soon as we hear from the mess hall I want this base out of bed. Condition One alert. Have you told the A-2 to break out the assigned target maps?"

"Damn it, no," Jesse said. "I forgot."

"That's okay. I'll handle it. We'll consider the twelve planes of today's mission as our first striking group. I want the whole Five-nineteenth Wing to go as a second wave by ten o'clock." He turned to Challon. "Get my staff in here. No, don't use those phones. Those are going to be busy."

## 6

Except for Ciocci's inquiry about the reappearing thermos bottles, for Smith the first five hours of his shift had been without event. He was thankful that only one more night of strain lay ahead, assuming he was able to get rid of his three bombs this morning. He was glad that it would soon be over, and he began to wonder about plans for the future. If something big happened Monday, as he expected, he must be careful to avoid the chaos. He wondered, without emotion, what would happen to Betty Jo. He would not see her again unless he discovered he needed the car. At five o'clock he went into the kitchen, ran bread through the slicers, and began making up sandwiches for flight lunches.

Ciocci, taking one of the new men at gin rummy across the meat block, said, "Say, Stan, you're pretty ambitious, ain't you? What d'you think we're going to do? Feed the whole Air Force?"

Smith said, "I heard a couple of officers talking. Twelve missions set up for this morning."

"Twelve? No fooling. I'll be with you in a minute." Ciocchi turned back to his hand. A few minutes later the phone rang, and he answered it. It was the flight line. Twelve missions, just like Smith said. The detail from the flight line would be over to pick up the lunches at about six. Ciocchi quit the gin rummy game and began preparing the cardboard cartons.

At six o'clock the detail had not yet shown up, but at that time Colonel Lundstrom and Major Click came into the mess hall, seated themselves at the table closest to the kitchen, and asked for scrambled eggs. Ciocchi assigned a man to serve them.

At 0603 two jeeps from wing pulled up at the kitchen door, and the lieutenant and two sergeants from the flight line came in for the flight lunches. On this morning there was another lieutenant, dark and stringy, with them. Forty-eight flight lunches would make quite a load, and in Smith's mind this accounted for the extra jeep and extra lieutenant.

As always, the lieutenant counted the flight lunches and paid for them with the chits collected from the offices of the aircrews. Then he said, "I'm not sure I counted right. You sure there are forty-eight?"

Ciocchi began to count the boxes again, and Smith, at his side, checked the count. Neither noticed Colonel Lundstrom and Major Click peering through the glass in the door to the mess hall.

"I make it forty-eight, right," said Ciocchi.

"Forty-eight," said Smith.

The lieutenant looked at his list. "Now about coffee," he said. "Three coffees." Ciocchi noted that the lieutenant's hands were trembling, as if with morning jitters after a big night.

Smith reached up and selected three bottles from the thermos shelf. He picked the three closest to the wall. "Here you are, sir," he said. "Good and hot."

At this point there was a slight variation in the detail's usual behavior. The second lieutenant, the strange one, stepped forward and accepted the thermos bottles. Two of them he handed to the security officer from wing. The third one he held close to his ear and shook gently, as if to judge its fullness. Then he nodded, as if confirming an unspoken remark, and looked over their heads towards the door. Ciocchi turned his head in time to see the colonel from Washington, and Major Click, charge through the door towards him.

Not until the strange lieutenant waggled the thermos close to his ear did Smith have any intimation of anything unusual, and even this gesture did not cause comprehensive alarm. But when the lieutenant nodded to someone behind Smith's back, he sensed a dangerous situation, although his mind could

not instantly adjust itself to knowledge that he was trapped. Just before he landed from the submarine, in June of the previous year, the high-ranking MVD official had called him and the three others into the captain's cabin. He had presented each of them with metal-cased capsules, long as the tip of his little finger. "In case you are taken, and interrogation and torture is probable," the MVD man had told them, "this is an easy and quick and painless way out of it."

Now he was in deep trouble, but long ago Smith had flushed the capsule down a toilet. To keep it, he had felt, would be an inner admission of the possibility of failure. Besides, if it came to the touch, he had a better and quicker way of dying—and carrying his enemies with him. There were two fuses in the thermos. One could be activated only by air pressure, but the second activated instantly if the top was unscrewed. The second fuse was an obvious precaution. Without it, an airman might unscrew the top before necessary altitude was reached, and find the bottle contained no coffee. With the second fuse, the thermos was not only a bomb, but an ingenious booby trap. Smith reached out his hand and said, casually, "Say, maybe I gave you the wrong bottle. Let's see it, Lieutenant."

The lieutenant made no move.

Fingers hard and painful as metal tongs clamped on Smith's arm and he was spun around to face a wide-shouldered colonel, the one who never slept, with a wild look in his eyes. Smith recognized the look of killing, having seen it several times before. Smith was fascinated by this look, and he never saw the blow coming. His next conscious realization was that he was under the wooden worktable, the left side of his face was numb, and that he was scrambling and clawing to get up. A slap on the ear knocked him to his hands and knees again and set his head to ringing dizzily. He looked around at a fence of braced legs and poised feet. Slowly, certain that a shoe would crash into his face, bracing himself for the blow, he crawled out from under the table.

He heard the colonel say, "All right, stand up, you son of a bitch."

Smith stood up, shielding his face with his arms, expecting to be hit again. Nobody touched him. Incongruously, his thoughts returned again to the submarine, and the last thing Karl Schiller, the German navigator, had told him. He had asked Schiller about the eight Germans who during the Fatherland War were landed on the same beach, and Schiller had replied, cheerful, gruesome, and truthful, "They were all caught and executed." It had been a lousy thing to say.

He saw that they were not going to hit him, and he lowered his arms. They simply stood in a circle, quiet and deadly as a noose, and stared at him as if he were not human. He wanted to tell them he was no disgusting traitor. He was an officer of the Red Army, performing his assigned duties. He decided to

keep still, at least for the time being. He would not open his mouth. The activities and lives of three others depended upon his silence. Being soft and knowing nothing of total war, the Americans would not torture him. And he might yet escape. Monday was coming. Something big was bound to happen.

