The Brigade

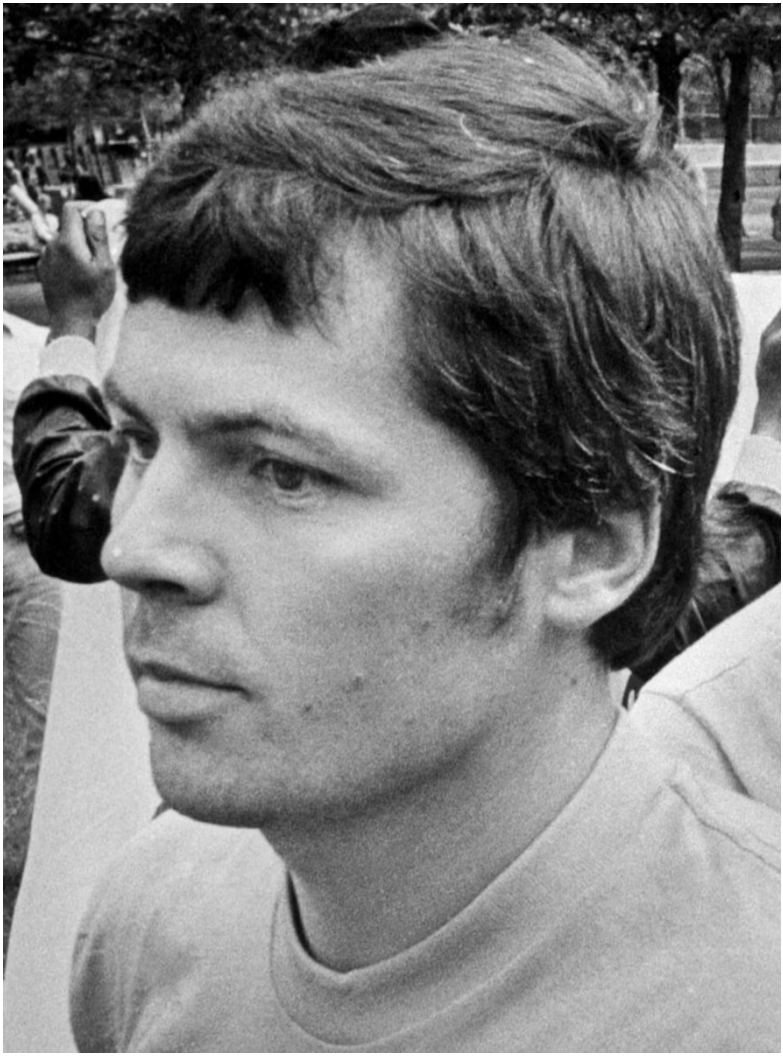
The Brigade

H.A. Covington

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Bob Mathews

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It is a very rare thing for a novel to be written by a committee, but to a certain extent, that's what happened with *The Brigade.* There are a lot of people, too many to name, who read the sample chapters over a period of eighteen months, and who deserve an expression of gratitude for their time, effort, constructive criticism, and input. Besides the multitude of readers involved, it is an unfortunate fact that in the present paranoid political climate in America, it may well be dangerous for me publicly to acknowledge their contributions.

However, I simply can't resist giving kudos to a few people without whom this book would not have been written. We're not in a position to give medals yet, so this will have to do. The first comrades who require homage are the Secret Six who kept a roof over my head while I was writing the book. You know who you are. Marcus the Computermeister kept my ancient machine functioning and sprang for updated software that has proven invaluable. Finally, I want to thank my three proofreaders Cinda Haupt, Matt Krause, and Joe Ryncarz, who took a first draft that was little short of gibberish and made it readable.

Whatever effect this book may have on future events, and on the hearts and minds of our people, the credit is by no means mine alone. I don't know what to say, except thank you all.

—H. A. Covington

Glossary of Northwest Acronyms and Terms

N. B. This glossary also applies to the previous three Northwest novels: ***A Distant Thunder, A Mighty Fortress,*** and ***The Hill of the Ravens***. Certain terms may not appear in all of the books.

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God—Christian hymn written by Martin Luther. The national anthem of the Northwest American Republic.

Active Service Unit—The basic building block of the NVA paramilitary structure. Generally speaking, an active service unit was any team or affinity group of Northwest Volunteers engaged in armed struggle against the United States government. The largest active service units during the War of Independence were the flying columns *(q.v.)* that moved across the countryside in open insurrection. These could sometimes number as many as 75 or even 100 men. More usual was the urban team or crew ranging from four or five to no more than a dozen Volunteers. After a unit grew larger than seven or eight people, the logistics of movement and supply and also the risk of betrayal reached unacceptably high levels, and the cell would divide in two with each half going its separate way. Command and coordination between the units was often tenuous at best. The success and survival of an active service unit was often a matter of the old Viking adage: "Luck often enough will save a man, if his courage hold."

Aztlan—A semi-autonomous province of Mexico consisting of the old American states of southern and western Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, parts of Colorado, and southern California, below a line roughly parallel with the Mountain Gate border post.

BATFE—Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms and Explosives division of the United States Treasury Department. Used by the government in Washington D.C. to suppress many early right wing and racial nationalist groups and individuals. Unlike its more sophisticated counterpart the FBI, BATFE seldom resorted to such things as bribery, fabrication, or forgery to get convictions. All brawn and no brain, BATFE simply smashed their way into the homes of dissidents such as Kenyon Bellew and David Koresh and started shooting. Many of their agents later became Fatties when the FATPO *(q.v.)* superceded the old ATF organization at the beginning of the War of Independence. BATFE was declared a criminal organization by Parliament and any surviving members are subject to arrest, trial, and punishment if apprehended.

The Beast—Term similar in meaning to ZOG *(q.v.)* used initially by Christian Identity people to describe the federal government of the United States and the Zionist, liberal power structure in general. The expression later came into more widespread use among the Northwest American Republic's non-CI population.

Break Bad—An incident or encounter between the NVA and federal forces or other enemy agencies that turned violent.

Bremer Wall—Heavy concrete berm, portable and lowered into place by a crane, used by the Americans to fortify police stations, federal buildings, FATPO barracks, Green Zones, etc. Also used extensively by American occupation forces in conquered Middle Eastern countries.

Brigade—In the paramilitary organization of the Northwest Volunteer Army, a loose combination of all of the partisan units assigned to a specific geographic area. In the larger cities of the Homeland such as Seattle, Portland or Spokane there might be as many as two or three brigades, each operating independently of the others, so that a single catastrophic betrayal or federal assault could not wipe out the NVA in that metropolitan area. A brigade could comprise as many as two or three dozen active service units of various kinds and strengths, including technical, supply, and support teams. Some of the smaller brigades covering larger and more rural areas only had a few units. In actual practice there was always an immense amount of confusion and overlap in membership and function between units. As is the case with

any conflict, nothing about the War of Independence was ever as neatly cut and dried as the Republic's history books have portrayed.

BOSS—Bureau of State Security. The Northwest American Republic's political police. The mission of BOSS may be summed up simply in the five words of its motto: "We will never go back." In *The Hill of the Ravens* Don Redmond summarizes that mission when he says, "The revolution is forever. Our job is to make sure of that."

CI—Christian Identity. By the time of the writing of *The Hill of the Ravens*, the predominant Christian religious movement in the Republic. The faith of Pastor Richard Butler, Robert Miles, and many others among the founding fathers of the Northwest American Republic. The essence of Christian Identity is the transfer of God's Biblical covenant from the Jewish people to the Gentile or Aryan peoples through the medium of the Christ's Passion and the Crucifixion. In most Christian Identity sects this transfer is accompanied by a very complex (sometimes downright tortuous) theological construct whereby white people are alleged to be racial descendants of the Israelites of the Bible through the alleged wanderings of the Lost Tribes through Europe, Denmark being descended from the tribe of Dan, etc. However tenuous the historical and theological basis for Christian Identity, there can be no doubt of the spiritual strength and personal integrity that the CI faith imparts to its adherents. During the Time of Struggle and ever since, they have been the very backbone of the Northwest nation.

Centcom—During the War of Independence, Centcom was the central command authority of the American occupation forces, consisting of representatives from the executive and judicial branches of government, the FBI, Justice Department, Department of Homeland Security, etc.

Chug-Chug—Homemade mortar, often of unusual caliber, used by the NVA to attack fortified federal positions and Green Zones.

Code Duello—The official protocols and procedures governing dueling within the Republic, administered by the National Honor Court. The purpose of the Code Duello is to make sure that the ultimate sanction for personal misbehavior remains available to all the Republic's citizens, but only under very clear and formally recognized conditions. Ref. the Old Man: "One of

the problems under ZOG was that there was no longer any penalty attached to being an asshole. There needs to be."

Come Home—To immigrate to the Northwest American Republic. Since the NAR is the Homeland of all Indo-European peoples, a white immigrant is considered to have Come Home.

Daryl and His Other Brother Daryl—Defamatory term used by certain white migrants to the Homeland during pre-revolutionary times to denote white people born in rural areas of the Northwest. Considered rude, boorish, and highly discouraged by the Party both before and since the revolution.

DHS—Department of Homeland Security. One of the many overlapping federal political police agencies created under Bush II as part of the suspension of the United States Constitution and the abrogation of American civil liberties that took place following the events of September 11, 2001. The Department of Homeland Security seems to have done little during the time of the revolution beyond adding to the confusion.

DM—Drooling moron. Defamatory term used by certain white migrants during the pre-revolutionary times to denote white people born in rural areas of the Northwest Homeland. Always frowned upon and discouraged by the Party. Several legal cases are now before the National Honor Court to decide whether "DM" is to be considered a killing word or not.

E & E—Escape and evasion. Associated with General Order Number Eight, a.k.a. the "Feets Don't Fail Me Now" order. When an operation went bad, or when confronted with a federal ambush, extreme danger, or overwhelming enemy numbers, every NVA Volunteer had a personal escape and evasion plan, a series of refuges and safe houses to which they would flee and from which they would subsequently regroup. The underlying rationale of General Order Number Eight was the ancient one of all guerrilla forces: *He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day.*

E-Piece—Throwaway handgun used for close-in assassination work, usually of small caliber and cheap manufacture, which could be discarded afterwards without the loss of an expensive heavy-caliber weapon such as a Glock or a Colt .44.

Ex Gladio Libertas—The motto of the Northwest Volunteer Army, and later of the Northwest American Republic itself as an acknowledgement of the origin of the state. Literally translated: *Freedom comes from the sword.*

FATPO—Federal Anti-Terrorist Police Organization. A body of special auxiliary police officers recruited by the United States government to suppress the revolution in the Pacific Northwest, after the FBI and local authorities had clearly lost control and it was not deemed politically expedient to use the regular military in a significant role. FATPOs were mostly recruited from discharged members of the United States military, local police departments, and from both sides of the bars within the American empire's immense prison system. FATPOs were given a short but intensive training campaign at Fort Bragg combining counterinsurgency, commando and SWAT-team style tactics, along with heavy political indoctrination in diversity, multiculturalism, etc. Nominally subject to the Department of Homeland Security and the Justice Department, but in reality the government in D.C. was far away, and a blind eye was turned. Local FATPO commanders had a blank check and more or less operated as independent warlords in their districts, above the law so long as they produced a plentiful white body count. Discipline and control from Centcom was patchy at best, accountability was nil, atrocities frequent, media reporting of those atrocities almost non-existent, and any serious military purpose or strategy quickly disappeared. The FATPOs in short order became nothing more than gangs of brutal gun thugs devoted to the bloody suppression of the NVA and any white citizen of the Northwest whom they so much as suspected might be sympathetic to the NVA. Strict policies of affirmative action and mandatory diversity were applied, and at any given time the force was only about 35 percent white and perhaps 25 percent white male. There were an unknown but significant percentage of lesbian and homosexual sadists who mainly operated in the intelligence units of FATPO as interrogators, and who earned themselves a reputation as some of the most cruel and vicious torturers in the history of human tyranny.

FBI—Federal Bureau of Investigation. The American secret police. Still extant, although now less involved in Northwest affairs than their rivals of the Office of Northwest Recovery *(q.v.)* Declared a criminal organization by Parliament after independence. Any member of the FBI or anyone assisting the FBI is liable to arrest, trial, and punishment under the laws of the Republic.

Flying Column—During the War of Independence, an independent unit of partisans numbering from 30 to 100 Volunteers. These guerrilla units were usually based in rural areas throughout the Pacific Northwest, and operated in the countryside and small towns. They were highly mobile and conducted operations against the American forces, against the means of production, and cleared their operational areas of American law enforcement, judicial, and governmental institutions to make way for the Republic's courts, police, and government. Because of the activities of the flying columns, the United States eventually lost control of the countryside almost completely and could maintain its authority only in the cities, and there only through repressive force. There were over thirty flying columns during the course of the War of Independence. The most famous among them were the Olympic Flying Column (Cmdt. Thomas J. Murdock); the Port Townsend Flying Column (Cmdt. John C. Morgan); the Hayden Lake Flying Column (Cmdt. O.C. Oglevy); The Barbary Pirates (Arcata and Eureka, California district, Cmdt. Phil McDevitt); the Sawtooth Flying Column (Cmdt. Winston Wayne); the Corvallis Flying Column (Cmdt. Billy Basquine); the Montana Regulators (Cmdt. Jack Smith); and the Ellensburg Flying Column (Cmdt. David "Bloody Dave" Leach).

Goots—Derogatory and defamatory term used by native-born white people in the Northwest for racially conscious Aryan settlers who came into the Homeland during pre-revolutionary times. Origin unknown but possibly originated with Seattle disc jockey Ray Sheckstein.

Green Zone—Heavily fortified and secured federal or military headquarters area, sometimes encompassing several square miles. Green Zones were used as bases of operations and administration for American occupation forces in the Middle East and in the Pacific Northwest.

GUBU—Grotesque, unbelievable, bizarre, unprecedented. Slang term used to describe most activities of the Aryan resistance movement prior to the advent of the Northwest Migration concept, and regrettably for some time after that as well.

Gun Bunny—Adolescent female Northwest Volunteer or associate of the NVA. A number of these young women distinguished themselves in combat, intelligence, and support roles during the War of Independence.

GW—Kinetic energy firearms named after the renowned Texas gunsmith and engineer Gary Wilkerson, who invented a kinetic energy plate whereby the bullet is not propelled by a gunpowder-charged cartridge, but by a small kinetic energy charge from a metal power grid in the receiving group or bolt assembly of the weapon. Wilkerson KE technology is the basis for most NDF *(q.v.)* small arms.

Hats or Hat Squad—Semi-derogatory, pre-revolutionary term used by native-born white Northwesterners for Aryan settlers who answered the Old Man's call for migration. Refers to the eventual adoption of the fedora hat as the badge or insignia for Northwest settlers, at first of the Christian Identity faith, then later on the practice spread to migrants of all faiths.

It Takes A Village—Slang term for the Federal Child Protection and Welfare Act, passed during the first term of President Hillary Clinton. Basically, a form of legalized kidnapping of white children for purposes of social engineering and federal revenue enhancement. The name comes from a book written in the 1990s by Ms. Clinton when she was co-president. Based on the precedent of the Elian Gonzales case of 2000, the act gave the federal government the power to obtain legal custody over any child deemed to be "at risk" from any "undesirable or inappropriate home environment," terms which could, of course, mean whatever the local U.S. Attorney said they meant, and then place such children elsewhere. In actual practice the act was used to take advantage of the scarcity of healthy white infants and young children available for adoption by the wealthy, due to the declining white birth rate in the early 21st century. The only children deemed to be at risk under the act were white, from poor or politically incorrect families. Placement involved an adoption bond from the adopting parents, which could range from $100,000 for older children to as high as a million dollars for a healthy, blond-haired and blue or green-eyed female infant.

Longview Conference—The conference wherein the United States agreed to withdraw from the areas of the Northwest Homeland deemed to be "administratively untenable," i.e. effectively under NVA control. At that point in time this consisted of the states of Idaho, Oregon, Washington, parts of western Montana, and most of Wyoming.

NAR—Northwest American Republic. Nation established as a worldwide home for all persons of unmixed Aryan, that is to say white, non-Semitic,

European descent. The Northwest American Republic presently consists of the entire states of Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming as well as hefty chunks of northern California, western Montana, Alberta, and British Columbia.

National Socialism—The racial and political world view (*Weltanschaung* in German) of the philosopher, soldier, and statesman Adolf Hitler (1889-1945).

NBA—Northwest Broadcasting Authority. State body in charge of all broadcast communications and entertainment in the Northwest American Republic.

NDF—Northwest Defense Force. The combined land, sea, air and space commands of the NAR military. All male citizens of the Republic are required to serve in the NDF for a minimum of two years of active duty plus reserve requirements up until age 50.

NLS—National Labor Service. There is no welfare as such in the Northwest American Republic. Neither is there any unemployment. If no private sector jobs are available in a particular field or locality, the Labor Service steps in to provide employment, usually on public works of various kinds. Many Northwest workers choose to work for the NLS voluntarily.

NVA—Northwest Volunteer Army. Formed on October 22nd in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, in response to the murder of the Singer family. Predecessor to the NDF.

OBA—Old Believers Association. The official NAR organization of non-Christian religious groups including Asatru, the proto-NS Nordic Faith Movement, and some elements of Wicca and Druidic cultism.

Old Man—Early advocate of Northwest Migration and independence. Helped found the Party *(q.v.)* and served as a convenient figurehead for the independence movement during the War of Independence, although he always considered his role in the revolution to be very much exaggerated. Served two terms as State President and was able to stabilize and consolidate the gains of the revolution, but was effectively removed from power by President Patrick Brennan and the Pragmatic Tendency in Parliament because he was thought

to be a dangerously radical relic of the past. Presently President Emeritus of the Republic and living in seclusion. Suffers from dementia praecox due to his advanced age and is generally confused and incoherent. Has issues with ducks. [See *The Hill of the Ravens*.]

ONR—The United States Office of Northwest Recovery. Covert agency of the United States government devoted to the long-term goal of returning the Northwest Republic to the United States and Canada respectively. Regularly conducts assassinations, sabotage, and other subversive activities within the Northwest American Republic.

On the Bounce—NVA slang term for being on the run from the American police and military.

Operation Strikeout—Twelve years after the Longview Conference the United States and Canada, in conjunction with the United Nations, launched what they believed to be a surprise attack against the Northwest Republic, intending to re-conquer the Pacific Northwest and return the Homeland to American imperial rule. Due to superior intelligence on the part of BOSS *(q.v.)* and the War Prevention Bureau *(q.v.)* the attack was not the surprise that the Pentagon thought it would be. The Americans and Canadians were decisively defeated in a campaign lasting 46 days and large sections of northern California, Alberta, British Columbia and Alaska were added to the Republic's territory.

The Party—The fighting revolutionary Party of Northwest independence founded by the Old Man, once a sufficient number of racially aware migrants had arrived in the Homeland to effect the socio-political demographic change necessary to make such a Party feasible. Although the Party was comprised mostly of people who were native-born in the Northwest, it was made possible by the influx of racially aware migrants who listened to the Old Man's call and heeded it. Based upon the principles of National Socialism as expressed in the Cotswolds Declaration of 1962 and the Ten Principles of National Socialist Thought, yet offering a broad program of tolerance and participation for all Aryan religious and political tendencies, the Party provided the political leadership for the revolution, while the NVA provided the military capability.

Resurrection Shuffle—NVA term for going on the run, evading the Federal forces.

Rockwell, Commander George Lincoln (1918-1967)—American National Socialist leader. Founder of the American Nazi Party and the World Union of National Socialists.

Senior Citizens' Quality of Life Act—Passed during Hillary Clinton's second term as president. Allowed the euthanasia of elderly people in hospitals and nursing homes who, in the opinion of their physician, were "unlikely ever to achieve any quality of life or ability to live unassisted." The physician was required to consult with the senior's family before administering the fatal injection of sodium pentothal, or "hot shot," but these very broad parameters led to widespread abuse by physicians who wanted to lighten their workloads or who were susceptible to bribes from family members, and by families anxious to gain inheritance and insurance benefits. The vast majority of elderly people thus legally euthanized were white.

Shock and Awe—A customary tactic for NVA partisans lying in wait to ambush federal troops, police, news media, or other enemy personnel. The concealed Volunteers would suddenly explode in a precisely aimed, concentrated hail of gunfire on full automatic or other rapid fire technique, using armor piercing bullets, rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) etc. The object was to inflict as much damage as possible in the opening seconds of an encounter, disorienting and disabling enemy reaction, before a rapid withdrawal under cover of smoke grenades or other stratagems. Also known as the Mad Minute.

Spuckies—Derogatory and defamatory term used by local white people in the Northwest to denote racially conscious white settlers who came into the Homeland during pre-revolutionary times. Origin of this term unknown.

SS—Special Service. The NAR and the Party's élite military formation. Drawn from the top achievers of all the NDF branches, with naval, air, and space mobile wings. Highly trained and equipped with the most advanced equipment, the SS deliberately follows the traditions of its historic namesake of the Third Reich. The corps seeks to erase all differences and divisions of class, religion, and nationality, creating a true Aryan band of brothers. For this purpose, extensive political and racial education based on the principles of National Socialism is part and parcel of SS training and qualification.

Stukach—A Russian term meaning informer, dating from the time of Stalin and the hideous purges of the 1930s. How exactly this term entered the lexicon

of the Northwest American Republic is not certain. When applied to the family or person of a citizen, it is considered the ultimate insult, along with the words *whigger* and *attorney*. All three are considered to be killing words, i.e. prima facie casus belli under the law of the Republic for a duel to the death if the parties involved cannot be reconciled by formal procedures under the Code Duello.

Take The Gap—Broadly speaking, to Come Home. To immigrate to the Northwest American Republic. In practice, to "take the gap" generally connotes an illegal entry into the Homeland from the United States, Aztlan, Canada, or sometimes by air. "Taking the gap" often involves physically running the border under gunfire and pursuit.

Tickle—An operation of the Northwest Volunteer Army against a federal or Zionist target.

Third Section (Threesec)—Intelligence, counterintelligence, security and special operations department of the Party prior to 10/22 and during the War of Independence. Created by Matt Redmond, who served as Threesec's first director until his death. Organizational ancestor of both BOSS (q.v.) and War Prevention Bureau *(q.v.).*

Volunteer—A male or female soldier of the Northwest Volunteer Army.

Whigger—"White nigger." A defamatory term for whites during the pre-revolutionary time who aped the mannerisms, behavior, and subculture of blacks. Considered to be a killing word in the NAR, i.e. sufficient *casus belli* for a duel to the death if no compromise can be reached between the parties involved.

Whizz-Bang—Homemade rocket used by the NVA to attack fortified positions.

Woodchuck—Originally a term with defamatory and derogatory connotations used by Aryan settlers in the Homeland to denote those born in the Northwest, especially in rural areas. Now transmuted and claimed as a proud and honorable designation by those born in the Homeland.

WPB—The NAR's War Prevention Bureau. A covert agency designed to prevent the necessary military, political, and psychological conditions from

developing within the United States, Aztlan, or anywhere else that might lead to an existential military threat to the existence of the Northwest Republic, through the use of targeted assassination and other black ops. The WPB is also responsible for tracking down and liquidating spies and traitors to the Northwest Republic, including informers and traitors from the time of the War of Independence. Their motto in German is *"Alles bekennings wird abgerechnet."* (Translation: "All accounts will be settled.")

ZOG—Zionist Occupation Government. Term originally created by the obscure National Socialist writer Eric Thomson in the 1970s. Strictly construed, ZOG means the federal government of the United States. In actual usage it is a much more all-embracing term meaning the System, the Establishment, the generic "them" used by oppressed peoples to denote the federal tyrant.

St. Crispin's Day

This day is called the feast of Crispian:
He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
Will stand a tip-toe when the day is named,
And rouse him at the name of Crispian.
He that shall live this day, and see old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,
And say "To-morrow is Saint Crispian."
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars.
And say "These wounds I had on Crispin's day."
Old men forget: yet all shall be forgot,
But he'll remember with advantages
What feats he did that day. Then shall our names.
Familiar in his mouth as household words,
Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter,
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,
Be in their flowing cups freshly remember'd.
This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall n'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remember'd;
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition:
And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

King Henry V—Act IV, Scene 3

I

"I've Had Enough of What Ain't Right!"

Bleed, bleed, poor country!
Great tyranny, lay thou thy basis sure,
For goodness dare not check thee.
Wear thou thy wrongs, thy title is affear'd . . .

Macbeth—Act IV, Scene 3

"I'll do it," said Zack Hatfield.

"Do what?" asked his friend Charlie Washburn.

"Kill them," said Hatfield. "I'm going to kill both of those bitches."

The two of them were sitting on plastic-upholstered armchairs in the musty living room of Zack's cheap furnished apartment in Astoria, Oregon. Hatfield was a tall and rangy blond man in his late 20s. His muscles were lean and ropy, and his often scowling face was prematurely seamed from working outside in the cold and the wind, at whatever temporary labor jobs he could find in his hometown that hadn't been snapped up by Mexicans. Washburn was a heavy-set, blue-chinned man, a few years older, who had lost the battle of the bulge and who was beginning to lose the battle of the receding hairline. A third man sat on an old sofa with broken springs. He was a local hardware store owner in his late 50s named Lennart Ekstrom. His face was lean and chiseled, his moustache and mane of hair speckled with white, but thick. Washburn and Ekstrom looked at Hatfield in silence for a long moment. It did not occur to them to doubt that he meant what he said. They had known him all their lives, and they were familiar with his military record in

Iraq. There was no sound except for the patter of an early winter rain on the windows in the black darkness outside. "Jesus," said Charlie softly.

"I'll do it on my own if need be, although I could use some help," Hatfield told them. "If you're in, we'll talk about it. If not, I think it's best that you both clear out right now, and then we shouldn't see each other for a while. When we do, afterwards, nobody ever says anything about it. Not a word. Zip."

"Is there really no other way, Zack?" asked Ekstrom in a leaden voice.

It was a rhetorical question. All three of them knew there wasn't any other way.

* * *

Earlier that day, Zack Hatfield had been sitting in the visiting room of the Clatsop County jail. Not the open room with the tables and chairs for family visits, but the walled-in security chamber with a Plexiglas-separated cubicle equipped with telephones for communication, while a corrections officer loomed watchfully behind the prisoner he was there to see. Steven King's crime was one of the most serious on both the Oregon and the federal statute books, and under state regulations he had to be kept under the strict restraint and supervision.

Facing Hatfield behind the Plexiglas, King looked ghastly. The former manager of the Seaside store of a major grocery chain was not wearing the orange jumpsuit of American shame, but ragged garments with old-fashioned black and white stripes that for some reason had never fallen out of use in Clatsop. The communications phone he held limply in one quivering hand. His once cherubically handsome face was now fishbelly white and gaunt, with the remnants of a double chin and once chubby cheeks drooping loosely from his skull in wattled folds of skin. His brown hair hung in lank rat-tails from his head, and showed new streaks of white that hadn't been there a few weeks before. His horn-rimmed eyeglasses were taped together with a huge lump of Scotch tape at the hinge on the right side of his face. Hatfield decided against asking King how the breakage had come about, nor did his friend volunteer the information. Hatfield could guess in a general way what had happened, but he saw no need to hear this particular variation on the hideous American theme of a middle class white man suddenly hurled into the nightmare world of prison. Besides, King was so wrapped up in his own personal misery that beatings by whatever Mexican or meth-head had hurt him didn't even seem to figure in his mind. He appeared disconnected with his body, feeling only the endless suffering in his heart and in his soul. All he could do was to keep

coming back to the same refrain, over and over again, like an animal in a trap desperately trying to chew off its own leg in order to escape.

"How could she do this to me?" he moaned. "I *loved* her! I love her still, in spite of it all! I gave her everything I could, everything I had. Liddy and the girls were my whole world! I would have moved heaven and earth to make her happy. I don't understand. What did I do wrong?"

"You aren't the one who has done wrong, Steve," Zack told him. "But do you mean to tell me, honestly, that you never saw any of this coming? I did, and so did Charlie and Len and just about everybody else. Okay, maybe nothing this foul, but we all knew Liddy was going to break bad on you at some point in time. The storm warnings were all there. She was always so brittle, always the chip on her shoulder, always that odd little look in her eyes, creeping people out. Every time I was over at your house or we ever met anywhere, Liddy managed to find some way to twist the conversation around and force some kind of politically correct feminist or pro-fag crap in there like she was some kind of suburban Jane Fonda. The constant little needling remarks, always trying to get in people's faces, always trying to pick a fight with you even when there were other people present. The pseudo-intellectual airs, quoting from Sartre and Sylvia Plath and ancient Greeks as if she knew what the hell she was talking about, which I happen to be well-read enough on my own to know she didn't. Her inability to be happy. The so-called community activism that always seemed to involve helping somebody other than this community. You're telling me you never recognized the signs?"

"Oh, she was always like that, ever since she came back from the university," said King with a shrug. "I mean, what else do you expect from U of O? I just figured she rebelled against her religious upbringing when she went to college, trying to be chic and fit in, and then she just sort of never grew out of it. I actually used to think it was kind of cute, kind of her way of retaining her youth."

"Yeah, well, baby tarantulas grow up into big fucking poisonous spiders," Hatfield reminded him.

But King was back onto his old refrain. "*Why,* Zack? I just don't understand it. *Why?"* he went on in a monotone.

"Because it's expected of her," said Hatfield.

"What?"

"Tony tells me that Marie Campisi asked Liddy that very same question, why?" Hatfield went on. "She said because she was past 30 years old and it was time for her first divorce."

"She's planning on more?" asked King in a disconnected daze.

"Yah, apparently that's the big thing in all the feminist self-help and psychobabble books now. They call it life scheduling or some such shit," explained Hatfield. "The first marriage is for kids, which of course she always takes with her in the divorce settlement after soaking hubby number one for every penny she can. Apparently the lesbian thing is also something every truly liberated woman is supposed to schedule now. At least one major lesbo relationship in your life or else you're not a true Womyn. I think Pocahontas may be in for a shock, though. I actually looked that crap up on the internet, and after her lesbo fling, if she decides she prefers guys, Liddy is supposed to try to bag an older man who is very wealthy and who will most likely kick off by the time she's 45 and leave her set for life. Or a wealthy older dyke if she decides she wants to keep on munching carpet. I think all Ms. Proudfoot has to her name is a welfare check and a line of noble Native American Womyn crap."

"Woe-men?" repeated King.

Hatfield nodded. "That's the way fems write it. I think that's how it's pronounced. It's one of those PC shibboleths the media and the intelligentsia are trying to introduce into the language and make into an accepted and then mandatory term, like the word *Ms.* George Orwell wrote about it in *1984.* Newspeak. Mind control. Just like we have to say African-American instead of nigger. When a totalitarian society controls the language, controls the words that people use in speech, and punishes them for using any word or terminology other than the prescribed ones, eventually the whole population will be so afraid they'll start using the politically correct terms in their very thoughts, to make sure they don't blurt out some word that will make them lose their jobs or get them arrested for hatespeech. The state ends up controlling not just their behavior and their speech, but shaping and controlling their very thoughts. Any questioning of the politically correct orthodoxy becomes literally unthinkable, because we don't know how. We don't have the words for it. The United States has been aiming for that for years. Anyway, your life has to be destroyed because it fits into Liddy's life schedule, apparently. It's all about her, of course. You're a used component and now she's throwing you away."

"But if she wanted a divorce she didn't have to do—*this!"* King waved his hand around at the surrounding walls and Plexiglas. "Why *this?"*

"To make absolutely sure that she gets Caitlin and Judy," Hatfield replied patiently. He had explained the situation to King several times before, and so had his court-appointed attorney, but it was obvious that King simply could not yet wrap his mind around what was being done to him. "Under both

the federal hatecrime laws and the Oregon Diversity and Tolerance Act, any conviction for hatecrime or hatespeech automatically terminates a convicted offender's parental rights. If both parents are convicted, then It Takes A Village moves in and grabs the kids and sells them, but in this case, since Liddy can show that she is in what she will claim to be a stable lesbian relationship, once you're convicted she'll walk into family court and walk out 10 minutes later with Caitlin and Judy wrapped up in a bow, a present from the judge."

"All for *one single word?"* screamed King in horror. The walls were closing in on him and he was clearly beginning to go insane. "Just because I said *dyke?"*

"Hey, buddy, settle down!" snapped the guard behind him. "You're in enough trouble already! I'm a pretty laid back kind of guy, but it's my job to make sure you don't talk any more hateful stuff, and if someone hears you it will be my ass in the wringer and they'll slap another count on you!" He took the phone briefly from King's hand and said to Hatfield, "Sir, you've got five minutes left."

Hatfield ignored him, and when King got the phone back to his ear he went on. "Martha Proudfoot claims that you made her feel threatened because of her gender, her sexual orientation, and her race. I think she claims you said dyke squaw, actually. You're lucky the D.A. kept it in state court and so you're only looking at five years for the speech. If they'd gone federal with it they might claim that making the Proudfoot woman feel apprehensive was an act of hatefully-motivated assault, which they can do under the statute, and then they could hit you with actual hate *crime,* which is mandatory life, maybe without parole if the judge thinks you actually intended to strike her."

"Strike her?" laughed King bitterly. "My God, have you *seen* that creature? She's built like a bulldozer! I just lost my temper is all, when I walked into my living room and found them doing—dear Christ, what they were doing—I can't even talk about it!"

"The Chocolate Ritual," said Hatfield. "I know. It is supposed to be for bonding between female lovers. Most people have no idea of what homosexuals actually *do.* You were unlucky enough to get a crash course."

"The girls were upstairs!" whispered King in horror. "They were *upstairs,* Zack! How could Liddy do that with Caity and Judy upstairs? Not to mention the fact that they must have known I would be home any minute?"

"Oh, they knew," said Zack with an assured nod. "My guess is that they wanted to provoke exactly the kind of incident that occurred, so they could hang this hatespeech rap on you, and thereby Liddy gloms onto your daughters and the house and all your property. No messing around with alimony or

child support payments or constant trips back and forth to court. You'll be a certified hater. One bang of a judge's gavel and she gets the whole kit and kaboodle. I wonder what the Proudfoot woman's cut will be from that night's work? Steve, you know that the FBI had some child psychologist and a couple of agents in the other day and they grilled the girls for four or five hours?"