The colonel nodded to the tall lieutenant. "We'll take this man to the guardroom in administration. He doesn't believe it, but he's going to sing like a bird."

Smith knew what this meant, in American slang. He was determined not to sing, not a note.

## 7

Buddy Conklin was in his own office, and Jesse was with him, when Lundstrom called from the mess hall. "General," Lundstrom said, "we nailed him. In the act. With three more gadgets. Know what I'm talking about? Price has filled you in, hasn't he?"

"Sure. Congratulations."

"He'll fry. He'll fry but he won't talk. Not yet, anyway. Won't even answer to his name. I'm bringing him over to the guardroom. I'm going to work on him. Any news from the other bases?"

"Nothing yet. But there'll be hell in the kitchens," Conklin said. "Bring that bastard over. When I have time, I want to take a good look at him."

Conklin put down the phone and Jesse said, "I guess that's the whistle for the kickoff, isn't it?"

"That's it. I'm going to call Operations and order the first wave to start bombing up. They ought to be off by oh-eight-hundred. What about the Five-Nineteenth wing?"

"They'll be ready by ten," Jesse said. "They've already started pre-flight briefing."

For the first time in many days Conklin smiled. Uncertainty and fear had been routed. Now everyone knew what to do. "The first wave will go with target maps but without orders," he said. "They keep on heading north until they reach Gander. If they don't get orders sooner they'll get them there, I hope. Anyway, a dispatch came in from Limestone saying they have authority to give us in-flight refuelling, anywhere along the route. I'm going to ask Limestone to have their tankers rendezvous with our Nine-Nines at Gander, so if any of our planes malfunction in fuelling they'll have a place to light. If nothing has happened by the time they get to Gander I'll send them on to Thule, and they can top off from tankers there. Whatever happens we'll have a striking force, loaded, in the air, and in the north. That's as good a break as anybody could ask, starting cold like this."

Conklin called a sergeant and dictated a message to SAC. The saboteur at Hibiscus, Airman 2/c Stanley Smith, had been caught with three pressure bombs in his possession. By 1000, one whole wing plus twelve planes, armed with thermonuclear weapons and briefed for targets long ago assigned, would be in the air.

Now SAC's commander was on the job. Almost at once his reply dropped on Conklin's desk. "*YOUR ACTION AFFIRMED. CONGRATULATIONS.*"

At 0757 Jess was watching from Buddy Conklin's double picture windows as the first of the twelve B-99's, originally scheduled for the milk run to California, took off. The muted thunder of their engines, and the grace of their lifting wings, set his heart to pounding. War could be exciting, and even beautiful, if you could black out the end result. This would be no milk run. If they were sent on all the way—and Jesse was quite certain they would go all the way—they would encounter fighters, flak batteries, a whole family of inhuman guided missiles to be repulsed only by inhuman means, and perhaps weapons of which they had heard nothing and against which they could present no defense. But there was also a chance that they would all get through. If these twelve all got through, they alone would likely be enough. They would turn a sizable fraction of earth into a segment of hell. There was no past war in history that they alone could not have decided in an hour.

Jesse was still at work an hour later, and the B-99's of the 519th Wing were being towed to the runways, one by one, when another message came in from SAC. An airman named Johnson had been caught with pressure bombs in his possession at Lake Charles, had crushed a metal vial filled with cyanide between his teeth, and had died before he could be questioned. At Corpus Christi another, Masters, had been taken. Masters had tried to kill himself in the same manner, but his guards had prevented it. Why Masters' guards were alert was not explained. Masters was now engaged in making a confession. He had already implicated a fourth man, whose name he gave as Gregg Palmer. All bases were urged to be on the lookout for Palmer, to comb their rosters and their kitchens. All four men, according to Masters' confession, were officers of the Red Army or Air Force.

As Jesse read this message, his eye felt jumpy. He could not focus it properly on the yellow teletype paper. His eye wouldn't steady, and neither would his mind. He could not force himself to concentrate. When you possessed one eye only, it could get badly overworked. It was likely to rebel, and since it was the only eye you had, it was necessary to coddle it. He laid his head in the crook of his arm to relax for a moment. Four men, he thought. Four men fitted that warning from the FBI.

It could have been a minute later, or an hour, that he realized someone was shaking his shoulder. Conklin's voice said, "Come on, Jess, wake up."

Price lifted his head and opened his bloodshot eye.

“What about that private plane sitting out on the field?” Conklin asked. “Security wants to know when the passengers can get out. Security says they’re fuming. Any reason to keep ’em out there, Jess?”

“No. No reason at all,” Jesse said. He shook his head to make his brain come to life, as you shake a stopped watch. “I’m sorry. Forgot all about them.”

“I guess you’ve had it for a while,” Conklin said. “I’ll take care of them. You get some rest because I’m going to need you later. My driver will take you to the BOQ.

“Okay,” Jesse said. “A little nap and a shower and I’ll be fresh.” He walked down to the first floor of administration and noticed a knot of airmen in front of the Air Police guardroom. The prisoner would be in there. He had to take a look at the man. He wasn’t too tired for that.

Jesse pushed his way through the group of curious airmen, a guard came to attention and saluted, and he walked inside. The man was under the floodlight in the interrogation room, seated. He was being questioned by Lundstrom and Fischer. Jesse recognized the blond, handsome, gray-eyed airman who several times had served him since he had been on the base. This was Smith. Except for a purpling eye, the man was unmarked.

Excessive fatigue can act as a drug. It can relieve a man of his senses. Perhaps it was the fatigue, or perhaps he thought again of Dinky, his friend whom this man had murdered. Jesse interrupted the interrogation by attempting to strangle Smith. Later, he could remember the whole episode only vaguely. He could not remember saying anything, or doing anything except that he walked into the circle of light and grasped Smith’s throat in his hands.