"Yeah, Pritkin, my lawyer, told me about that. Caitlin is six years old! Judy is four! What in God's name could they expect to get from children?" demanded King incredulously.

"Whatever Liddy coached them to say. But I did hear something interesting. I name no names, of course." He figured King could guess that he was referring to Len Ekstrom's daughter Christina, who was a police dispatcher in the Justice Center, but he didn't think it was a good idea to mention her anywhere her co-workers might hear her name in connection with a hatespeech case. "They asked the girls if you'd ever said any bad things about black people or Hispanic people as well as gay people, that kind of crap. This thing up in Idaho last month has them really freaked out and maximum paranoid. The Marines just recaptured Coeur d'Alene a few days ago, and the feds are seeing white supremacist rebels under every bed now. They asked your girls if they'd ever seen any flags in your house. Green, white, and blue ones."

"That's lunacy!" gasped King in shock.

"In case you hadn't noticed it, the people who rule us are lunatics. Among other things." Behind King the guard was holding up two fingers. "That's the two-minute warning."

"My life is over now, because I uttered a single word in anger," muttered King, still unable to comprehend the magnitude of his fall.

"Your life is over now, because you uttered a single word in anger," confirmed Hatfield.

"No one on earth will help me," King moaned.

Hatfield glanced up at the guard behind the broken man in the orange jumpsuit, uncertain as to how much the guard could hear of his end of the conversation. "No one on earth will help you," Hatfield repeated aloud. But before the guard led Steven King away, Zack caught his friend's eyes, and he winked.

Outside the jail, the rain was falling softly, steadily, and the light was already fading. Zack pulled out a wireless phone, punched in a number, and quickly texted a message, ARE YOU ALIVE? Before he hit send, he thought rapidly and decided that the question might get picked up and noticed by some kind of government monitoring, and so he changed the message simply to ????? Then he hit send, and waited in the rain under a streetlight

for several long minutes. Finally the little window on the phone lit up and he saw a reply.

I AM THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST.

Zack Hatfield took a deep breath and after a brief moment of indecision, the last he would ever experience in his life, he texted back: I WANT IN. CALL ME. Then he closed his cell phone and walked off in the rain toward his battered, ten-year-old Toyota.

* * *

"Sure, there's another way," agreed Zack in a conversational tone, in answer to Ekstrom's question. He took a sip from his can of generic supermarket diet cola; he couldn't even afford a name brand of bellywash. "We can just stand by and wring our hands while Steve King's life is destroyed, and the lives of two little girls are poisoned and twisted by perversion and politically correct horse shit, until they grow up into beastly toadstools like their mother. Oh, we can maybe squeak a bit in protest, but not too loud. We can do the things that powerless white men do these days to let off steam. We can write a letter to the editor, or maybe get drunk and call up a right-wing talk show, although we'd damned well better not say what we really think, or we'll be up on hatespeech charges too. Then when we sober up we can sweat for days, hoping we didn't open our mouths too much and hoping the FBI or the local PC snoops didn't hear us, or that they're too busy this week to put us in the crosshairs and come and tear apart our lives because we dared to annoy our lords and masters by making even that one little squeak. We can do that, Len. I think Steve might even be grateful for that much. Of course, that won't keep him from being sent into living hell because he dared to say the word dyke out loud. And it won't stop Liddy King and that goddamned Indian or whatever the fuck she is taking everything Steve has managed to accumulate in life, and living high off the hog on it while he suffers the tortures of the damned. And it won't save Caitlin and Judy King from being raised to hate all men of their own race, and being taught that it's right and natural for them to do disgusting things with candy bars when they grow up. Or maybe before they grow up."

"Suppose we all club together whatever money we've got and try to hire a decent lawyer for Steve?" suggested Ekstrom.

"There's no such thing as a decent lawyer, and even if there were, they wouldn't stand a chance in these courts on a hatespeech case," Zack told them. "No lawyer with enough clout to beat a hatespeech case will touch one, because of the repercussions to his own career if he does win. It's like

an accusation of witchcraft or heresy in the Middle Ages. There simply isn't any defense. None is permitted, and you have to remember that under the law, an attorney never really represents his client. He's an officer of the court, first and foremost, and he is not going to buck the system that makes the payments on his Porsche every month. Any shyster we hire would simply take our money and plead Steve out, just like that court-appointed Jew he's got now is going to do. We'd be throwing our money away and letting these filthy courts keep up the pretense that there is some kind of fairness or justice left in them, which hasn't been the case since long before any of us were born. Steve King is white, male, and he likes women, even though he picked the wrong one to like. He hasn't got a chance, and we all know it. We either help him, or we cut him loose because we're too chickenshit scared to do what has to be done, and we let him fall all the way into hell. Even if he survives prison, what kind of life do you think he'll ever have again? He'll have to register as a hate offender, and that means he'll be lucky to find a job flipping burgers or changing rich people's oil in one of those quick-lube places, if he can find one that isn't taken by a Mexican. If we're going to help him, it has to be now, and we have to actually *help* him. There is only one way. Those two bitches can't be around to get up on a witness stand and swear his life away."

"It's not just about Steve," said Washburn heavily. "It's about Caitlin and Judy as well."

"It's not even about them, Charlie, not in the final analysis," said Hatfield, shaking his head. "It's about *us.* About whether we're men or dogs, groveling and whimpering in front of this evil tyranny, thumping our tails between our legs and pissing on the floor in terror of their muscle-bound steroid thug cops and their FBI torturers in silk suits and their reptiles in black robes. Steve King is a friend of twenty years' standing to all of us. What is being done to him ain't right, and I've had enough of what ain't right! *No more!"* Zack suddenly clenched his fist and roared aloud, a lifetime of rage and humiliation and contempt for the world around him welling up from his heart and his belly and his brain and bursting out of his body in an explosion.

Washburn looked at the other two men. "Me, too. I'm in. Len, I think Zack's right. You'd best take a powder. Zack's single and I'm divorced, and we both have crappy jobs and nothing to lose. You have a family and a business and you've got everything to lose. I wasn't a Ranger like Zack, I was just a truck driver, but I remember enough of my military stint to fire a weapon. I'm sure two of us can do this. There's no need for you to be involved."

"Steve used to come by the store starting when he was about 10, buying little bits and pieces and tools and screws for his go-kart," said

Ekstrom, his face distorted now as he almost wept in rage. "He was a fine, bright boy, friendly, not a malicious or selfish bone in his body, and he never changed. His father was a good man and a good friend. Those two girls of his are so beautiful, so sweet and wonderful. I see them when he brings them by the store. I must stand by while this terrible thing is done to them, simply because I am afraid? I can't do that. God would punish me if I did that. I'm with you guys. I've just plain had enough. This time they're not going to get away with it. They can't. There has got to be some justice left somewhere, or all the world becomes hell. I am tired of living in hell. I never thought that I would be ready in my own mind to kill someone. But I'm ready. At some point in time, this madness and this cruelty has to stop. For me, it stops with Steve King. They're not going to get him. No."

"That's the real thing, all right," said Zack with a sigh and a smile. "It's taken how many years between us to reach this point? Sometimes I thought white men never would."

"We have," said Charlie. "Okay, Zack, you're the ex-Ranger. You should know how to plan a double assassination. How do we go about this? What do you want Len and me to do?"

"I'll do the planning and the actual killing. I need you two to provide an alibi, nothing more," said Zack.

"I think I may start year-end inventory a bit early," said Ekstrom. "You're registered with the Helping Hand temp agency, right?"

"I'm registered with all the temp agencies," said Hatfield. "For all the good it does me. I work about three days on a good week."

"I know Brenda down there," Ekstrom told them. "I use their people sometimes when I have a truck coming in with heavy stuff, and I have a nod-nod wink-wink arrangement with her not to send me any Mexicans, so at least my money goes to one of my neighbors who really needs it. She won't think it's so unusual when I call her up and ask her to send you to me, just doing a good turn for a friend kind of thing."

"It needs to be at night, when no one is around in the store," said Hatfield. "I show up around closing time and let your last customers see me moving some boxes around. Charlie comes in just before you close up, and he hangs out for the evening jaw-jacking with his good buddies Len and Zack and helping you count sheet metal screws. I wait until traffic dies down a bit. I slip out the back and head for Seaside. I do the job, get rid of the gun and any clothing or gear I need to lose, come back when it's over, and slip back inside. You sign my ticket for eight hours, documentary evidence I was there

all night. That piece of paper can get you the rest of your life in prison, of course. Len, are you really sure about this?"

"I'm sure," said Ekstrom with a nod, and Hatfield could tell that he was. "I can also make you a key to Steve's house in Seaside," the older man continued. "Steve used to get all his keys made at the store, and he ordered some extra sets a while back. Not many people know that Homeland Security regs require anyone with a key cutter to keep the specs, names, and addresses for all keys made in case the FBI or DHS wants the information for some reason. I still have Steve's house key pattern on my key machine's computer."

"We can hoist the bastards on the petard of their own snooping laws," laughed Washburn.

"Will you need a piece?" asked Ekstrom. "I can let you have pretty much anything you want from my collection, and ammo as well." Ekstrom was a licensed gunsmith, which was the only way he was able to make a serious living and keep his small hardware store competitive with Mighty Mart and House Depot and the other big chain stores. His was one of the last remaining actual merchant businesses on Commercial Street in Astoria; most of the other storefronts were now converted to yuppie fern bars, chintzy antique shops, "quaint" eateries of various kinds, and offices for left-leaning activist organizations.

"No, I have one of my own I can use," said Hatfield. "I'm going to ditch it afterwards, of course, but I don't want to take the risk of getting caught with anything that might be traced back to you. If this goes bad, you just tell the cops I went out for lunch and never came back, and you had no idea I intended to commit such a horrible hateful act. I don't want to drag you guys down with me."

"When do we do it?" asked Washburn.

"It needs to be fast," said Hatfield. "I did get from Steve that the kids are with Liddy's mother for a week or so, and the Proudfoot bull dyke has moved into Steve's house so she and Liddy can have their orgies with no risk of the little girls walking in on them, which I find charmingly delicate of them, if a bit too late. They're probably on their p's and q's so they'll look good in court. That means they'll be alone in the house. I've been in and out of Steve's place for years, and so I already know the lay of the land, no need for any extensive preliminary scouting or observation. Liddy was also dumb enough to give Steve's dog away to the SPCA as an act of spite, so I won't have to worry about Spuds or maybe have to silence him, which is definitely a load off my mind. Spuds is a cool mutt, and it would really bother me to have to hurt him. I sneak in with the key, cack them both, and I'm outta there."

"In and out," said Washburn. "It's a good simple plan."

"Yeah, well, the first thing you learn in the military is that no plan ever survives the first day of combat," said Hatfield wryly. "The simplest plans are the best, but even so, there are always a hundred things that can go wrong."

"You do realize the shit is going to hit the fan big time when two lesbians with a hatespeech case pending against a white male are murdered?" asked Charlie. "You also realize that yours is the first door Sheriff Ted Lear is going to come knocking on? He knows you and Steve have been tight since high school, plus you visited him in jail."

"Yeah, well, that's why I need you two guys as my alibi," said Hatfield with a grin. "But I've also got a little trick up my sleeve to muddy the waters like hell. I'm going to take a magic marker with me, and I'm going to write the letters NVA on the wall. Maybe in their blood."

"Jesus, Zack, that will be *sure* to bring in the FBI!" exclaimed Washburn. "After what's happened in Coeur d'Alene, they're descending on the Northwest like a swarm of angry bees!"

"Are they? Or are they running around like chickens with their heads cut off?" queried Hatfield. "Charlie, remember, I saw the federal government of the United States in all its glory operating in Iraq. You have no idea how incompetent they are, what complete *idiots* they are. 20,000 or so ragged, barefoot little brown men with nothing but AK-47s and a few RPGs whipped the mighty United States Army and Marines down into jelly when I was there, and they're still doing it all over the Middle East. Have been for almost a generation now, and these morons in Washington *still* haven't got a clue! All they know how to do is jump however high and run however far Israel and the Jews tell them to. My guess is that by writing NVA on the wall I can ratchet this thing right out of Ted Lear's hands and up onto the federal level where it's simply lost in the shuffle. Ted Lear is smart. He can read this, although he may not be able to prove anything, and he may not want to. He's a friend of Steve King too. But I'd rather have the dumb-ass FBI on my trail than any local cop who knows the ground and knows the people involved, and who has a couple of brain cells to rub together. We see all over CNN and Fox News that the uprising in Coeur d'Alene has been crushed and it's all over. I don't buy that. My guess is what's left of the real NVA is going to keep on fighting and hitting these bastards, and very quickly the file on these homicides will end up gathering dust in some SAIC's pending basket, with the files from a hundred other NVA hits piled on top of it."

"So when do we do it?" repeated Charlie.

"Len, make your call to Helping Hand tomorrow morning," said Hatfield decisively. "I'll blow those dykes away tomorrow night."

* * *

Steve King's house was a large split-level ranch-style dwelling built on a wide landscaped lawn, constructed in redwood paneling and stucco on the outside with a brick planter and other tag ends of brick trim, house and lot, sitting on a beetling ridge in a subdivision just south of the coastal town of Seaside. Zack hadn't been too happy about driving through the town itself on his way there, since the one major weakness in his plan was his vehicle. The only car he could come up with for this murder mission was his own, and that was a dangerous and foolhardy thing to do, but he could not in all good conscience ask either of the other men to loan him a car or truck, and risk linking them to the killings. Before starting out that night, Hatfield had cut several short strips of black masking tape, made sure his front and rear Oregon license plates were dry so the tape would stick, and carefully altered his license number by transforming the I into a T and the 5 into a passable 8. The resulting false license number would raise a red flag if it were run on the DMV computer by a police officer, but you had to get very close up to see the tape, and from a distance it worked.

After crossing the great bridge over Youngs Bay he took a carefully pre-planned route, turning left off Highway 101 as soon as he came into Gearhart and swinging wide along some back roads to bypass the glowing rainy streets of Gearhart and Seaside, so hopefully no one would recall seeing his car. It had taken him an extra half hour, and he would have to take the same route going back. It was a long time on the road, but there was no help for it. He made sure he had a full tank of gas before he left, cleaned his fuel injectors, checked his battery and replaced the starter just in case. He wanted to make damned sure that engine fired up when he needed it to start.

Now Hatfield stood outside the house preparing himself for his entry. It was about 10:30 at night, moonless and drizzly, perfect for Hatfield's purpose. Clatsop County deputies left local law enforcement in the county's many small towns to small municipal forces. Hatfield remembered that Ted Lear had once mentioned in some casual context or other that Seaside police shift change (all four cars of it) took place at 11 p.m., and so by now the single-cop squad cars and station staff should be easing on back to the barn, so the cops could turn in their gear and paperwork and go off duty as close to 11 as they could manage, before heading home or off to Ray's Tavern,

which had a special late-night liquor license to accommodate the gents in blue. There was a faint salty tang in the air from the nearby beach, just a couple of blocks away, and the sound of the Pacific breakers could be heard low and soft in the dark night air. The lots and lawns in the neighborhood were large, and there were almost 50 yards between King's house and the neighboring homes on either side. Hatfield counted on the distance and hopefully some internal noise of televisions, home entertainment centers, and computers in the homes of King's neighbors to make sure no shots were heard.

He parked his car on a narrow yet paved verge in front of the right-hand neighbor's house, to prevent leaving any tire tracks, although there wasn't much chance of that with the asphalt as wet as it was from the drizzle. This also meant that so long as he walked only on the concrete driveway and stayed off the grass and out of the muddy shrubbery, he didn't have to worry about leaving any footprints. Even so, he was wearing hospital shoe covers tied on over his shoes, which he would get rid of afterwards. The car was almost centered between two streetlights. It meant a longer walk, but Zack had balanced that against the possibility of someone noticing his Toyota in front of the King home. Zack pulled on a pair of latex surgical gloves and pulled up the hood of the cheap parka sweatshirt he'd gotten from the Salvation Army store last year. It would go as well; few people had seen him in the garment and no one should remember it.

He walked calmly down the empty street and turned in at the Kings' driveway. Inside the sweat shirt, stuck into his belt was a truncated double-barreled 12-gauge shotgun. Before he left the hardware store in Astoria, he had placed the old Remington, which had belonged to Zack's father, into Len Ekstrom's vice grip and carefully taken the double barrel down to 18 inches with a hacksaw and oil, and cut off the stock of the old weapon down to the grip. The amputated fragments were in a plastic bag in Zack's trunk for disposal along with the gun itself, the parka, and other bits and pieces. The gun was loaded with two shells of .00 buckshot, and Zack had half a dozen more rounds in the sweatsuit parka's pockets. He also had a snub-nosed Smith & Wesson .38 in an interior clip holster stuck in his belt at the small of his back. The house was dark as he walked up the driveway except for a single light in the front living room downstairs. He glanced through the windows of the garage and saw Steve's SUV and Liddy's Lexus parked inside. There was a battered military-surplus Hummer in the driveway sporting a number of feminist and pro-abortion bumper stickers, which Zack had learned belonged to Martha Proudfoot. There were no other cars in the driveway, which was a

good sign. Zack mounted the steps to the front door and took from his back pocket the key that Len had cut for him.

Hatfield stood at the front door, thinking of his text message to the Ghost of Christmas past. *I may well be doing something like this again soon,* he reflected. *If so, I damned well better plan it a lot better. This job was too rushed.* He was now at the point of no return; he could if he wished simply turn and walk away, and possibly he should. There were several things that could go wrong now if he proceeded to enter the house. First, the key might not work, and he might have to go around to the rear door, use his knife to cut through the screen and then either kick in or jimmy the door lock to force entry, thus alerting those inside. Secondly, he had no way of knowing if Liddy King or the Proudfoot woman had become sufficiently paranoid to install an alarm system. Steve King had never used one, since this part of the Northwest was still sufficiently crime-free so it had not seemed necessary, as long as the family had Spuds the terrier to sound the alarm in case of intrusion. But with the media full of hysterical raving about evil racist terrorist conspiracies in the wake of the October rebellion in Idaho, the two lesbians might have gotten jumpy. Thirdly, he had no way of knowing for absolute certain that they were the only two people in the house, despite the lack of any unaccounted-for vehicles in the garage and driveway. It was possible Liddy had brought the two little girls back home. Finally, he had no way of knowing whether or not he had somehow been detected already, or whether he would be detected on entry in some manner, and they would call the police. Good liberal that she was, Liddy would never allow Steve to own any guns, which her husband had gone along with for fear of the girls getting hold of a weapon and a subsequent tragic accident, but that could have changed along with Liddy's sexual orientation. It was indeed a rushed job, maybe too rushed.

Zack pulled back the hood of the parka and then pulled down a dark navy blue ski mask, covering his face. He inserted the key in the front door, unlocked it, and carefully turned the knob. There was a brief sticking and then the tumblers fell softly. He pushed the door open. The chain was off, so he would not need the small pair of bolt cutters in his left back pocket. *That's a stroke of luck,* he thought. *They're careless. Careless and arrogant. I'll bet it simply never occurred to them that despite what they're doing, anyone would dare to lift a finger to stop them. Why would it occur to them? Until a few weeks ago, no one's ever fought back.*

He pushed the door open and went in. The front hall was dark. Zack silently moved to the door of the living room and peeped around into the room. It was empty except for one lit table lamp. Zack mounted the carpeted

stairs slowly, staying close to the wall so as not to make any boards creak. He knew where the bedroom was, the defiled bedroom where Steve and Liddy had slept as man and wife. The door to the girls' room was open and he glanced in; in the very dim light filtering in through the window, he could see that the little beds were empty. *Thank God,* he thought to himself. *Caity and Judy at least won't have nightmares about terrible sounds and boogey men in masks from this night's work. I wonder if they will ever be able to understand why, when they grow up? If I'm still around, if we win, I'm going to have to tell them one day that I killed their mother. I can't shirk it. Damn! Better not think about it now.*

Now Hatfield stood outside the master bedroom door. He could hear low, drowsy female voices from within, talking softly and casually. There was no sign of alarm; he had been as silent as the grave. Zack pulled two rubber ear plugs out of his pocket, lifted his mask and inserted them into his ears so the noise and concussion of the heavy bore gun going off in a closed room would not damage or rupture his ear drums. He slid the hammerless shotgun out and eased the safety off; it was ready to fire. He took a long deep breath, remembering Iraq, recovering the mindset needed to kill. This was different, he knew. The Indian bitch he didn't give a damn about, but Liddy was a woman of his own race, a woman he'd known from Astoria High. They'd never had much in common, since even in high school Zack had been blue collar and right wing, and she had been wealthy by Astoria standards and lilac, Lifetime Channel trendy-left. But she was Steve's wife, and so they'd spent some years at least being polite and halfway friendly to one another. Until she had gone mad and turned on his friend like a rabid dog, he'd had nothing against her. Could he do it? *If I can't, I'd damned well better find out before I meet with Red's people,* Zack said to himself.

Hatfield pushed open the door and stepped into the room, and in that room he found only enemies, targets to be destroyed. He could do it, and he did. Driving away from the house of the dead, back to Astoria, he knew he had been right to send that text message.

He drove to a spot he knew near Hammond, at the very mouth of the mighty river where it entered the ocean, a low cliff, and he pitched the shotgun and ammunition into the estuary. The parka and the shoe covers and gloves went into the black plastic garbage bag; they would be cut into strips and burned before morning. He stepped back inside the hardware store at 12 o'clock sharp. "How was lunch?" asked Ekstrom, glancing up from the desk in his office where he was scribbling on some inventory papers.

Charlie Washburn sat in a corner sipping from a large Styrofoam cup of latté from a late-night espresso stand. "Speaking of which, I got you a hoagie before Larissa's Deli closed," Washburn said, pointing to a paper-wrapped sandwich and a second cup of coffee beside a brown paper bag.

"Thanks," said Zack, finding he was hungry. He unwrapped the sandwich and chomped down on it. "It's done," he said with his mouth full.

"Both of them?" Washburn asked.

"Both of them."

"Any problems?" asked Ekstrom.

"Nope."

"You write those letters on the wall?" Ekstrom persisted curiously.

"I did. Don't know when they'll find the bodies, but when they do I promise you'll be able to hear the *Daily Astorian* scream in horror all the way down to Coos Bay."

"Well, that's that," Washburn sighed.

"Not quite," said Hatfield. "I think I'm going for a few encores."

"What?" asked Ekstrom.

"Charlie, you remember last summer, that meeting I asked you to go to?" Hatfield reminded him. "The one where something suddenly came up and you backed out?"

"Yeah," responded Washburn cautiously. "I can't remember what it was that came up, now, exactly."

"You probably had an outbreak of common sense. Anyway, don't worry about it," said Zack with a shrug. "That was last summer. Things are different now. I've got one last thing to say about tonight, and then if you guys want out, there will be no hard feelings, and who's to say you're not a hell of a lot smarter than I am? I won't ever mention it again, but for now, just listen to me a bit. You both know that I know some people, and you've always avoided bringing up the subject. I appreciate your tact, and I never pushed it because I figured that once you knew, it was your choice whether or not you wanted to talk about it. But what happened in Coeur d'Alene has changed things. Now we know it can be done. We failed in Coeur d'Alene, but the Party hasn't been destroyed. I know because I have been in contact with some people who escaped from CdA and who are still fighting, carrying on a guerrilla war to establish our own white country here in the Northwest. It's going to be long and bloody and horrible, but we're going to win."

"How do you figure that?" asked Washburn curiously.

"Short answer? God is on our side," said Zack simply.

"Oooo-kaaay . . ." said Washburn. "And you know this, how?"

"Because of what happened in Coeur d'Alene and what happened with me tonight," Zack explained. "These things are God's sign to us. Not whether we won or lost, or whether I screwed up somehow and I'm in jail looking at a double murder charge this time tomorrow night. That's not what matters. What matters is that these things *happened.* That we *did* them. God has given the white man back his courage. The courage to stand up and defy our oppressors' laws. The courage to fight back with weapons in our hands, instead of a computer keyboard. The courage to be *men* again, real courage that comes from our hearts and not from a can of cheap domestic beer or a whiskey bottle. We never had that before, up until now, and that's why white men always lost. We were ashamed of who we were. We were ashamed to *be* who we are. No more. Guys like me and the Old Man and so many others have spent all our lives begging God on our knees to just do this one little thing for us, to give us back the courage that our ancestors had, even if it's only for one last glorious defeat, so that we can die on our feet instead of live on our knees, and exit the stage of history with our heads held high. God has answered our prayers. We have our courage back now. I don't know how it happened, but we've got it back. We got ours back when we did this thing tonight, because even though I was the triggerman, you guys stepped up to the plate just as much as I did. When I got to that house and I didn't find cops waiting for me, and when I got back tonight and I found both of you still here, at your posts, instead of home hiding under the bed tossing a case of beer or a bottle of Jack down your throats to quiet your terror, you proved yourselves just as much as I did. God has given you back your courage too, guys, and either of you could have done my job tonight if you'd had to."

Zack paused, took another bite of his sandwich, and then chewed and swallowed it. "Anyway, I'm going to meet with some people about joining the Northwest Volunteer Army and setting up a unit here. You guys want in?"

"Yes," said Ekstrom, quietly and without hesitation.

"Yes," said Washburn with a nod.

"Welcome to the lunatic fringe, boys," said Hatfield.

II

The Trouble Trio

Therein, ye gods, you make the weak most strong;
Therein, ye gods, you tyrants do defeat.
No stony tower, nor walls of beaten brass
Nor airless dungeon, nor strong links of iron
Can be retentive to the strength of spirit,
But life, being weary of these worldly bars,
Never lacks power to dismiss itself.
If I know this, then know all the world besides,
That part of tyranny I do bear
I can shake off at pleasure.

Julius Caesar—Act I, Scene 3

The three friends met again in the watery gray twilight of a December afternoon, in the old Kiwanis Club beach shelter on the Washington side of the Columbia River, about a half a mile up Highway 401 from the gigantic bridge. The prefab building with the concrete floor was cold as a walk-in freezer inside, and the would-be insurgents kept their heavy winter coats and caps on, but it was enclosed and tight against the wind, and it had electricity. The hut contained several picnic tables and some plastic chairs, a ping-pong table leaning against the wall that could be laid across the picnic tables if anyone wanted to play, a sink, a battered old refrigerator, and some cupboards. The nearby beach was really just a small shelf of gravel instead of sand, but it served as a passable casting spot for fishermen and a good picnic place in the summer. As the early

darkness descended they could see the Christmas lights starting to come on across the river in Astoria, twinkling green and red and white.

"I'll get the heat going," said Charlie Washburn, stoking up a propane stove in one corner and lighting all the burners. He found a large saucepan in one of the cupboards, filled it with water from the sink, and put it on one of the burners. "Instant coffee all around, I'd say. These cups look more or less clean, and I see we've still got some sugar and creamer left over from Labor Day. Okay, Zack, care to run tonight's revelries by us again?"

"We're going to meet a guy they've sent down from Olympia who's called Mr. Chips," Hatfield told them. "It goes without saying that he's wanted by the law, and if we are so much as seen in his company we will all be marked men."

"Like we're not marked already?" snorted Washburn. "I think Lear knows damned well who did Liddy King and that plug-ugly dyke Proudfoot. He gave me a funny look when he talked to me about your night of gainful employment at the store. It's common knowledge we're Steve's closest friends, and Zack's military record isn't exactly a secret."

"Yah, same with me. I think he knows, all right. He just can't prove anything," said Len Ekstrom.

"I don't think he *wants* to prove anything," said Hatfield. "He's known Steve as long as we have. Rod Berry told me Ted was damned near crying when he had to come and get Steve and take him to jail on that damned bullshit warrant those two bitches swore out on him. He knew what the score was, and what Liddy and that dyke were doing to Steve and the girls. I don't think he was too upset over being compelled to release Steve from jail, and I don't think he's looking any harder for the killers than the pressure from the PC establishment over there makes him look." Hatfield gestured toward the lights of Astoria. "What I don't understand is why no FBI involvement? Why no mention in the media of the letters NVA I scrawled on the bedroom wall in dyke squaw blood? Especially since they were all over Steve and his kids in the original hatespeech case?"

Washburn spoke up. "From what I gather from the news, the Bureau has a whole new set of priorities these days. Damn if you weren't right about the NVA fighting on, Zack. I heard on the truck radio coming over here they tagged another couple of Mexicans in The Dalles and bombed a Portland Police Bureau patrol car at an intersection, with a nigger cop still in it."

"Steve is out now, he's back with his kids, and he has a chance to rebuild his life and theirs. That's the important thing," said Ekstrom. "It worked."

"I guess Mr. Chips can bring us up to speed on what's going on around the Northwest," said Hatfield.

"And who exactly is this Mr. Chips?" asked Washburn.

"He's a representative from the Party, and now I suppose from the NVA," replied Hatfield. "He doesn't really have a title. Few of them do. The Party has always avoided handing out Chief Cook and Bottle Washer monikers like some racial groups back in the old days used to do. It's kind of like the Mafia. Let the feds keep on guessing as to who does what. Chips is kind of a general factotum. He describes himself as a Johnny Appleseed who wanders the Pacific Northwest planting seeds of hate and hoping they'll turn into big blooming orchards. I've met him before, back when the Party was legal and I went up to some meetings in the Olympia area, and also down in Dundee and Centralia, Washington. He's one of the most knowledgeable and intelligent men I've ever met. When he speaks, we listen. If we want in on the revolution, then he's the man who can get us in."

From the gloom outside there came the sound of a vehicle pulling up outside, tires crunching on the gravel beach and a motor running. "That's them," said Hatfield, looking out the window. "Right on time. A good sign in a revolutionary. One thing, boys, if we ever do get into a shooting sitch. Four thirty means four thirty on the dot. One man out of position at the wrong time can kill us all. You can take that as my first lesson to you in combat skills." The visitor they were waiting for had arrived in a battered and nondescript Subaru sports utility vehicle. In the falling darkness, Hatfield couldn't tell if it was black or dark blue or green. Mr. Chips got out of the back seat. He was accompanied by a young man wearing a denim jacket and a tweed golf cap, and a tall young woman with a plain but strong-featured face and long orange-ish hair tied in a ponytail behind her head. The boy and the girl both appeared to be about 18 years old. Hatfield had met both of them before up in Dundee. Hatfield opened it and let the youth in. "Hey, Shane," he said.

"Hey, Mr. H. How's it going?" The young Volunteer stepped in and looked quickly around the hut. The Oregon men could see the butt of a Tec-9 machine pistol poking from a shoulder holster rig under his denim jacket. The woman stood in the door, wearing a tan fur-lined shepherd's coat, and they could see the nubby barrel of an Uzi submachine gun protruding from the open coat, held respectfully pointed at the floor. "Hi, Rooney," said Hatfield.

"Hey," said the girl. The boy went to the door and beckoned, and a bespectacled man in late middle age with a grizzled moustache stepped inside the room. He took off his overcoat. Under it he was wearing a green cardigan

sweater and a tie with a light yellow pastel shirt. In the pocket of the shirt was a plastic protector containing several pens. He looked like a teacher or a computer geek.

"How was the traffic on the bridge?" asked Hatfield.

"We came down the scenic route, from Ilwaco," replied the newcomer. "Homeland Security is starting to put closed-circuit TV cameras on bridges and tunnels so they can monitor traffic, so I figured we'd better meet here on the Washington side rather than cross the river. The damned things can't always be avoided, but there's no need to leave them a trail of breadcrumbs. Shane and Rooney will stay outside and keep an eye out. A young couple in a parked car will need no explanation to any passers-by. By the by, I hope you men are armed and ready to use your weapons, because I should tell you that if anyone comes at us, we're shooting our way out." The boy and the girl turned around and left without another word, and Hatfield closed the door. "These gentlemen are . . . ?"

"This is Charlie Washburn, and this is Lennart Ekstrom," said Hatfield, indicating them. There were brief handshakes. "They're good men. I've already trusted them with my life."

"You know our names now, but all we know about you is you're called Mr. Chips," said Charlie. "Do we get code names too?"

"Eventually you'll each have a whole collection of your own, yes," said the Party's man with a smile. "Mr. Chips isn't so much a code name as it is a nickname. I used to be a schoolteacher up in Dundee, and I taught a kind of unofficial history course to certain selected white students after school, strictly extracurricular. The feds know who I am, and there's no reason you shouldn't. My name is Henry Morehouse, but back in the days when I had more hair, I ended up being called Red."

"Zack vouches for you," said Washburn. "That's good enough. I suppose we'd best get on with it, then. He's told you what we want from you?"

"Yes, and some of the background. You would be amazed how common a story yours is, gentlemen." Morehouse sat down and accepted a steaming hot cup of instant coffee, black, and waved away the proffered packets of creamer and sweetener. "They say that all politics is local. So is oppression, apparently. It requires a man to be personally affected by tyranny at his own front door before he will act. Sometimes not even then. You guys acted, on your own, and that impresses us. Zack has told me about the incident that took place here with the King woman and her beast of pleasure."

"Uh, we gonna have to take some blood oath or something?" asked Ekstrom.

"No, not at this time," said Morehouse. "Later the Army may find it expedient to formalize. For now, if you're good men and true then an oath is unnecessary, and if you're not, no oath will make you so. If I say you're in, then you're in." Morehouse paused and took a sip of coffee. "The first question that I need to ask is the obvious one. Are all of you up for this? Do you fully understand just what the hell you're doing? This isn't a video game or a made-for-TV movie. This is the real thing. You see what's going on in the Northwest, every time you turn on CNN. People are dying, and not just white people this time. The Beast is in a blind rage. It has been defied and it has been wounded, and it's lashing out in all directions. You do understand that if you proceed, there is every chance that you men will end up either dead or living out the remainder of your lives in a federal prison, under conditions that don't bear thinking about?"