Lundstrom and Fischer pulled him off, with difficulty. They held Jesse against the whitewashed wall until they felt him relax, and he said, “Okay, okay. Lost my head.”

“I’d like to feed him to you, Jess,” Lundstrom said, releasing his arms, “but right now he’s mine.”

“Talk yet?” Jesse asked.

“Won’t even tell us his name.” Lundstrom turned on the prisoner. “Will you, Mr. Smith?”

Smith looked up, woodenly, one hand over his throat. His windpipe was bruised, and he was gasping. Momentarily, he had felt fear. It would be a shame to die now, Smith thought, almost on the eve of the attack certain to come. If he could only hold them off until Monday, everything might change. It would be smart, now, to feign serious injury. That crazy one-eyed major had done him a favor. Still holding to his throat, Smith pitched face down on the floor.

Lieutenant Fischer bent down and rolled him over on his back. “Hadn’t I

better get a medic, sir?" Fischer asked.

"Yes," said Colonel Lundstrom. "Right away." He looked down at Smith's face and smiled. He reached over, picked Smith up by the armpits, and lifted him back into the chair. "You're going to get medical attention, all right, Mr. Smith, but it won't be exactly what you expect."

Smith closed his eyes and groaned and swayed. He didn't like the sound of the colonel's voice.

"You fellows don't think that you invented confessions, do you?" the colonel went on. "I understand that sometimes, in Russia, it takes a week to ten days to get a confession out of a man. But we're going to have a confession out of you about forty-five minutes after the doctor gets here. Oh, we could follow the Russian method. We could strip you naked and slap you around and prevent you from sleeping, but we haven't got time for that. Ever hear of sodium pentathol, Mr. Smith?"

Somewhere, Smith knew, he had heard of sodium pentathol, but he didn't exactly remember what it was. He would have to put on a good act, when the doctor arrived. He coughed, and tried to fall from the chair again, but the colonel's hand forced him back.

"Sodium pentathol is also called truth serum, Mr. Smith," Lundstrom said. "It'll make you feel wonderful. You'll soar like a bird, and you'll sing like one."

Smith opened his eyes and looked up, to search the colonel's face and see whether he was serious. This was wholly unfair, something worse than torture. The thought of being unable to control his tongue appalled him. So long as he could control his tongue he had a chance of living until Monday. He could stretch out an interrogation. He could lead this inhuman colonel into a hundred rhetorical cul-de-sacs. But he knew what would happen under an injection of truth serum. He would tell everything, quickly. Once he had told everything, somebody might decide to kill him, quickly. Smith spoke for the first time. "It is contrary to the laws of war to do anything like that. I am an officer of the Red Army."

They were silent.

"I demand to be treated as an officer!"

"Well, no," Lundstrom said. "You're either a traitor, or a spy, maybe both. You're in the wrong uniform, buster, to be treated as a Red officer."

A young flight surgeon came into the interrogation room. "I hear you've got a saboteur, and he had an accident," he said, smiling.

"Yes," Lundstrom said, "his neck got caught in Major Price's hands. He needs about seven and a half grains of sodium pentathol, and damn' fast. He wants to talk, but we haven't got time for lies or political lectures. Stick him, Doctor!"

Smith watched the flight surgeon bring a packet of hypodermic needles out of his bag. He felt dejected. Perhaps he was wrong about the Americans. Perhaps they knew more about warfare than a man would realize. Either that, or they were so lucky you could think they were smart. His sleeve was being rolled up, and he gritted his teeth as the needle thudded into his arm, not gently.

Jesse left them, reeling. He was too exhausted to call Katy.

## 8

Had it not been for one man, or rather one man's confidence in another man, the course of events and even the final result might have been different. The one man was Admiral Kitteredge, aboard the *Coral Sea*. When the admiral was ordered to load helicopters and sub-killing dive bombers instead of conventional jet bombers and fighters, and steam north, the admiral sensed a deeper disquiet in the Navy Department than the message text conveyed. To convert a powerful attack carrier, capable of strategic action against the enemy in distant waters, into an anti-submarine vessel was a drastic move. Kitteredge knew that a regular hunter-killer task force was just around the horn of the Florida Keys. What was the big rush? While the new loading was going on, the admiral went ashore to confer with Captain Clyde, the Mayport facilities commander. He especially wanted Clyde's opinion of the queer story told by a Marine of the landing a few miles down the coast. The admiral knew Clyde, who had served with him in battleships, as a level-headed, sagacious man. The admiral was aware that except for one slip, on the day of Pearl Harbor, Clyde might have been an admiral also.

Captain Clyde was convinced that the Marine was telling the truth. It was no hoax, he insisted. So the admiral also was convinced. They discussed other matters, going all the way back to the Swedish report of submarines clearing the Skaggerak. Assuming that this force was headed his way, and also assuming that the radar sighting of what could have been a flotilla of subs had been accurate, and the real thing, the admiral visualized where those submarines would be on the curve of the Atlantic at the moment. Then he returned to his ship and word-lashed his force into a loading frenzy. As a result, *Coral Sea* and escorting destroyers were able to sortie from Mayport three hours ahead of the Navy Department's optimum hour for sailing. Once in the open ocean, Kitteredge had the *Coral Sea's* captain work up his ship to emergency speed, a most uneconomical effort not called for in his orders.

At first light on that Sunday, at a point three hundred miles off the Capes, he launched his helicopters. Thereafter the carrier and its destroyers and helicopters were able to probe an enormous swathe of ocean, more than a



hundred miles wide, its length limited only by the ships' speed.

The helicopters, in a scouting line stretching fifty miles on each flank of the carrier, behaved like bees darting from flower to white-capped flower, seeking nectar. Hovering close to the swells, they lowered a long proboscis of sound gear into the sea, listened for a few seconds for the stealthy beat of propellers beneath, and flew on to another sector.