"Mister, the way they're hollering in the news media about racism and domestic terrorism, if we were even caught sitting here with you, we'd go to prison for the rest of our lives," said Ekstrom. "We know this, and we're still here."

"Yeah, official paranoia is rampaging, all right," replied Morehouse with a chuckle. "They're starting to wake up to the fact that they didn't get us all when they stormed into Coeur d'Alene last month, and some of us are still fighting. Fair enough. But before we get down to cases, I'd like each of you to tell me in your own words what has brought you here tonight."

"I guess I'll start," said Hatfield. "I had some idea of what the Party was doing behind the scenes, of course, that preparations were being made. Some of it you told me, Red, and some of it I figured out for myself. I was starting to turn over in my own mind whether or not I wanted to join you when the time came to pick up the gun. I knew that time had to come, if any of us in this country had one spark of manhood left in us. We have tried everything else," Hatfield went on grimly. "For generations we have dutifully trooped to the polls like sheep and voted in elections where we were given no meaningful choice, and where not one single candidate or party represented the white man's racial interests. Nothing changed except the politicians grew more and more coarse and corrupt, more cynical and contemptible. For almost a hundred years now we have been betrayed at every turn by the men we voted into office, and we have been ravaged and bled dry by these alien creatures called Jews. We have tried every single peaceful avenue of redress, every non-violent method we could think of to try and change the world, to try and make these sons of bitches wearing the suits *stop doing what they are doing.* None of it has worked worth a tinker's damn. We have shouted and

screamed NO at the top of our lungs, and we have been ignored and spat on and called haters for our trouble. We tried the internet and spent years tapping to one another on keyboards, because we bought into the idea that 'education' was the answer, and if we could just get the truth to people, then things would change. Well, education without action isn't worth a bucket of warm spit. We got the truth to people, all right, and it turned out to be nothing but a bunch of noise that was simply ignored, because the internet was where it stayed. Nobody ever *did* anything except tap on keyboards. That was fine with the bosses. Tapping on keyboards was no threat to them, we just let off steam and nothing changed. It is now crystal clear to any white man with two brain cells to rub together that the only thing that will make these dogs in power hear the word *no* is the sound of gunfire.

"But I didn't make up my mind finally until that night when I took care of Steve King's problem for him," Hatfield continued heavily. "I never realized just how damned *good* it would feel to strike back! It wasn't like Iraq at all. I hated those hadjis because they were killing and maiming my friends and trying to do the same to me, but I knew in my heart that we had no business there, that the reason they were trying to kill and maim me was because I was trying to take from them their little patch of the world and the oil that was underneath it. I was a thief who had come into their home to rob them of their land and their goods and their dignity, and they had every right to try and shoot and bomb my ass off. To be honest, those Iraqis were doing what I would have been proud to see Americans do if we were ever invaded and occupied. We never said such things, of course, and most of us didn't even think them out in our own minds in so many words, because we knew how dangerous those thoughts were, but we all knew that we were the guys in the black hats over there.

"I got back home and I somehow understood as I never had before that *we are an occupied people.* Occupied by our own government, occupied by the same goddamned Jews and politicians and business executives who sent me over to Iraq to steal what little those poor people have. Then came the business with Steve and Liddy King, when I used the skills ZOG gave me for my friend and for his children, for my own people and not for a monthly paycheck from the Jews. It felt *right.* I find that I like the feel of that white hat on my head, and I want to keep it there. That's not very articulate, Red, but that's the best I can tell you right now."

"I know what you mean," said Charlie Washburn with a smile. "For once, just once, the bad people didn't win. I am just so damned sick and tired of bad people always winning all the time. But not this time. For once, just once, there was true justice and a good man and two good children will

now have some kind of a chance together in life. A horrible deed committed by wicked perverts has been undone. The scales were balanced just a tiny bit back in the right direction. I feel it too, and it's indescribable.

"But it's more than that with me," he went on carefully. "You know, Americans see a lot of movies and TV shows where some ordinary Joe like me is called upon to step up to the plate, so to speak, and be a hero in some way, usually fighting against the Arabs or Serbs or French or evil white racists or whoever the Jews' main enemy of the moment is. Most of those flicks are just hokum, but in the past few months, ever since Coeur d'Alene, I've been feeling like that. Like I've gotten a call from destiny, as conceited and arrogant as that sounds. I couldn't do it alone, but Coeur d'Alene changed everything for me. Now I know that *there are others,* others who see the things I see and read them the same way, who think and feel as I do, who understand that it's a truly wonderful gift from God to be born white. I saw what happened in Coeur d'Alene on CNN, but I don't want to watch the rest of this great thing on television. I *have* to be here tonight, Mr. Morehouse. I have to be part of this. I don't think I could walk away if I wanted to."

"Things must change," said Lennart Ekstrom slowly. "Every white man and woman in America knows it, deep down inside of themselves. This isn't America anymore, it's a Rocky Horror Picture Show that just goes on and on. Somewhere, sometime, it has to stop, at least in some part of the country, and here in the Northwest is the best place for that. Once you accept in your own mind that things have to change, you don't sit and reflect and introspect and brood and agonize over it. You just do what has to be done."

"And that, Mr. Ekstrom, is what the white race has been waiting to hear from men like you for a hundred years," said Morehouse with a nod. "You know that we were in a very similar situation, back before the Party was formed? The Old Man himself Came Home in 2002, but for years he simply sat all alone in a series of cracker box apartments or trailers or boarding houses, pounding on a computer that grew older and crankier as time passed. For years he looked for those out-of-state license plates to come over the hill, begging and pleading on his knees with his fellow white people to come to his side and *help him,* and for year after year, no one came. He asked only for a hundred good men, or women. One hundred people who were willing to place the future of their blood and their civilization over their own personal welfare. And for year after year, no one came."

"And then what happened?" asked Ekstrom.

"Then they came," replied Morehouse simply. "We refer to this among ourselves as The Awakening, and we still don't understand it fully. Don't get

me wrong when I say this, because we're not a religious movement, rather the reverse in fact. But the best and most comprehensible way that I can put this, is that it had to be some kind of divine intervention. God decided to give His most wonderful and yet wayward children one final break before He threw the white race onto the scrap heap of history. He reached into the hearts of one hundred people and moved them, changed them, so that they let the scales fall from their eyes and they knew they had to put something above their own well being; that they had to live for something besides a job and a paycheck and a shopping spree at the mall. One day it just kind of began, and one hundred people stopped worrying about themselves and went out and began packing the moving van. The Old Man had his first hundred, and they became the nucleus of the Party that was formed when they came to the Homeland and were in place. Without that first hundred people, there could have been no Party, because it was they who set up the infrastructure and the safety net so the rest of the migrants would have something to Come Home to."

"We're going to need more than a hundred men now," said Washburn gloomily.

"They will come," said Morehouse with quiet confidence. "They came before. Damned late, but they came. Very well. Let's get on with it." He knocked back the rest of his coffee, put down the mug, and leaned forward to speak to them. "We are here to make history, gentlemen. We are here to plan and execute the first organized, armed insurrection against the United States of America since 1861. We are going to finish what began in Coeur d'Alene two months ago. The media is now crowing that the so-called racist republic is dead. It is not. The Northwest American Republic exists. It exists because we say it does, and because we are willing to spill the blood of others and to give up our own lives to make good on what we say. That is how nations come to life in the world, gentlemen. I am a representative of that Republic, of its provisional government in the present form of the Army Council until we can establish a state under the draft constitution we've been keeping in our drawers for so long. In that capacity, I am asking you to enlist in the armed forces of that Republic and fight a war of liberation against a cruel and wicked tyrant. Will you do so?"

"I'm in," said Hatfield.

"I'm in," said Washburn.

"And I," said Ekstrom.

"Gentlemen, you just swore your blood oath. Make sure you honor it all the days of your lives," said Red softly.

"I look back at all the crap our people have put up with over the past century and I am still astonished that we never picked up a gun before," said Washburn plaintively. "Why the hell has the white man never *fought?"*

"Oh, God," said Morehouse with a sigh. "Some of us have spent our entire lifetimes studying that one simple question, Charlie, and I have to say we're no closer to an answer than we were at the beginning. There are a few standard, canned answers, of course. Up until the past couple of decades, most white people simply had it too good. Life was just too damned sweet, and all the bullshit caused by liberal democracy and political correctness didn't seem to be really life-threatening, just more and more annoying as time wore on. When men are merely annoyed, they write letters to the editor, or phone a radio talk show, or bitch and gripe drunkenly in bars about how the world is going to hell. They don't pick up a rifle or start making bombs in their basement. And of course, up until about twenty years ago, if things got too bad where you were living, then you could just up stakes and move to the suburbs, or some other state that was a little whiter. We got hundreds of thousands of organic migrants here to the Northwest that way."

"Oh, yeah, I think we've got half the population of California living in Clatsop County," said Washburn. "Most of those same people pull the straight Democratic ticket lever in the polling booth, and they'd cut off their own goolies rather than admit that they came here looking for a whiter and safer environment."

"Mmm hmm," said Morehouse with a chuckle. "Liberals are always the first to flee from the messes they make. Usually, they're the only ones who can afford to do so. Anyway, liberalism and political correctness have gone beyond the merely annoying phase for a long time now. Things have been getting colder and crueler for white people ever since the economy went south under Bush Two and never recovered, when Social Security and Medicare went under, and when the neocons finally had to bring back the draft. You can't conquer the world without a huge army; all their high-tech toys and smart bombs and computerized weapons of mass death simply wouldn't serve. If we were going to keep that fossil fuel pumping, the Middle East had to be actually *occupied,* and so now every American family with a male child knows that when their boys turn 18 there is a good chance they're going to be dragged away to the desert and butchered. Everyone knows at least one young man who came back from Iraq or Saudi wounded or crippled, minus an arm or a leg, or blind, or insane. And of course the drawbacks of our wonderful democracy have become quite apparent to those of us who find

ourselves living in the northernmost province of Mexico. They can't sweep all the problems under the rug anymore. They're too visible and obvious, and no one has any money left to run to the suburbs."

"But that still hasn't produced anything other than an army of white people hollering on talk radio and then trooping in to the polls on election day to vote Republican," complained Ekstrom. "We vote in some white guy in a blow-dried hair do, with a bright smile and a thousand-dollar suit, then as soon as he hits Washington he betrays us, and all we get is more Mexicans, more crime, more taxes and fewer jobs, and all our savings gone on medical bills because nobody has any insurance anymore, and more dead kids coming back in coffins that no one is allowed to photograph. Surely we're not that stupid? This isn't an overnight development. This has been going on for 50 years. What the hell was *wrong* with us back in the 60s and 70s? Or even earlier? Why didn't we *fight?"*

"Perhaps the more pertinent question, Len, would be why are we fighting now?" asked Morehouse. "As for our failure to resist this genocide by force of arms before, it's of course tempting to put it down to cowardice plain and simple, and there has always been a lot of that in what passed for a white resistance movement, to be sure. Way too much of it. Not to mention the fact that most of our self-appointed leaders were little more than con men who didn't have the chops to make it as televangelists. But it's more complicated than that. White American males are still capable of being physically brave, sure they are. They prove it every day on the battlefield. Every week you can see some story on the tube about a white cop who faces down a pack of gang-bangers or a white fireman who pulls kids out of a burning building, and then you get these extreme sports kooks who jump out of airplanes with snowboards and try to surf down Mount Everest, or snorkel butt naked in a school of sharks, that kind of nonsense."

"God knows I saw enough Aryan heroism every day in Iraq," said Hatfield. "White men will still be as brave as lions, granted, but only for the Jews or for their money, Red. When it comes to standing up and fighting for ourselves, against the Jews and the government that's tyrannizing us, all of a sudden we wuss out."

"Mmmmm, here's where it gets complex, Zack," said Red contemplatively, dragging out a filthy old pipe from his pocket and beginning to stuff it with tobacco. "The white man can still show physical courage, yes. Lots of it. That courage gene is definitely still there in our makeup. But what we can't seem to do is to be brave *on our own,* for our own interests, without the Jewish seal of approval. We have developed a poisonous symbiosis with the system. It needs us and we need it, psychologically. White males are addicted to social

approval nowadays. We need it like an addict needs his crack pipe. We've got to have that supportive peer group around us yelling attaboy. We can be brave in a structured environment, so long as it is an *officially approved* form of courage, and so long as afterwards we can belly up to the bar and talk drunken shit with the boys and get slapped on the back, and then go home to the little woman and the comfortable middle class lifestyle from which we have ventured out, however briefly.

"The white man can face danger, but he can't face loneliness," Morehouse went on, lighting his pipe with a match from a paper book. "He can't handle being away from the comforting herd. He can't handle being out in front anymore. He's lost there. The pioneer spirit is all but dead; you would have to have lived through those bleak times in the early 2000s like I did, before those first hundred people Came Home and built the Party, to understand how rare the true pioneer, the trail-blazer, the man or woman who can *go first*, has become among us. You might say the Jew has succeeded in domesticating the Aryan. We can be brave and good dogs so long as we hear the reassuring sound of our master's voice and get the occasional doggie treat from his hands, but we can't be lone wolves anymore. We can venture into the forest and do battle for our masters, but we can't live in the dark wood and make it our home and kingdom anymore, hunting on our own and keeping our entire kill for ourselves. We must always return to the master's warm fire and his doggie treats, and of course his collar and his leash. We didn't fight, Charlie, up until now, because for a century or so we have no longer been wolves, but dogs. The Jew domesticated us. But now we must hear the call of the wild again. We have to find that spirit of the wolf once more within us, and bite the hand that feeds us. And I suppose I'd better abandon that simile before I stretch it into a pretzel. But you get what I'm saying?"

"Yeah, I do," said Zack with a sigh. "And that poisonous symbiosis between the American white male and the system is still very much with us, an ingrained part of us. How many guys are going to be able to break out of it? Those are going to be pretty rare birds."

"Well, maybe not so rare," said Red with a smile and a swirl of smoke. "Once that first hundred stepped forward, it wasn't so hard for others to do so, because more and more, when they came here they found a crowd to hide in. It was getting that first hundred to *go first* that was the real bitch. There are more now, a lot more. We've got six of them here tonight. Four in here and two very fine young people out in the car."

"Red, I'm not so stupid as to ask how many men are in the Northwest Volunteer Army . . ." began Ekstrom.

"I couldn't tell you even if you asked," interposed Morehouse. "No one knows how many Volunteers there are, and I doubt anyone ever will know."

"But how many men do you think it's going to take to get this job done?" persisted Ekstrom. "To create our own country here and make it good? To drive out the federal authority?"

"Far fewer than you might think," Morehouse told them. "Our victory, gentlemen, will be the ultimate victory of quality over quantity. The American régime is not invincible, you know. The Muslims have shown us that, in spades. Bear in mind, gentlemen, that we are facing an opponent who passed the top of his game a long, long time ago. We will be the tiny lion against the enormous snake, but the serpent is old and sick and dying, poisoned with its own crapulence. We are facing a putrid mass of corruption, incompetence, bureaucracy and sloth, quavering with senility, an enemy who already is maintaining an army of almost two million men around the globe in an attempt to create and maintain an empire containing all of the world's petroleum reserves. American soldiers are engaged in trying to keep that rickety empire together from Venezuela to Tehran, and very few if any will be available to pull back here to fight against us."

"The movement has always had to deal with this defeatist and paranoid belief that if we ever really tried anything, the might of the Army and the Marines would simply crush us," said Hatfield. "Well, I can tell you, having seen the military from the inside, that the Army and Marines ain't anywhere as mighty as they once were. And do you seriously think the Americans will abandon Iraq and Israel and Saudi Arabia and Venezuela and cut themselves off from their own oil supply to drop a million men on a handful of partisans in the Pacific Northwest, and maintain that level of occupation in a part of the world that is just as much a foreign country to those East Coast and L.A.-centric Jews and intelligentsia as Iraq ever was? The ruling élite all consider the Northwest to be a minor backwater."

"You would think that maintaining the territorial integrity of the United States would be the régime's first priority, but it won't be," agreed Morehouse. "With the growing world fuel shortage, oil is frankly more important than land, and will become more so. After all, the Northwest has no oil, other than Alaska, which is a separate problem. The Army Council's strategic assessment is that initially, at least, there will be only a small actual military commitment against us, if any. They won't take us seriously. Wishful thinking on their part: they desperately won't *want* to take us seriously. The idea that white boys would actually revolt against them boggles their minds too much. They're

not going to be sending B-52s to bomb Seattle or landing the Third Marine Division in Astoria. What would that accomplish against small bands of guerrillas who will simply melt away in the face of overwhelming force, and then strike where the underbelly is soft? I think they've learned at least that much in Iraq and Iran. It won't be that type of war.

"No, they'll try to treat us as a crime problem at first," Morehouse went on, the three of them leaning forward intently to listen. "Our enemies on the ground will consist of a hodge-podge of local police, National Guard reservists, FBI and BATFE, Homeland Security and other enemy paramilitaries, and eventually probably some SWAT-type special units and loyalist vigilante groups. And of course the black and Mexican gangs in the cities who may be sworn in as special U.S. Marshals or something of the kind when the shit really hits the fan. And the media, of course. Our enemy will be fragmented, disorganized, poorly coordinated in his many arms and agencies, and like all federals, each group will be jealous of its own turf and resources. They won't work well together, they'll trip over one another's shoelaces, and they will fight us just as incompetently as they fought against the Iraqis and Iranians."