Two hours after dawn one of the helicopters heard a new sound, something that should not have been there at all, the unmistakable murmur and hum of a submarine's props whirling under electric or atomic power, deep, very deep, and quite fast. This helicopter called *Coral Sea*, and the carrier launched four more of what the Navy calls eggbeaters or whirlybirds, and the less romantic Army calls choppers. Soon these, too, buzzed the area, dipping, listening, triangulating, obtaining an exact fix, exact course, exact speed.

With the contact confirmed and pinpointed, the admiral assigned one destroyer and two dive bombers to the kill, and did not tarry. Without being informed by Washington, he was aware that if this was an all-out attack, the largest enemy concentration would lie still to the north, closer to the industrial heart of the country. He was also aware that if such a concentration existed, he had caught it off base, a day and a night's run from the coast. But he must be quick. With darkness, his most efficient hours for killing would end.

At almost the same time that *Coral Sea* radioed news of its first contact to Washington, the accounts of what had happened at Hibiscus, Lake Charles, and Corpus Christi exploded in the Pentagon. The Navy was convinced. The plan for defense against submarine attack, involving all ships and naval planes and blimps on both coasts, went into effect. The search for B-99 survivors was abruptly dropped. Now it was proven that the bombers had been blown up, further search for survivors seemed hopeless. Besides, in wartime, casualties can be accepted, and this was already regarded as war.

## 9

On Sunday morning it was Katharine Hume's custom to sleep late and breakfast on waffles, and it was the same in the Gresham household, and this Sunday was no different. Still in pajamas, she joined Margaret Gresham in the kitchen at ten o'clock. "Red's not here," Margaret said. "I don't know what happened to him. He wasn't due to fly today. If there was an alert, or anything, they'd call him, and I didn't hear the phone ring."

"I did," Katy said. "At least I think I did. I didn't get up because I only heard it ring once."

"Red must have answered," Margaret said. She looked around the kitchen. There were no dirty dishes beside the sink, or crumbs on the table. She lifted

the silvered percolator. It was cold, and empty. “He didn’t eat any breakfast. Maybe he had an early golf date and ate at the O Club.”

Katy knew that Margaret was expressing a hope rather than a belief, and she was glad Jess was no longer a pilot. It must be hell to wake up in the morning and not know whether your husband was playing golf, five minutes drive away, or a thousand miles out over the Atlantic, fifty thousand feet up, and sitting thirty feet from an H-bomb. “Maybe,” she said, but Margaret wasn’t listening. Her ears were tuned to something else.

The cluster of houses for married officers, alike as the aircraft they flew except for roof colors and shrubbery, was three miles from the flight line, and outside the glass-shattering takeoff zone, and yet the sound of air activity was always with them. After a time the ear grew calloused to the distant din of multi-jets, and sealed off the sound entirely, just as the city dweller’s ear ignores traffic noises, and the farmer never hears his own chickens. Now, Katy was aware of a change in the sound from the runways, a change in intensity, in volume, in urgency. Katy didn’t know what it meant, but Margaret did.

“A whole wing is going off,” Margaret said. “I guess I won’t see Red today.” She plugged in the waffle iron and began to mix batter. “You know what they do to us sometimes? They scramble the whole wing, or even the whole division, and the men don’t know whether it’s the real thing or not until they’re up in the air.” She looked at Katy. “You don’t think this could be the real thing, do you?”

“I don’t know,” Katy said, and thought of her brother, Clint, who would be with Red Gresham. She had no doubt, now, that there had been an alert, but she could not say this to Margaret, without also giving the reasons for her belief.

The radio in the kitchen was on, giving out Sunday music, more subdued than weekday music. The bright Florida sun stained the table, and outside the window poinsettias nodded their gaudy heads against the screen, as always at Christmas. The radio, like the thrum of the jets, ordinarily was an unobtrusive background. You were never aware of it until it changed its pattern. The music faded and the pattern changed. An announcer’s voice uttered that inevitable preamble to news of disaster, “We interrupt this program . . .”

They stood perfectly still, Margaret with a pitcher in one hand, spilling a trickle of batter on the smoking griddle.

“. . . to bring you a news flash from Washington. General Thomas Keatton, Chief-of-Staff of the Air Force, has just announced that the mysterious loss of nine B-99 bombers of the Strategic Air Command has been solved. According to General Keatton, all were destroyed by acts of sabotage committed by officers of the Red Army and Air Force. Three saboteurs have been captured. One of these has killed himself. Two others are now making a full confession.

We will bring you further details as soon as they are received.”

Margaret Gresham turned off the electric waffle iron and set down the pitcher. There was no doubt at all, now, of the whereabouts of her husband. “Please excuse me, Katy,” she said. “I don’t feel hungry.”

“Neither do I,” Katharine said. Having a brother out there was bad, too.

## nine

THERE WAS very little music on the air the rest of that day. Television was cut off entirely, and all radio shifted to the Conelrad stations, designed to confuse incoming bombers, but a crude World War II device at best, of no use against modern radar. And of course V-2 type rockets, fired from submarines, needed neither radio on which to home, nor radar to see, for their course and destination were pre-set.

At ten-eight Katharine and Margaret Gresham were listening when the Navy announced that three enemy submarines had been attacked and probably destroyed in the Atlantic, and another in the Pacific four hundred miles off Seattle. Other contacts had been reported.

At intervals, thereafter, the radio repeated orders from service heads for all soldiers, sailors, and airmen off duty or on leave to report to their stations and bases and ships at once. Katharine felt that she had to call Jess. She had to know what was going on. Knowing nothing of what had occurred at Hibiscus during the night and early morning, she guessed that he had returned to the BOQ at two or three in the morning, slept for a few hours, and been awakened again when Clint was routed out of bed for the alert. So he would be back in Air Division headquarters, either in Conklin's office or at the exec desk. She went into the hallway and picked up the telephone and asked the base operator for headquarters.

"Is this an official call?" the operator snapped.

"No, but—"

"Sorry." The phone clicked. So she was cut off from it. She was, after all, only a woman, a woman without duties, of no use in this emergency. She returned to the kitchen and found Margaret Gresham using a dish towel on her face. But not crying, not openly. "I tried to call Jess," Katharine said. "They wouldn't put me through."

"We'll just have to wait," Margaret said, "and listen."

Ten minutes later the Director of Civil Defense spoke. While no enemy aircraft had been sighted on any of the polar approaches to North America, and

the situation was still unclear, he felt it his duty to order the evacuation of the ninety-two primary target cities. He hoped everyone would keep calm and listen to the President's words. The President would speak to the nation at noon.

Katharine opened the kitchen door and looked up. She could count four B-99's wheeling and climbing against the clean blue sky, and she could hear others. Clint and Red Gresham might be in one of those planes, but she had no way of knowing. Otherwise, she could detect nothing unusual. Two children left the house next door and mounted bicycles, careful not to dirty their Sunday clothes. Their mother, probably, had not turned on the radio that morning, so, for her, life proceeded as usual. The whole country, she supposed, was in a sense like an enormous battlefield. One person could see only a miniscule part of it, and that imperfectly. Margaret called, "I guess we might as well eat. It's going to be a long day."

Commander Stephen Batt was in a position to know more. He had driven to Washington early that morning, expecting something, and something had happened. He had gone to the liaison office of the Eastern Sea Frontier, which he judged would be a quickly spurting fountainhead of information on any action at sea. Again, he was right. Patrol bombers, blimps from Lakehurst, Brunswick, and Key West, shore-based dive bombers, and all available surface craft were speeding out to sweep the Eastern Approaches. The carrier *Shangri-La*, just arrived in Boston to give the crew Christmas leave after a month in Arctic waters, turned around and raced out to sea with half a crew. It took on helicopters and key personnel at a rendezvous two hundred miles offshore, a feat which Batt suggested and helped arrange. The hunter-killer task force vacated the Gulf, rounded Key West, and streaked northeast.

Even in the Pentagon it was difficult to grasp the scope of events that followed the Civil Defense Director's suggestion that the principal cities be evacuated. Of course no one kept calm, and yet the panic that had been feared, and expected, failed to develop. Since it was Sunday, the cities were already empty of commuters. It was Christmas vacation, with children home from school, and so the mindless terror that results when families are disunited in time of crisis was not a problem. When the news came, no business was being conducted except the sale of Christmas trees, gasoline, and Sunday papers. Families were either at home, at church, or on the highways.

Everything that could move on four wheels took to the roads, but this happened, on a lesser scale, on every bright Sunday, even in winter, providing the day was not too cold. There was simply more Sunday driving, and more exasperating traffic jams, than on any other Sunday in history.

Two million people tried to get off Manhattan Island at approximately the same moment, and by all previous estimates this should have resulted in

disaster and carnage. But it was Sunday, and a transportation system capable of handling three or four millions in the weekday rush hours, while momentarily flustered, was not disorganized or strangled. Within a few hours the highways radiating from the New York area were black with refugee armies.

It was the countryside, not the cities, that suffered heavily. The city dwellers, in cars, trucks, busses, riding bicycles, and afoot, moved across the landscape like hordes of locusts or migrating army ants. Stocks of food vanished from the roadside inns and diners, then from suburban super-markets, and finally from the most remote country stores. The smarter owners and managers of grocery and hardware stores opened their doors and disposed of their stock in a manner more or less orderly. In some communities windows were smashed and there was looting, for there is a lawless element that waits to prey on its fellow humans in any disaster. Remembering the shortages of the World War II, housewives bought up all the cigarettes and coffee they could find. Whisky almost instantly was selling at a premium, and so were shovels. Millions were digging in.

When the President spoke at noon, no one was so busy in flight that he did not listen. The President said there was no doubt an attack on the United States was underway. He declared Martial Law.

He said he believed the attack would fail, for the enemy had been caught off balance. Each hour brought news of contacts with submarines, and their destruction. The battle going on was taking place far at sea.

The Navy had taken precautions against strange surface craft invading the harbors. All ports had been closed except to military traffic and ferries.

He emphasized that no bombs had yet fallen on American soil, and he was confident that bombers could not penetrate the Continental Air Defense screen to the north.

But his words were directed to the Kremlin as well as to the people. Cable communications to Moscow were dead, and he had not heard from the American embassy all morning. Therefore he felt it necessary to supplement normal diplomatic communications.

“More than half the long-range bombers of the Strategic Air Command are now aloft,” he said. “Some are now within striking range of the Russian cities. They are armed with thermonuclear weapons that can utterly destroy the Soviet Union.”

The world heard the President pause. “We have another weapon,” he continued. “It is called the Intercontinental Ballistics Missile, or ICBM. It is a rocket. Combined with the H-bomb, it is the ultimate weapon. It cannot be shot down. It cannot be deflected from its path by electronics. Fired from this continent, it can reach and obliterate an enemy target city within forty minutes. We have several batteries of such rockets—we call them the Atlas I—

emplaced and aimed. One is now aimed at Moscow.

“If there is no capitulation within a reasonable time—I should think three hours is reasonable—there will be no Moscow. Shortly thereafter, there will be no Russia.”

The President’s revelation, in a sense, was hopeful. But millions, listening in their cars, or in strange farmhouses far from their warm and familiar apartments and homes in the cities, or stubbornly remaining in those cities to guard those homes, asked a question:

“Why not now? Why wait? It’s a war, isn’t it? Why give them a chance?”

## 2

It was already night in Russia when it was noon in Washington. There had been no hint to the Russian people, naturally, of imminent war. Clark Simmons, ever since the first bulletins came in from Hibiscus, had been sitting at his short-wave receiver in the library of his home in Chevy Chase, listening to Radio Moscow. While the President was speaking at noon, Radio Moscow was broadcasting a speech by the Minister of Agriculture, praising certain Heroes of the Land on the collective farms in Kazakhstan.