"I've had to work with the federal government in the Forestry Department for years," said Washburn. "I can tell you, the people in charge of us are fucking idiots. They break down just trying to establish a coherent forest firefighting plan, and don't even get me started on FEMA. Get somebody actually shooting at these bureaucrats, and they'll fall to pieces."

"Exactly," agreed Morehouse. "The reality is that for the first few months and years, we won't be coming up against anybody that we can't outshoot in a clutch, if our gunners can stay cool and calm and sober, keep the initiative in our hands, hunt them instead of letting them hunt us, and put some guts behind our guns. Of course, ideally speaking, it should never come to a full-blown shootout. We live light, we move light, we hit hard, and then we vanish before they can bring their superior force to bear. Classic guerrilla tactics. Remember those long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the Middle East? Many of our Volunteers will be military veterans who have been under fire on the other end of the stick, and man for man they'll be every bit the personal equal or better than some pot-bellied highway patrolman or affirmative action FBI bitch in a feminist business suit."

"So how many men do you think we will need in the NVA to get the job done?" asked Ekstrom again.

Morehouse puffed his pipe meditatively. "All right. I'm going to give you guys the theory here, all nice and neat. In reality, of course, nothing about this war is going to be nice and neat, but I am going to create a scenario for

you that will at least approximate how we will win the Northwest American Republic, so you can get a glimpse of the possibilities. Assume we have intelligent and determined leadership. Assume we can get Volunteers with strong character and courage. Assume we can formulate a coherent battle plan and tactics, and add a generous dollop of good old-fashioned *luck* from the God of Battles. Those things acquired, and remembering how essentially weak and hollow the enemy really is, we should be able effectively to terminate federal control over three Northwestern states and maybe more territory as well, if we can maintain a force in the field of approximately one thousand men. And women, lest we forget."

"Overthrow the United States government with a thousand men?" demanded Washburn in skeptical amazement. "Bullshit!"

"I didn't say overthrow the United States government," Morehouse corrected him. "I said effectively terminate federal control and authority in three large Northwestern states, which is not the same thing."

"How?" asked Ekstrom.

"By hitting the enemy hard and often, in teams or crews of two to five or six people max. Let's assume an average of five Volunteers per squad or crew. Our thousand effectives will make up two hundred such crews. Assume half of them are involved in support duties, supply, intelligence, medical services, propaganda, whatnot. That's one hundred combat teams of five guys each remaining, who are actually pulling triggers and making things go boom. Imagine each of those crews striking the enemy on an average of once per day, all across the Northwest. Remember, one of the main reasons we migrated and we're restricting our campaign to this corner of the country is to *reduce the problem to manageable proportions.* Let's assume an average of a single dead enemy of one kind or another per attack. That's 100 people per day being killed in one three-state area, with concomitant damage to enemy property, infrastructure, and damage to his morale, his public image, and thereby his capacity to govern. Their armies are designed to fight Star Wars, but we won't be fighting Star Wars. We'll be fighting Godfather style in the cities and Jesse James style in the countryside. We will be fighting high tech with low tech, and low tech is the one thing the United States has never known how to beat." Morehouse knocked out his pipe onto the concrete floor, and then went on.

"In Vietnam, in Iraq, in Iran and Afghanistan, ZOG had every gadget and deadly toy human ingenuity could devise, computerized and covered with bright shiny lights. But they never found a way to beat the little barefoot brown man, dressed in rags and armed with an AK-47 and a couple of magazines

of ammo, and a heart that would never surrender. The human heart and the human spirit can beat their machines, gentlemen. The human heart and the human spirit can beat their money. The human heart can beat their lying media. Our heart and our spirit can defeat their cruelty and their treachery and their lies, but only if we are fortified with strength and pride and faith in the justice of our cause. Our Volunteers must be like the soldiers of Oliver Cromwell, who said he wanted simple men of labor and the land, who know why they fight, and love what they know. ZOG could never beat the barefoot brown man with his AK-47. Neither will they be able to beat the white man of the Northwest in his pickup truck, his blue jeans and his baseball cap, with a pistol stuck in his belt and a backpack full of Semtex, on the rainy streets of Seattle or out in the backwoods of Idaho."

"That's if we can find the kind of political soldiers necessary for that kind of warfare," Hatfield reminded them. "The guys with the cool head and the iron nerve and the ice water in their veins, who can pull a trigger or thumb a radio detonator and not worry about it afterwards. The guys who can go the distance and do this for year after long bloody year. The guys with a bottomless reserve of sheer guts."

"You got it," agreed Morehouse with a nod. "I can outline for you a structure for a revolutionary armed force that will work a treat against the enemy we will be facing. I can give you a strategy that will win us our own nation, and I can describe to you the tactics that will keep us alive and free and fighting while putting the enemy and his minions six feet under every time. But what I cannot do is to make you *brave.* I cannot turn mere white males into white men once again, men that our ancestors would have recognized. That we must somehow do for ourselves, by finding within ourselves that last dying spark of pride and honor and courage that has always distinguished us for thousands of years. It's still there, comrades, and every man and woman of us who wants to change the world must search for it in their hearts and their souls. They must find it and feed it, blow on it, nurture it until it bursts into flame again."

"You think these bastards will give in no matter how many people we kill?" asked Washburn. "Iraq and Afghanistan are very far away, something people read about over their morning coffee or watch on CNN. We will be striking at the very core of their power, right here on what they consider their home turf. Can they psychologically bring themselves to admit defeat even if we beat them?"

"This is another reason why we are not being so foolish as to try this in all 50 states. What we're going to be doing, Charlie, is we're going to

be fighting a classical colonial war," Morehouse told him. "There are rules for fighting a successful colonial war, and they have come into play dozens of times over the last century, from Ireland to Africa. We're not trying to take their whole loaf from ZOG. Of course, they'd resist that to the death. Such a guerrilla war across all of America would last for generations, and anything we could salvage after such a conflict probably wouldn't be worth living in anyway. Nor could we win it. For one thing, we'd have to slaughter over one hundred million non-whites, or drive them back south of the Rio Grande in the most massive refugee wave ever seen, and that simply isn't feasible with what we have or what we are likely to get. If the only alternative to ongoing insurgency is the complete destruction of their own empire, ZOG will simply absorb whatever we dish out and hang on to the wreckage like drowning rats. A country as huge as the whole United States of America could absorb such a bloodletting as I have described, as traumatic as it would be, if it was scattered all over from Florida to Maine to San Francisco and everywhere in between. After all, more people than that are killed every day in traffic accidents. The ruling élite would never agree to hand over power to us on a nationwide basis and thus commit personal and political suicide. That's just not going to happen. The patient isn't going to disembowel himself to cure a bellyache, or even to remove a tumor. But, if what we do is to gangrene only one leg below the knee, so to speak, and if the patient knows he can amputate that part of the diseased limb and still walk on crutches and function—well, once it gets to hurting enough, he might be persuaded to amputate.

"With our thousand or so people—and by the way, there will almost certainly be more than that as our insurgency grows—anyway, what we can do is to make these three states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho and maybe parts of Montana and northern California completely ungovernable. We can stop the United States from reaping any profit or income from this territory, and we can turn it into one gigantic black hole sucking in men, resources, time, effort, and above all money. Gentlemen, there is a truth to fighting and winning a colonial war that I want all of you to burn into your brains, because it is the key to our victory. In a colonial war, the generals never surrender! The *accountants* surrender! What we have to do is to confront the United States with a situation where as bad and as humiliating as it will be to let the Northwest go and let white people have their own country, the continuation of the guerrilla war is no longer an option for them. We can win this, comrades," concluded Morehouse decisively. "We can beat the God Almighty United States of America, kick their stinking rotten asses right out

of here, and take this land for ourselves and our children. But only if we have the stomach for it."

There was a long moment of silence. "Let's get started, then," said Hatfield.

"Right," said Morehouse, filling his pipe again. "Okay, you've already got the basics here. You've got three men. I always say men out of force of habit, but bear in mind that the right woman can do any of these jobs I'm going to describe to you just as well. In this room you've already got your first Trouble Trio."

"Say what?" asked Charlie.

"The basic building block of the NVA company," said Morehouse. "A three-man team. When we were planning all this out, studying and analyzing how previous successful revolutionary movements worked in Western political and social environments similar to ours, we came up with a kind of hybrid anatomy combining the IRA and the Cosa Nostra, two highly successful subversive outfits who to this day have never been completely repressed by their governments, despite over a century of trying. It's simple, flexible, and workable. Even if the cell never grows beyond the first three guys, you've still got a small team who can do damage out of all proportion to their numbers, presuming they've got some stiffening in their spines. You'd be amazed how much hell three men can raise in a society this complex, this racially volatile and unstable. For a while some of us called this three-man building block a troika, but that sounds a bit foreign, so we ended up christening this formation unit a Trouble Trio. I'll go ahead and give you the theory now, but I should mention that already some mutations in actual practice are starting to appear as we are forced to work out the kinks under fire, quite literally in some cases."

"Go ahead," Hatfield urged him.

Morehouse lit his pipe again. "You start with three people as I said, all of whom must have the requisite qualities of courage, resourcefulness, loyalty, and fanatic dedication. That's the hard part, finding the right men and women for this. Each of these threes will be the nucleus of a company. I know it sounds ridiculous to call three people a company, but there will be more of you, and what we want is a structure that we can maintain right up until the end, when we will make the transformation from a guerrilla insurgency to become a proper national army. During our initial underground phase, the NVA is not an ordinary army where units are supposed to have some kind of set strength or function. We are as fluid as a lava lamp, always changing shape and bobbing around. Each company needs to be free floating, capable of conducting operations indefinitely on its own, even if it is totally cut off

from the rest of the movement, and eventually regenerating itself and growing, adding more cells, like an amoeba.

"Each company will be part of a larger unit called a brigade," Mr. Chips continued. "The next unit up from a company in most armies is actually the battalion, but we're not going to create any of those until necessary and until we've got the bodies. The brigade will be the main operational combat unit of the Northwest Volunteer Army, responsible for taking on ZOG within a roughly defined operational area, and it will be made up of as many companies as needed. We diddled with the idea of creating separate commands for each state, Washington and Oregon, Idaho and Montana, but we decided to keep it simple. We need an army of fighting political soldiers, not layers of paramilitary bureaucrats. Each brigade will report to and be directed by the Army Council in the person of one or more political officers."

"So the political officer actually commands the brigade?" asked Charlie.

"No. He's strictly a liaison who acts as a communications conduit between the brigade commander and the central organization, although there may be situations where he has to use his interpretation of Army Council policy and strategy and pull a kind of rank on a brigade commander. That situation hasn't arisen yet, and I hope it seldom does. That's still kind of a gray area. The brigade is actually commanded by a brigade commandant, but don't worry about that now. What concerns you is the company, the basic fighting unit. The company itself will eventually be subdivided into flexible squads, or teams, or crews of three to six men each, as needed. An NVA combat team with their weapons should always be able to fit into one vehicle at a pinch, although we're finding that it's a damned good idea to always take two cars on an operation. Getting back to the Trouble Trio, one of them will become the company commander. He's responsible for everything that goes on in the company, and he leads his men in battle. He handles target selection, he initiates combat operations, and he keeps the company functioning and fighting. The company commander needs to be the most experienced and basically the most badass dude in the outfit, but he also needs to have demonstrated leadership capacity. In your case, I would suggest Zack Hatfield for this position."

"So would I," said Ekstrom.

"Absolutely," said Charlie.

"Congratulations, Lieutenant Hatfield," said Morehouse.

"Boy, that was quick," said Zack. "It took me three years in the American army just to make E-5."

"Yeah, well, we don't have affirmative action in the NVA," said Morehouse with a grin. "White boys are encouraged to apply. By the by, sorry to tell you two guys that at the moment only a company commander holds an actual NVA rank. We don't have any sergeants or warrant officers or field marshals as yet. Later on when there are more Indians, maybe we can have a few more chiefs, but for the time being there's only one big fish in each of our tiny little ponds. That's all you need right now. This is a real war we're fighting, not an Italian opera."

"Mmm, more democratic like that anyway," said Charlie. "Good psychology. That way you don't have guys getting jealous cause I'm a sergeant major and they're only lance corporals, or whatever."

"That, too," agreed Morehouse. "The first NVA companies will only be a small handful of men anyway, maybe a dozen at most, and you only really need one recognized honcho. But Zack, you need to set up a chain of command and appoint one of these guys to deputize for you in your absence, and to take over if you buy the farm. Let us know which one. You'll also need to select men as team leaders, as your company expands."

"We'll worry about that later," said Hatfield.

"Fine," said Morehouse amicably. "Anyway, a second member of each Trouble Trio must become company quartermaster. This is a vital job. The quartermaster is responsible for the acquisition, maintenance, and security of all physical plant, including weapons and ammunition, explosives if any, every kind of supplies from food to medical, as great a number of motor vehicles of all kinds as you can get access to, safe premises for housing and training, and generally everything material. He also holds the company's bankroll of cash, since money is just as much a war material as ammunition."

"Len, you already run a hardware store," said Zack. "You're used to keeping track of inventory and dealing with a cash flow, and you know guns better than any man in the county. I'd like you to take quartermaster."

"Fine," said Ekstrom with a nod.

"That leaves me," said Charlie Washburn.

"Looks like you're executive officer, by default," Morehouse told him. "The XO has two primary duties, intelligence and planning. Intelligence is vital. Good intelligence keeps you alive and makes the enemy dead. Bad intelligence does the opposite. Planning means scouting out ambush sites, figuring out what manpower and equipment and vehicles you'll need, anticipating contingencies, setting up operations from beginning to end. Zack can teach you a lot of what you need to know based on his military experience."

"Got it," said Charlie. "I'm a state forestry employee and I have an official truck and uniform and ID, so I can be seen pretty much anywhere and have a good reason for being there that won't cause comment."

"That's ideal," said Morehouse with a nod. "Now, one of the first things you will need to do is recruit more Volunteers. Each one of you should be working prospects, assessing their character and their ability, trying to figure out first off if they *can* do what must be done, and secondly if they *will* do it. This will be the most potentially dangerous of all the things you do. Make a mistake and try to bring in the wrong man, and you've compromised the whole company. Make a bigger mistake and *actually* bring the wrong man in, and you will either die or spend the rest of your lives being sodomized by niggers in the prison shower. There is no worse error a revolutionary organization can make than to bring the wrong individual or the wrong *kind* of individual on board. This is a whole separate topic we will have to get into later in some detail, and we are starting to establish the necessary procedures to screen people, so you won't be flying totally blind, but I can't overemphasize the seriousness of recruiting. We have to have more Volunteers, but they *must* have the right stuff right from the start. It's going to be a bitch. By the way," he added casually, "Do any of you drink? Never mind. From now on, you don't. We have something called General Order Number Ten that forbids any Northwest Volunteer from consuming alcoholic beverages or using drugs of any kind. Period. End of story. Do I need to explain to you why this must be?"

"I think it's obvious that you can't stage a revolution with drunks," said Ekstrom.

"Hell, I'm too damned overweight anyway," said Charlie. "Yeah, I suppose like a lot of white men, I've crawled into a beer can sometimes to try and kill the pain. Can't you tell by looking at me? But now I know there's hope, I'd have to be a real creep to choose my six-pack over the future of my race. I guess I just won't stop off at the mini-mart on the way home tonight. Or any other night, until this is over. It's a small price to pay for being a part of history."

"I saw too many things go bad in Iraq because of drunks and dopers, of all ranks and races," said Hatfield. "I don't want to be out on some rainy street at night, and the man I'm depending on for my life and the success of the mission shows up staggering drunk or he's not where he's supposed to be because he snuck off to some damned bar. Not to mention the fact that booze loosens lips and sinks ships."

"Good," said Morehouse with an approving nod.

"Okay, so once we get a few more guys in, assuming one of them doesn't rat us out and we don't all end up in prison before we fire a shot, what then?" asked Hatfield.

"The Holy Grail you seek, gentlemen, is what's called OR. Operational readiness," said Morehouse. "That means you've gotten all your ducks in a row, acquired enough guns and recruited men willing to pull triggers, gotten a small fleet of vehicles and safe houses and supplies and some money together, and you're ready to start shooting. But then you don't just go out on the street and start blasting at every passing black or Mexican face you see."

"Darn!" said Washburn.

"You have to condition yourselves always to keep your eyes on the prize," Morehouse urged them. "Remember that you are part of an army that is fighting a colonial war for independence. You are trying to achieve a political objective, not just rack up a black and beaner body count. Any damned thug can shoot people. We are trying to *free* people, ours. Eventually the Army Council will appoint political officers to the smaller NVA active service units whose function will be to make sure that every action a unit takes in some way serves the larger purpose and fits into the big picture."

"I assume there will be other NVA companies around," said Hatfield.