For forty-five minutes thereafter Radio Moscow maintained its regular programs and then, without explanation, went off the air. Simmons leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and tried to analyze, from his knowledge and experience, what was occurring in the Kremlin. Later, he learned that in part he was right.

The world outside could not guess, but a chill such as comes with a wind from the steppes had swept through Russian cities. Not all Russians were listening to the Minister of Agriculture. A few, at the moment the President spoke, were listening to the Voice of America and the BBC, which re-broadcast his speech from the powerful transmitters in London. In a land where news has been censored, suppressed, and juggled for generations, the whisper supplements and sometimes replaces newspaper and radio. In time of crisis this is invariably true.

In Moscow the whisper spread through a family, and then ran like a flash fire through a whole building. Suddenly all the telephone exchanges were clogged with private calls. It was the same in Leningrad, Kiev, Chita, Alma-Ata, Stalingrad, Vladivostok, all the great cities, the target cities.

Strangely, in view of the absolute threat, there was no mass evacuation of these cities. The people of Russia had never been allowed to contemplate the possibility. The rule of the Presidium was omnipotent, the Red soldier and airman invincible. Error by the high command was unthinkable, and it would be an error if American planes could reach the cities. Thus it must always be in

the monolithic state. Thus it had been in Nazi Germany, when Goering had said, "If one British bomb falls on Berlin, you can call me Meyer." So to speak of America's mastery of the new weapons, or the possibility of enforced flight, was defeatism. It was not allowed. People who spoke of evacuation were subversive, and enemies of the state. In the Russian cities the civil populations could only wait in dumb fear, without guidance.

Even had the Kremlin planned evacuation, it could not have been carried out. The skeletal communications system, wretched transport, and lack of housing and feeding facilities in the countryside would not permit an evacuation—not in the Russian winter.

It was this knowledge that nothing could be saved in the Russian cities—not even people—that may have brought action in the Kremlin. Exactly what transpired in its stone labyrinths may never be known, any more than it will be known, exactly, what occurred on the night that Beria was seized and executed, or the day that Stalin's nine doctors were arrested and put to torture, or the day that Malenkov humbled himself, lived, and fell. There are few elder statesmen and former premiers in Russia, and no publication of frank and truthful memoirs.

Radio Moscow fell silent for twenty-three minutes. When it resumed broadcasting there was no explanation of having been off the air, but the voice was different. Clark Simmons, listening intently in Washington, realized that Radio Moscow had changed announcers. Knowing how a shift in government is often extended even to the lowest echelon, in so vital an instrument of policy as the state radio, he understood its significance.

The new announcer approached his subject in an oblique manner, which was to be expected. The government was considering certain changes in foreign policy, of great importance. Everyone was urged to keep tuned for an announcement later.

Then Radio Moscow was silent again.

Thirty-five minutes later it resumed broadcasting, this time through the voice of still another announcer. Not only had the policies of the government been changed, this third announcer said, but there had been changes in the membership of the Presidium as well. Except for two deputy premiers, all former members of the Presidium had resigned. There was a new Premier—he named a marshal whose name had vanished from the public prints weeks before.

The Premier's first act had been to express his hopes for peace. In addition, he announced that all forces then engaged in maneuvers were being recalled. The new Premier admitted that the unhappy disposition of these forces had provided unchallengeable grounds for hostile action. All Red Navy ships adjacent to North American waters had been ordered back to home ports, and



the Red Air Force had been ordered to remain on the ground.

This was as close as the Kremlin could come to surrender without losing complete control of the Russian masses, Clark Simmons knew. He deduced that there had been two revolts within the Kremlin. The first had been a division within the Presidium itself. The second, more definitive, had been the rebellion of the Red Army against Party domination.

Simmons decided to drive to New State and report for duty. He felt there was a chance that they might find his knowledge useful.

### 3

The President had not left the White House. According to his calculations and the Navy's, danger to his personal safety could not develop before Monday morning, unless enemy planes were sighted at the DEW line. In such an eventuality the executive departments would disperse out of Washington. He and his personal staffs would retire to an underground command post a safe distance from the capital. There were two such shelters, each the center of an elaborate communications network, reserved for presidential use. One had been used in the Civil Defense rehearsals for evacuation. Its location was supposed to be secret, but of course it wasn't. The location of the second, more distant from Washington, was actually secret, and it was from this second command post that he would continue his functions as Commander-in-Chief, when the time came. On the south lawn helicopters were waiting, their rotors slowly churning.

Now the President sat at his desk in the oval office of the administrative wing, watching the minutes jump up on his electric clock. The office was vast as a small ballroom, and often seemed to him a place awesome and lonely as a haunted wood, but now there was no empty space there. With him in this room were the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the members of the National Security Council, and the Director of Central Intelligence. And others, many others, but these others, while men of prestige and importance in their own spheres, were silent, unimportant, merging gray-white with the ivory panelling of the walls. Later they would tell their children and grandchildren that they had been present, and perhaps describe the scene in articles and books, explaining exactly what really happened. They would magnify their part in it, as the years passed, which is the way of politicians, statesmen, generals, and plain people, but in fact they played no part at all. The Constitution of the United States is so shaped that in a moment of supreme emergency all the responsibility, and therefore all the power, rushes into the hand and heart of one man.

Messages arrived steadily, were passed from hand to hand by the President's secretaries and assistants, winnowed down to the most urgent and

critical. These alone found their way to the President's desk.

One such message was brought in by the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, typed on a single sheet of paper. The President read it, read it again, frowned, and wished it weren't there. But it was there, and having reached his desk at this moment had become part of history. It could not be ignored, or ever forgotten. But with a clean, clear decision to make in exactly one hour and eighteen minutes, it complicated his task immeasurably. His responsibility now embraced not only the people of the United States, but the world.