"Yes," replied Morehouse with a nod. "Once you guys are OR, by the way, you will officially come on strength as D Company of the First Portland Brigade, Northwest Volunteer Army. We're shaping up two brigades in every major urban area, Seattle and Portland and Spokane and Boise. Two completely separate structures acting independently, suspenders *and* belt, so if the feds break one and roll it up, then the other one can keep on fighting. Eventually there may be more than two. We'll have to see how all this plays out. Your brigade commandant is Tommy Coyle. I can go ahead and mention his name since he's already on the Ten Most Wanted List after Coeur d'Alene. I'll be in touch with you in a few days, Zack, and we'll set up a meeting. I think you two will be *simpatico*. Tommy did a couple of tours in Iraq like you, with the Rangers. Each of you will need to appoint one man from your group to act as liaison with the other, so that if either you or Tommy go down, we won't lose contact. If that ever should happen, by the by, you also know Shane and Rooney, and if either of them can find you, you can take anything they say as coming from me. Communications is a whole 'nother bag we'll have to sort out, since we'll be using everything from the internet to cell phones to coded personal ads in supermarket tabloids. Make no mistake—this is going to be a complex gig and you're going to have to be able to keep all sorts of names and numbers and information in your head without writing anything down."

"Okay, so we're part of the Portland Brigade. How will that work? What, exactly, do you want us to do?" asked Charlie Washburn.

"D Company will be responsible for a very large turf, and you'll probably end up being the biggest company in the brigade," Morehouse told them. "Eventually you may even become a separate brigade, but for now we need you working with the boys in Portland. Urban units will necessarily have to be smaller and more compartmentalized, since most of the action will be in the cities due to the fact that there will always be more targets for us there. In theory, you guys' operational area will be everything from the Portland city limits down Highway 30 along the south bank of the Columbia River, and then on down the coast along Highway 101 to about Tillamook or so. In actual practice, we could send you anywhere in the Homeland, or for that matter anywhere in North America, if there's something that needs doing and we think you're the best guys for the job. Your first duty will of course be to clear this North Shore area of all enemy forces and non-whites, but a very important secondary duty will be to provide backup and support for the Portland units, hideouts for them when they're hot, supplies, training areas and logistics, safe caches for arms, lab facilities for EOD units, whatever they need."

"EOD?" asked Washburn.

"Explosive ordnance delivery units. Bombers," said Morehouse.

"Define enemy forces," requested Hatfield.

"Anyone who is part of the federal apparatus of control and enforcement, or who assists in maintaining the Zionist occupation, or who gives aid and comfort to the régime," Morehouse explained. "Military personnel, of course. FBI and Homeland Security agents, obviously. Certain local police but not all; that's a special problem I'll go over with you later. Some of the cops will be on our side, or at least willing to stand aside and let us get on with it. State and federal judges and anyone to do with the court system, and all lawyers. There are a few good lawyers and they go on a special don't-shoot list, but they're going to have to find another way to make a living. The enemy court system comes to a screeching halt, period. Anyone to do with the prison system—we want to make them move all those nigger and Mexican criminals the hell out of the Homeland, because in a pinch they might release thousands of gang-bangers and drug-addicted scum to attack the white population and create confusion and diversion. There are a number of white prisoners we want released to join us, but they're a special problem and will be dealt with at a higher level than yours, unless your company should be specifically brought in on any such operation. Federal bureaucrats of any kind, but especially

anyone to do with the IRS or revenue collection. One of the keystones of our strategy is that from now on, not one more dime we can prevent goes to Washington, D.C. from the Pacific Northwest. Elements in the media and the civilian population who actively support the régime or propagandize for it. And of course, anyone with skin the color of shit is henceforth persona non grata in the Northwest. Believe me, Zack, you won't lack for targets. Basically, your job is to make sure that from Beaverton on down the river to the sea, ZOG's writ doesn't run anymore."

"That's a mighty big stretch of territory," commented Ekstrom with a frown.

"Yes, but the potential is immense," replied Morehouse with a smile. "I don't know if it's hit you guys yet, but you're sitting right in the middle of perfect guerrilla country here. Huge expanses of heavy forest, mountains and ravines where you could hide an army, and where maybe we will someday. Small towns scattered far apart, connected only by long, twisting highways where an ambush can lurk around any corner. Endless back roads and isolated houses and trailers and old mines and logging camps where you can meet and train, and where you can disappear when the heat comes down. Weak, scattered, and disconnected enemy forces in small outposts that can be isolated and taken out or forced to evacuate, and the whole area a backwater that the feds won't want to expend much on in the way of effort or manpower, because their main fight will be in the cities—and yet your small band of Volunteers can quite possibly force the government into committing tens of thousands of men and tens of millions of dollars to try and keep you contained, because you've got a main enemy artery of supply right out your front door," he went on, gesturing through the window toward the river. "Huge container ports at Portland and Longview where billions of dollars of goods are trans-shipped coming and going every year. Do you realize the economic chokehold we could apply on the United States if we succeed in shutting down the Columbia shipping pipeline to the Asian rim, as well as Seattle and Tacoma? I say to you again, comrades—in our kind of war, it's never the generals who cry halt. *It's the accountants!"*

III

In Shadow

Let every man among you task his thought,
That this fair action may on foot be brought.

King Henry the Fifth, Act I, Scene 2

It wasn't for another week that Morehouse was able to set up a meeting between Zack Hatfield and First Brigade Commandant Tommy Coyle. Len Ekstrom arranged through the Helping Hand temporary agency for Hatfield to be permanently "employed" as a stocker and general dogsbody in the hardware store, thus providing Hatfield with a steady cover job and also giving him time to spend getting the new D Company organized. Then Hatfield got an e-mail from "General Okeke Okezi, former Nigerian Army Chief of Staff," composed in pidgin English and asking him for his assistance and his bank account number to transfer "much of foreign currencies" out of Nigeria. Red Morehouse had gone over with him a series of code words that enabled him to decipher the NVA message, and the next day he took a bus into Portland, which was stopped at the off-ramp going into downtown and searched by nervous city cops and Oregon State Police with sniffer dogs. Hatfield was glad he had obeyed his orders and come unarmed; such random searches were becoming common in the cities. Hatfield was met at the bus station by a shabbily dressed, unshaven man of about 50 who walked up to him and tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Are you Fred Johnson?"

"No, Fred's my brother," replied Hatfield. He followed the man out onto the street to a battered pickup truck. In a few minutes they were driving down the sleazy strip malls of 82nd Avenue. Zack noticed that police cars were now

patrolling the streets of Portland in pairs. The driver said nothing, and Hatfield decided not to try and engage him in conversation. He was surprised that the silent man made no effort to conceal from him where they were going, until he pulled up behind a tavern. They got out, and his chauffeur walked up to a large dirty white RV and opened the door. Hatfield entered the vehicle and found two men inside waiting for him, sitting behind the tiny kitchen table, Red Morehouse and a large square-built man in a black pullover sweater, with close-cropped brown hair and a face that looked chiseled in Donegal granite, in which two cold blue eyes seemed to flicker like gas jets. He was carrying a Glock 9-mm pistol in a shoulder holster. "Have a seat, Lieutenant," said Morehouse formally. "This is Commandant Tommy Coyle." Zack was a powerful man with a powerful grip, but Coyle's ham-like fist almost crushed his fingers.

"Red tells me you're a former rah-rah," rumbled Coyle. "So was I. 75th Infantry, Dynamic Entry Unit."

"75th, Recondo," replied Hatfield. "You guys were the door-kickers. At one point your life expectancy was what, three weeks?"

"In a good month," said Coyle. "I got a steel plate in my head from one time when we kicked in the wrong door in Ramadi." His accent was Yankee. Hatfield guessed Boston or New York. He heard the front door of the vehicle close and the engine start up. He glanced over and saw that the man who had picked him up was behind the wheel, and he felt the RV pulling out of the parking lot. "Red says you've told him why you want to party down with the Volunteers," said Coyle as the RV pulled out into the street. "You convinced him. Now convince me."

Hatfield wasn't offended; he understood the need for suspicion and precaution and he knew that in a movement like the NVA, trust and comradeship was not something that would come overnight. It had to be carefully forged and then tempered in the fire of combat. Nothing loath, he started talking. He was lucky in that Coyle's bullshit detectors were excellent and they detected none; it occurred to him that if Coyle had sensed anything off kilter about him he wouldn't be seeing the bus station again. But Coyle sized him up and at some point, he approved. After a time Zack could feel the conversation easing into serious business between colleagues. "So what does the big picture look like?" he eventually asked.

"A lot of thought has gone into the question of how the revolution in the Northwest will flow, so to speak, with relation to the urban-rural question," Morehouse explained. "Mao's classical dictum was that you always take the countryside first and the cities last. That's fine for the Third World, but it

doesn't always work. There are a hundred other factors that come into play. That countryside-to-city flow worked in China and in Cuba, then Che Guevara tried it in Bolivia and fell flat on his ass. The Iranian revolution was almost entirely urban, the Afghan resistance against the Russians and later the Americans was almost entirely rural, and the Iraqi insurgency is a well-balanced hybrid of both, although in Iraq the resistance has massive support of the people of a kind we don't have yet, and they have more numbers than we'll likely have for a long time."

"They also have massive world opinion on their side and beaucoup outside sources of supply, as well as recruiting and training bases across every border," Zack reminded him. "I remember one of the classes we got in guerrilla warfare from the TAC school in the Rangers. The instructor was an egghead professor type from some neocon think tank, and he told us that it's always been considered that a completely self-contained insurgency based inside the country of operation, without foreign bases and outside supply lines, was impossible."

"Nothing is impossible," said Coyle vigorously. "We're going to *win* this, period, end of story. We have to take that attitude right from the start."

"It always helps to have allies and exterior sources of aid, true," agreed Morehouse. "But it's not completely necessary. The Bolsheviks had none in 1917, and the Provisional IRA and the Taliban always made do with a minimum. We will eventually develop some outside resources, of course. A lot of people across the world want to see the United States go down, and they'll be willing to help once they observe that our men have the right stuff and we are seriously pinning down American forces which would otherwise be used against their own countries. The Russians in particular won't have any objection to stepping back up to superpower status while we mangle ZOG from within. Bear in mind that there are certain advantages in fighting from within the belly of the beast. For all the incipient collapse and waste of the past three generations, this is still the richest country on the face of the earth. Everything we need to fight and win is right here; we just have to take it."

Coyle nodded. "You're right, Red. It's all there just waiting for us to stiffen our spines and take it. We need weapons and ammunition? We don't need gunrunners from outside. There are enough guns left in private hands in this country to get us started, guns we can beg or buy, or just take. From then on it's simple. We fight and kill the enemy and then we take *their* weapons and ammo. The Old Man always said that gun control was never really that important an issue. There was no point in having a right to keep and bear arms if we were never going to *use* it. How many right wing cranks have we

all known down through the years who had a whole rec room full of guns, all gathering dust and rust, not one of them ever used to fire a single shot in anger at the real racial enemy?"

"Oh, I have seen some private arsenals in the hands of right wing eccentrics that would make us all drool with envy," Morehouse chuckled. "Rusting away while the owners got older and older and more senile, until they died and their liberal asshole kids *gave the guns to the police.* Weapons kept obsessively clean and well oiled—and never taken out of the closet even when things were at their worst. It's like the Old Man always said—once we get some iron in our souls, we'll find a way to get some iron in our hands."

"We need safe houses, training and staging areas?" Coyle continued. "The Pacific Northwest is *huge;* the feds simply won't have the manpower to put a soldier behind every Douglas fir tree. Remember how it was, Zack, when we tried to occupy Iraq with only 140,000 men? There were hadjis behind every window and in every ditch, and we never knew where they were. The Northwest Homeland is at least three times the size of Iraq, and most of it is heavy forest and mountain, not empty desert. Screw outside help. It's all here for us, if we're man enough to use it. We have to get rid of this attitude that the federals are somehow better than us or superior to us. They aren't. They're not the bosses in this land anymore. We are. The police and the FBI are no longer the baddest motherfuckers on the block; the NVA is. The NVA does not fight on the defensive. They do. They don't hunt us. *We hunt them.* We can get all the weapons and ammo we need with a little hustle, explosives as well, plus what we can make ourselves. If we run short on anything else, we can always just raid the local Mighty Mart. Our sources of supply are right under our nose. We've got the elbow room to float like a humming bird and sting like a bee. This is a spiritual problem, not a material one. What we need are men and women with enough balls to pull the triggers and live the life."

"The size and terrain of our new country is in our favor," pointed out Morehouse. "A completely self-contained revolt might have small chance of success in some small and overcrowded country like England or Belgium, or some tiny state like Vermont or New Hampshire here, where the occupation forces can monitor pretty much everything and bring their superior forces to bear on any point quickly. This is the problem the Palestinians have always faced. They're trying to fight in a strip of land the size of a postage stamp, crowded in like sardines with their own people. But here in the Northwest we've got room to maneuver."

"Maneuver exactly how?" asked Hatfield.

"What the Army Council finally decided on is a series of small crews raising as much hell as possible in the cities, to keep the enemy forces mostly occupied in the urban centers, and make even fewer troops and cops available for large stretches of countryside and small towns like the North Shore where your company will be operating, Zack. This should make your job in this area a lot easier, since hopefully they'll be so occupied protecting their own institutions and people in Portland that they're just not going to be able to spare much in the way of manpower to chase you and your boys over hill and dale through hundreds of square miles of forest, or go rooting around for you in every isolated farm and logging camp. For the first year or so, in addition to direct operations against all federal authority and personnel in general, we want the combat crews to concentrate on gofers."

"On what?" asked Zack, puzzled.

"General Order Number Four," said Coyle. "GO-4 enforcement actions. Gofers. Get it?"

"Uh, refresh my memory," said Zack.

"Oh, that's right, you haven't yet seen the NVA General Orders for the State of Emergency, as we are officially calling our little insurrection," said Morehouse. "They're based on the last proclamation of the provisional government of the Northwest American Republic from Coeur d'Alene, officially transferring authority to the Army Council for the time being. Later on it will be known to the history books as the Northwest War of Independence. I'll get you a copy soon, but we try to keep those few and far between. Under the new Homeland Security regulations it's now a death penalty offense to be found in possession of them, along with the Protocols of Zion and certain specified books."

"Yeah, I hear *Mein Kampf* is now being pulled from public libraries and you have to register your privately-held copies," said Zack in disgust.

"Hate to see any of our lads or lassies get the cyanide needle just for a piece of paper," Morehouse sighed. "American bastards! Anyway, General Order Number Four orders all non-whites and homosexuals to leave the three basic Homeland states and anywhere else we're operating. Henceforth all non-whites, especially Jews, are considered to be legitimate military targets and are to be destroyed on sight, in theory. In practice, your job will not be to run around slaughtering blacks and Mexicans en masse. Your task is to drive them out, if you see the difference. Dead or *vamanos* doesn't matter, we want them *gone."*

"Oh, they'll get gone," said Tommy Coyle grimly.

"It is absolutely vital that we whiten up the Northwest, and fast," said Morehouse. "Every non-white, every Jew, and every bugger boy is a potential enemy asset, a pair of eyes and ears for the feds, a potential enemy soldier who by the very nature of who and what they are can only seek to do harm to us and to our people. That's in addition to all the problems they cause with their usual crime, violence, drugs, and monkey music. Right now the federal government has a vast pool of millions of willing assets, activists, and soldiers, living right here among us. We have to drain that swamp. But what's more important, the white people of the Northwest need to *see a difference,* a visible improvement in their lives. Fewer Mexicans especially. They need to no longer hear the babble of Spanish or ching ling ding in the local Safeway. They must no longer be confronted with sullen clerks and attendants in business places who don't speak English. They must no longer stand an extra twenty minutes behind endless sets of Mamacita, Papacita, and seven little bambinos in the checkout line. They have to notice that all of a sudden there are *jobs* available once again. They should be able to open their windows on a summer evening and not hear jangling salsa music from a boom box or a passing low ride. They have to notice that all of a sudden there are doctors and medical services available again in the local hospital, so when little Timmy cuts his hand or falls off his bike they can take him in and not have to wait four hours in the emergency room because it's flooded with non-paying wetbacks. They have to be able to walk down the streets of their towns and cities in safety, and not feel like they're in Guadalajara or Hong Kong or Somalia. White people may not come out openly and support us, but they will notice these things, and in the privacy of their own thoughts, they will know who is responsible, and they'll thank us for it."

"They have to understand that we are doing with the gun what the American politicians promised for 50 years and never delivered," concluded Zack.

"By George, I think he's got it!" exclaimed Morehouse excitedly.

"How do we go about it exactly?" asked Zack.

"Blacks are simple," said Morehouse with a shrug. "You shoot a few and make it clear to the rest of them that remaining in the Pacific Northwest is hazardous to their health. Let them know the Boss Man is back, as the Old Man said in his nationwide address on October 22nd. You'll get some who'll go on television and swagger and beat their chests like King Kong and go booga booga booga about how brave they are, and how no cracker woodchuck racists gonna run dere black asses outa nowhere, all that happy horse shit. You shoot them, too. It won't take long for the message to sink in. Blacks have a kind of racial instinct about whites. They know the difference between the Boss Man and Dilbert, and

they know who they can Mau Mau and who they can't. Once they know de ole massah be back, they'll break the plantation. Bugger boys ditto. No faggot in his right mind will want to stay here once they understand that by doing so, they're risking a hot lead enema. Mexicans are a more complex problem," Morehouse went on. "There's an economic factor there. Mexicans are here because capitalists *employ* them. Some of those employers are rich white people who want their pools cleaned, and their lawns trimmed, and their children nannied while they go out every day dressed for success, sure, but mostly it's the big corporations who have brought in all this mud, everything labor-intensive from flipping burgers to stacking pallets to mass farming in agribusiness."