Moscow's second broadcast, swiftly translated, reached him at once. He read it, looked up to witness the relentless march of the minutes, and shook his head. "That's not enough," he said. "Those submarines have got to be surrendered."

Navy spoke. "I'd rather not have those submarines any closer to our coast than they are right now."

"Can't they be boarded at sea?"

"Yes, we can board them at sea. It's possible, but risky. Even if they're ordered to surrender, how do we know all their skippers will comply? And, sir, it'd only take one. Some fanatic captain might be willing to trade his life and his command for New York, and maybe Washington too."

"So we let them get back to Russia?"

"No, sir! I want to sink 'em!"

A general spoke, a four-star general who had fought Germans and Italians for four years on the battlefields of Africa and Europe, and fought the Russians for ten across conference tables in Berlin and Vienna. "Sir," he said, "we've got a lock on them. We can hit them where they live, safely. We've caught their fleet at sea. Their planes must be massed on their bases. All we have to do is proceed according to plan. We can smear every base, every industrial complex, once and for all." The general's voice cracked. He could not contain his anger and emotion. He held out his fists, clenched. "We can eliminate them, now and forever. That is self-preservation, sir. Our children can live in peace."

The President watched another minute die. He had fifty-four minutes left. He lit a cigarette, and discovered that one was already burning in his ash tray, a fluted white clamshell bedded in gold, a token from the Japanese Emperor. A present from the Emperor, long ago, in appreciation of America's forbearance in victory. For the past year, at his wife's insistence, the President had limited himself to five cigarettes daily. Now he had smoked, or at least puffed on, at least thirty since he awoke with the news from Hibiscus at seven-fifteen that morning. He looked at the clock again. It was 2:09. It was his moment of decision. He said, "We can't do it."

He ground out both cigarettes, not heeding the rustle of surprise, the quick drawing of breath, that in the aggregate became a gasp, of the others in the office. "We can't do it because if we killed Russia we might also kill the United States. We might kill everybody. I mean literally. I have this memorandum from the Atomic Energy Commission." He picked it up and allowed it to flutter back to his desk. It was a pretty late hour to be getting something like this, he thought. But he knew government. It always took a crisis to blast out a difficult decision. He could imagine that they had argued about this memorandum for months, perhaps years, in the AEC. Probably not all the scientists agreed with it, or all five commissioners thought it properly worded. Probably there was dissent. But a majority had felt that they could not allow him to act until he had seen this caveat. They had unloaded the responsibility on him. That's the way it always was, and always would be. It was the terrible price of the presidency. Responsibility was the silent assassin whose permanent home was the White House. A minute flipped. They all expected him to say more. They expected an explanation.

"You all know," he said, "that for many years we have conducted very extensive research into the effects of excessive radiation, short range and long. At one time or another we've had at least forty scientific groups, in universities and foundations, look into it. I have just received a warning that an attack such as we have mounted, and are prepared to deliver, will not only eliminate Russia as a power, but will make a large part of Europe and Asia uninhabitable for months, perhaps for years. That's not all. An attack of this sort will endanger life everywhere in the world. Oh, not instantly. Not all in a day, or a generation. The general speaks of his children. I am thinking of his children's children as well. I have to. And any lesser attack, not completely crushing, would expose us to reprisal." He turned his head until his eyes found a blue uniform among the officers clustered at the right of his desk. "Is that not true, General Keatton?"

Keatton was not prepared for the question, but he knew the answer. It had been reached, in staff studies, long ago. "That is true, Mr. President," he replied at once. "We have to hit 'em everywhere, or nowhere. If we fail to eliminate all their bases we are bound to lose cities. A second attack, and perhaps a third, would be necessary."

"Gentlemen," the President said, "I'm not going to pull the trigger."

Later, the President often wondered what it was in the memorandum that had allowed him to decide so quickly, and with so little hesitation, and with certainty of rightness. He thought it was the sentence about radiostrontium, an uncommon chemical of fantastic toxicity which would be one of the awful by-products of the supers. A ten-megaton bomb would produce only three pounds of radiostrontium. But a tiny fraction of an ounce, scattered over a square mile,

would cause bone tumors in humans. It would contaminate the soil and be dangerous for years. He could not bring himself to spread a cancerous cloud around the earth, or sow cancer on any part of it.

#### 4

So there never was an X-Day, or a D-Day, or an H-Hour. The cities lived.

The remnants of the Russian submarine flotilla that had been ambushed by *Coral Sea* retired across the Atlantic. By no means all the Russian submarine strength was contacted, so it was assumed that this flotilla had been en route to southern targets. The main body, following, remained unseen and unscathed.

The bombers of the 519th Wing went as far as Thule. There they landed and remained for several weeks. In the redistribution of SAC's strength, bombers were kept aloft, prepared to strike, day and night.

There were casualties. As many people were killed in the evacuation as would ordinarily die on the highways, and by crimes of violence, on a long summer holiday, such as when July 4 falls on a Monday.

It was necessary to postpone the celebration of Christmas, in most homes, until New Year's. Millions of families, out of food and gas, were stranded in distant towns and villages Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Millions slept in barns, in their cars, in warehouses, railroad stations, and jails. Others were more fortunate, and for a few days lived in luxury and pleasant surroundings such as they had never enjoyed before. Country clubs and resort hotels suddenly discovered they were catering to the masses, free.

Hundreds of thousands from Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Washington, and Richmond had fled to the Cumberlands and Shenandoahs. Of these a lucky hundred or so discovered the Walback lodge near Front Royal. Their host at first had been hostile, actually threatening them with a rifle. But when he saw how many they were, and how determined, he admitted them. At the lodge they had everything they needed for their comfort and pleasure, just as if Walback had been preparing his place for such an emergency. Some of his guests were so impressed with his hospitality that when they left they took with them souvenirs, such as silver spoons and forks, heirlooms fashioned by Kirk of Baltimore, that were more than a hundred years old.

After their last guest departed, the Walbacks returned to Washington. It was early January by then, and the country was pretty well back to normal. Henrietta Walback never tired of telling of her experiences and hardships, when she had been forced to entertain the rabble.

Business quickly restored itself, since people had to work to live. Congress met and approved the President's action, although a minority faction would always contend that he had been weak and soft.

The two captured saboteurs were tried and executed. Stanislaus Lazinoff, alias Stanley Smith, requested that he be allowed to die before a firing squad, as befitted an officer of the Red Army. His request was denied. He was tried for murder, not espionage or treason. He was electrocuted at the state prison in Raiford, Florida, with five witnesses. There were no flowers. *Pravda* and *Izvestia* applauded the executions, branding the saboteurs tools of the previous criminal regime.

Gregg Palmer, the missing man of the four, was never found. Hunting for Palmer was almost as difficult as hunting for a Smith. Felix Fromburg, detailed to the search for six months, was sure that Palmer had never joined the Air Force. It was Fromburg's opinion that Palmer was the shrewdest of the four. Finding himself in the United States with \$40,000 in cash, he had considered the odds carefully and decided to take his chances with the West. He had discarded his synthetic identity and adopted another, and now was lost among 160,000,000 citizens as completely as a single drop of water in a broad lake. Perhaps he had married, bought a farm or business, and joined the Kiwanis Club. It was anybody's guess. Fromburg felt he would never be found, for his training in Little Chicago had fitted him superbly to mix with the population.

Betty Jo Atkins was questioned, and testified at Smith's trial. She was fearful that he would curse or rage at her publicly, and was puzzled and then angered by his complete indifference. During the trial he seemed bored, and when she testified glanced at her only once, and in contempt. Actually, Betty Jo benefited considerably from her relationship with Smith. She was paid a thousand dollars to sign her name to her memoirs for a confession magazine, and another five hundred to appear on a television show, and she regained possession of the green-and-white Chevrolet.

PFC Henry Hazen was promoted to corporal.

Clark Simmons was picked as one of the members of an inspection team to visit Russia. Agreement on methods for complete inspection of all armaments production, nuclear weapons, and military strength, seemed really promising, after the years of futile palavering. The Geneva Spirit revived, and everyone hoped that this thaw was permanent.

Colonel Cragley again resigned from the Army and resumed his teaching at Charlottesville.

Steve Batt repaired the hole in his game room, at considerable cost, and was advanced forty numbers towards his captaincy.

Jesse Price remained at Hibiscus on Conklin's staff. Conklin recommended his promotion to full colonel, skipping the intermediate grade, and he was sure the SAC commanding general, and Keatton, would approve. In an Air Force where crewless rockets were replacing planes, a pilot's eyesight would be of little importance, since pilots were obsolescent.

The Intentions of the Enemy Group remained dissolved, to General Clumb's satisfaction. But General Clumb himself was uprooted from the Pentagon and exiled to a desert post in Arizona to superintend the storage and care of obsolete tanks and armored cars.

Katharine Hume wrote the AEC that she was remaining at Hibiscus, on annual leave. Nobody seemed to have missed her.

One night, in the new year, Jesse took Katharine to dinner in the city. The place was noisy, the Florida lobster tougher and stringier than usual. It was not the atmosphere he wanted. Rather abruptly, he suggested they return to the base.

On the drive back to Hibiscus she nestled close to him, saying little, as if she expected him to say much. But traffic was heavy, and with only one eye it was necessary for him to concentrate on driving.

Once on the base he drove to the O Club. It was crowded, for the 519th Wing was newly returned from Greenland, and happily thawing out. Jesse and Katharine had one drink, avoided a dozen gay groups, and he led her back to the car. They drove to a quiet lane near the golf course. Three other cars were parked there before them. He turned back, and drove past the hangars and across concrete to the fence protecting the flight line. The 99's stood there, moonlight on their wings, the wings drooping like great birds roosted for the night.

"Pretty, aren't they?" he said.

She dropped her head against his arm. "Yes they are, now."

He kissed her. "This will have to do for our romantic place," he said. "It's the only romantic place left around here. Ready to get married?"

"I've been ready." She was thoughtful for a moment. "Some people think the President was too soft. Men may think that, but not women. I know he was right. If we'd erased Russia, I don't know that I'd be so anxious to get married. Years ago a fellow wrote a story about all the men being sterilized by a big nuclear explosion. If there had been a war, I don't think anything so quick and simple would have happened. It would have been much worse. A big bang, and then a long, long whimper."

"Time of troubles," Jesse said. "Very dangerous time. Know what I'm worried about? What happens if they get parity in the ICBM? What happens if they won't disarm?"

She said, "I'm not going to worry now. I'm glad I live in this time. Time of troubles, yes. But also a time of decision. What we do, counts. Just think, Jess, all the generations to come are going to look back at us and say, 'That was some generation!' We're only beginning to learn about nuclear energy. Wait until we harness the meson, and learn all there is to know about cosmic rays. Do you know what we're doing, Jess? We're groping our way out of a dark

age. And I want to be part of it. I want to reach for the sun.”

His hand tightened on her shoulder. “You don’t want to go back to the AEC, do you, Katy? You know, I’ll be on duty here for at least two years. Maybe I can get Washington duty after that. But who knows?”

“It really is a time of decision, isn’t it?” she said.

“I guess it is,” said Jesse. “Housewife on Hibiscus Base or scientist for the AEC.”

She ruffled his hair and pushed his head. “Don’t be silly!” she said. “I’m staying here. We’ll get married in the base chapel. Jess—”

“Yes?”

“A full colonel rates a pretty big house, doesn’t he?”

“Four bedrooms, two baths, and study.”

“Big enough so I could have a little workroom, a little lab?”

“Sure,” he said. “Anything you want, so long as it doesn’t interfere with the next generation.”

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Forbidden Area* by Harry Hart Frank (as Pat Frank)]