"Which is one reason why whites are so poor these days," pointed out Coyle. "There are no entry-level jobs for white kids anymore, except in the military, which I've always suspected was part of the hidden agenda. Whites aren't eligible for affirmative action, so unless you're one of the lucky few whose parents can afford to send you to college and you're smart enough to get some kind of techie degree while you're there, you're stuck in blue-collar or white-collar poverty forever. I laugh my ass off at these feminist Barbie Dolls in the natty business suits and briefcases who go through years of college and get a masters degree in business administration or something equally useless, and who then end up working as word processors or secretaries for temp agencies or bank tellers until they're 45 years old. They wanted a career, but all they ended up with was a job, and a shitty one at that."

"At least they can *get* some kind of white-collar office job," said Morehouse. "Right now a white male who can't get into college and go high techie once he's there is in deep shit. He gets a degree in business or liberal arts or something like that, and he ends up driving an ice cream truck or delivering pizzas. We need to put a stop to that crap. The employers are the key. To get rid of the beaners we don't just go around blasting them on the corner, although there needs to be some of that, of course, to get them motivated. We go for the *employers,* without whom there would never have been any problem to begin with. We need to deprive capitalism of this vast pool of cheap Third World labor they've imported into this country and force them to start investing in real human resources again, to hire ten white people at a decent wage and train them and motivate them and keep them, instead of just hiring a hundred Mexicans off the street corner every two months or calling a temp agency for a no-benefits, minimum-wage office drudge. We have to open the job market for whites again, so they can at least do like our grandfathers did, *get a start* in some company even if it's only on the production line or in the warehouse, and work their way up."

"The big shots will yell and scream that it's not competitive in a global economy," Hatfield chuckled.

"Fuck that," said Red succinctly. "Contrary to capitalist myth, the economy is *not* some kind of primal force of nature that just does what it wants like the weather. It is in fact possible to plan and manage an economy to some degree, provided the men doing it don't have their heads up their asses and they have some moral sense of *civitas.* Permanent employment of white people with full benefits worked fine for almost a century, when American companies made their products here in America, marketed their products here in America, and treated their employees at least somewhat like human beings instead of widgets to be thrown away and replaced by a Mexican or outsourced when they wore out. There is no reason on the face of the earth why that system couldn't work again if there is some kind of political will at the top to make it happen, which there will be in the Republic we are fighting to establish. We can take the first step now, and show the people of the Northwest proof of our pudding, so to speak. We have to re-open entry-level jobs to whites, because when they get that first paycheck they will know who they have to thank for it. When the word gets out that despite all the insurgency trouble, there are *jobs for white people* in the Northwest, real jobs, then we'll start getting migrants even in the middle of a civil war."

"So how do we defeat the might of globalized world market forces?" asked Hatfield curiously.

Morehouse drew his sidearm and held it up. It was a Son of Sam Special, a Charter Arms .44-caliber revolver. "One of these makes a hell of a presentation," he said with a grin. "I don't think it will be too difficult to persuade some corporate executive to see our point of view when he's looking down a gun barrel. Oh, it won't be that easy. They'll try all the usual crap, outsourcing and eventually shutting down their companies and trying to flee the Northwest for Guatemala or someplace rather than employ white people at a living wage. They'll think we can't find them and wire something to their car ignitions in New York or St. Louis or wherever their corporate headquarters are. They'll soon be disillusioned on that score."

"I've never been to New York," said Hatfield wistfully.

"You haven't missed anything," Coyle told him.

"I wasn't planning on missing."

"That's for the future, though," Morehouse went on. "Right now, what you guys on the ground need to do is deal locally with direct managers. You just go into a place that employs Mexicans or Chinese or whatever, wearing your ski masks at first, then later you won't need to because no one will dare

to try and stop you. You politely explain to the boss or the manager that come Monday morning there had better not be a single brown face in his establishment, or else there will be all kinds of physical experimentation done upon his carcass. If he tries to pass the buck to the head office or something like that, explain to him that the head office isn't going to go upside his head with a baseball bat if he doesn't do what he's told. You will. Do *not* burn down or blow up the factory or the business unless it seems really necessary to make your point. Remember, white people need those jobs the illegals will be vacating, and there will be some white employees there whom we don't need blaming the NVA for losing their jobs. No need to get too heavy about it. We've already littered the landscape with enough corpses so they'll know we're serious. There's nothing like killing people to convince others that they'd damned well better listen to what you have to say. For 50 years, we were never taken seriously. We were a joke and everybody knew it, because we never had the nerve to fire these things," Morehouse said, putting his pistol away. "We were not willing to spill blood or to put our own lives and bodies at risk for what we claimed to believe, and everyone knew this about us. They held us in contempt, and rightly so. Now we're pulling triggers, and you will find that all of a sudden, people pay attention."

* * *

The next afternoon, back in Astoria, Zack ran down that part of the conversation for the other two members of his Trouble Trio. "Of course, we need something in our hands to get everyone's attention with," he concluded. "We need to start assembling more of an arsenal than we've got. Any ideas on that, quartermaster?" he asked Len.

"A good one," said Ekstrom. "I think we need to go see old Bert Fields."

"Astoria's Mr. Second Amendment himself? Yeah, I remember Bert from when I used to go to gun shows, back when I still had some money to buy," said Hatfield. "I believe he has quite a collection."

"Yeah, he's got every federal firearms license the BATFE can issue, including a couple of them he had to take the Bureau to court to get them to grant him," said Len. "He's rich enough to hire decent lawyers, and so he won. The NRA was always able to spread enough cash around Congress so that technically speaking, we do still have the right to keep and bear arms, it's just that the federal government doesn't want white people *exercising* that right, and so they put every conceivable stumbling block in our way, hoping

to make it so expensive and so much trouble that we'll just say to hell with it and give up our guns voluntarily. Bert never did, though. He's fought the BATFE tooth and nail in court every time they tried to fuck with him over something in his collection."

"Yeah, I remember some of his news coverage," chipped in Washburn. "Like that time he demanded the right to keep a howitzer on his front lawn."

"He lost that one, but he won most of the other cases," Ekstrom reminded them. "I've been to his house to work on some of his pieces. You wouldn't believe it, Zack. He has a prefab hangar in his back yard, and it looks like a combination museum and National Guard armory inside. Bert's a genuine collector; he's got everything in there from full-auto Kalashnikovs to a matchlock musket, and ammo for all of them. Must be two or three hundred weapons of various kinds, most of which we could use if only on a once-off basis and then throw away."

"What's his security like?" asked Hatfield.

"Everything the law and twenty thousand federal regulations require," said Ekstrom. "Locked steel cabinets, every longarm chained to the rack through the trigger guard, trigger locks on all the handguns, a stack of documents a mile high filed with the BATFE for every weapon. The building itself has steel vault doors, sealed windows, motion detectors and an alarm connected with the cop shop downtown, all that blather."

"Going to be a hard crib to crack," said Washburn. "And will the three of us be able to transport all those guns once we get inside?"

"We may not have to crack it," said Ekstrom. "I've gotten to know Bert fairly well down through the years as a fellow gun nut. He was always pretty conservative and right wing."

"Maybe so, but the NVA isn't right wing," said Hatfield. "We're revolutionary, and a lot of us are outright Nazis, including me. We're out to save our race. Conservatives only want to save their money."

"Mmmm, maybe," conceded Len. "I don't know, though. He's let a few things slip that lead me to believe he might be approachable. The past few years have been a real eye-opener for Bert and a lot of people like him. They started out believing all that yay-hoo propaganda after 9/11, waving their Amurrican flags and stomping and cheering for Jug-Ears when he started this endless war in the Middle East, staring like brain-dead zombies at Fox News and swallowing whatever crap the neocons dished out. Of course for most folks, a lot of that was finally finding a group of people with dark skins whom white people were legally allowed to hate. They projected their real

loathing for niggers and Mexicans onto poor old Apu down at the Quickie Mart. Then as the war ground on for year after year, some of the sharper right wingers like Bert started noticing the contradictions, the little things here and there that didn't quite fit in with the official version of events."

"Like the fact that every petroleum-grabbing invasion the United States has carried out has turned into a fiasco?" asked Hatfield.

"That, of course, but other things as well," replied Ekstrom. "I think one of the best unintended consequences to come out of this Middle East crusade of ours has been that it's no longer possible to keep the central role of Israel in all this discreetly in the background, like the establishment used to do. The little man behind the curtain has finally been forced out into the open. I've actually heard Bert pass a few remarks questioning the official version of 9/11, and hinting that Israel might have had something to do with it in order to drag America into the Middle East, after that second intifada in the early 2000s, when it became apparent that the kikes were losing their military edge over the Arabs and wouldn't be able to fend off the entire Muslim world forever."

Hatfield whistled. "Questioning 9/11? That's a dime in the federal pen for hatespeech right there," he said. "What is that particular section called? 'Propagating malicious and baseless conspiracy theory regarding the government of the United States or any of its allies?'"

"Yah, only of course we all know that only *one* United States ally is meant," said Ekstrom. "Look, let me have a talk with Bert. No need for him to know about you two. He knows me from way back and I don't think he'll rat me out, but if he does, I'll be the only one compromised. I think I can persuade him to give us some or all of his weapons, rather than us have to plan a complex and risky heist."

"Okay, give it a shot," agreed Hatfield somewhat reluctantly. "Just be careful, take it slow and easy, and the second you get any bad vibes off him, you back off. There's still only three of us, remember, and I don't want to have to go looking for another quartermaster."

That evening Bert Fields was surprised to receive an unannounced visit from his old shooting buddy and gunsmith Lennart Ekstrom at his spacious sixteen-room Victorian mansion high on the beetling brow of the long ridge overlooking Astoria. "Come on in, Len," said Fields, nothing loath, inviting Ekstrom into his den. "Take a load off. Mary Lou's over at her sister's place. Hannah's health hasn't been too good lately." Fields and his wife were both well into their 70s. He was the retired director of an electronic circuit board manufacturing company in Portland that had been bought out and relocated

to India, but they'd given him a generous golden parachute, and he had moved to Astoria and spent the last twenty years investing that golden parachute with skill and success in everything from real estate to gold coins to European securities. He was easily a millionaire. "Can I get you a drink?" Fields offered. "Cognac? Bourbon? Name your poison."

"Ginger ale will be fine, if you've got it." Ekstrom replied. "I don't drink anymore."

"No? You got better sense than I have, then," chuckled the old man as he opened a small fridge under the wet bar in his den and pulled out a can of ginger ale and a plastic cup, into which he dropped some ice. He handed the soft drink to Ekstrom and poured a generous cognac for himself. "Want a cigar? Got some Macanudo Supremes."

"You might not feel so hospitable when you know why I've come, Bert," said Ekstrom.

"Oh?" Fields replied in surprise.

"I'll get right to the point, although it may not sound like it at first," said Ekstrom. "Just bear with me for a bit." He pointed to a photograph on Fields' mantel that showed several young naval officers on the flight deck of an old carrier. "You mentioned once that was taken when you were on the *Kitty Hawk* launching air attacks against North Vietnam?"

"Yep," replied Fields nostalgically. "That's me on the left, Al Vitelli on the right, and Bret Halsted in the center. Al died of cancer a few years ago, and Bret died in Atlanta federal penitentiary. He told a nigger joke and he got five years for hatespeech. Judge went light on him because of his age. He was 64. The first day the guards simply turned him into the yard and the black gang members beat him to death." Fields' voice was nonchalant and light, as if he were discussing the weather. Ekstrom hadn't known about the death of Fields' old navy buddy. It was an unexpected plus.

"That feeds right into what I want to talk to you about," he said in a steady voice. "Bert, the America that we once knew, that we were born into, the America that you fought for in 'Nam, that America is now gone. It doesn't exist anymore. It is gone forever. It will never come back. I need to know if you understand this, if you accept it. Because if you don't, then there's no point in my continuing with what I have to say."

"Of course I understand!" growled Fields, knocking back his cognac and heading to the bar for another. "I thank God every day that I'm old enough and rich enough so Mary Lou and I will be able to die in some comfort before this monstrosity comes crashing down around everyone's ears. I thank God that our children are all decent and loving men and women, and if their

mother and I have to go into the hospital they won't connive with some Jew doctor to slip us the hot shot under the Put The Old Folks Down Like Dogs Act, sorry, the Senior Citizens' Quality of Life Act, so they can get this house and get our money. That's happened to some of our friends, you know, since those carrion-eaters in Congress passed that goddamned law. I turn on CNN every morning, and it's all I can do to restrain myself from vomiting up my breakfast. Yes, Len, I understand that the United States of America has turned into a stinking latrine pit piled high with corpses and blood and shit. So why the hell do you ask?"

"Because I want a favor from you," returned Len, going for broke. "I want you to take Mary Lou and maybe Hannah on a short little vacation somewhere for a few days. A Christmas shopping trip would be a good cover. Before you go, I want you to give me the security codes to the driveway gate into this house, and to the doors to your outbuilding in the back. When you come back, you will be shocked and upset to learn that you have been the victim of a burglary. Some person or persons unknown will have broken into your annex, and all of your guns and ammo will be gone."

"My God," said Fields in a low voice. "You're one of *them* now, Len?"

"Yes."

"There are others? Here in Astoria?" asked Fields.

"Yes, and no, I won't tell you who they are."

"I had no intention of asking," Fields told him. He walked to his window and looked out into the winter darkness outside. "Do you believe in the hand of God, Len? I mean something of God that manifests itself in the affairs of men at just the right time?"

"I seem to perceive something of the kind in operation recently, yes," Ekstrom answered.

"This morning I got a call from Pat Franklin, my attorney in Portland," Fields told him. "Pat's pretty well connected down at the federal courthouse, and he learned something he felt he should pass on to me. Within the next week or so, the BATFE is going to rock up on my doorstep here with a large truck and a piece of paper, all nice and legal and signed by a federal judge in Portland, ordering the confiscation of all my firearms under some obscure Homeland Security legislation I never heard of, some secret clause those yea-saying leeches in Congress snuck into an appropriations bill or something. We've had total gun control in this country for many years, it's just the BATFE hasn't bothered to exercise it up until now. The fact that this act of theirs is in direct violation of the Second Amendment of the Constitution of the United States apparently doesn't enter into the proceedings anywhere. The

Second Amendment no longer exists except as a few meaningless lines on an old yellowed parchment behind a glass case in some museum. None of the Bill of Rights exists anymore. I'm surprised it's taken them this long to get around to me, after what happened in Coeur d'Alene. They've been after my collection for a long time. After I heard from Pat this morning, and before you arrived here tonight, I had already resigned myself to spending most of the remaining years of my life and most of my personal fortune paying attorneys astronomical legal fees to try and fight this monstrous violation of my rights in court, and try to get my guns back before I die. That was to be my last remaining goal in life. I was already wrestling in my mind with the virtual certainty that I would never see any of them again. Now you come along tonight, and you tell me you want a favor from me. I have loved firearms all my life. Don't know why. Some people are just born to certain things, I guess. I spent my whole adult life building up that collection, Len. Starting with the old single-barreled shotgun my father gave me on my 16th birthday. In all this time, I have never fired a single shot in anger at another human being. Not even in the Navy when I was in a war zone. I know in my heart that I wouldn't do it even when those sons of bitches in their silk suits come to take my guns away. I'm just too old a dog to teach new tricks."

"They're gone, Bert," said Lennart. "One way or the other, you can't keep them anymore. That's just the way it's played out. You have two choices. Let the federal goons steal your property and ruin yourself and Mary Lou bleating about it in court, begging and pleading for these tyrants to be so kind as to grant you a right that you were born with. Or you can give them to us freely, and know that at long last they won't be just sitting on a shelf or in a display case somewhere, but they will be doing what they were made to do, firing bullets at evildoers in defense of freedom and justice."

"How do you know I won't agree with everything you're saying, and then pick up the phone and call the FBI as soon as you've left tonight?" asked Fields.

"I don't," said Ekstrom. "We're going to change the world, Bert, and that can't be done without risk. I drew the short straw, and if I've judged you wrongly then I pay the price."

Fields stared out into the dark night beyond the window. "Dear God, I am so sickened and ashamed by what this country has become!" He walked over to his desk and tore out a sheet of paper from a notepad, and picking up a pen he scribbled something on it. He handed it to Ekstrom. "The first one is the code to open the automatic gate to the driveway. The second one is the code for the main door to the hangar, and the third is for the safe inside

which has a few toys in it that you and your friends will find useful. Try to make it look like you broke in, smash the keypads or something. The BATFE will suspect I connived with you, but fuck 'em. They've pushed me once too often. I'll leave all the padlocks on the cases and the racks open."

"No, we'll cut those off with bolt cutters to make it look good," said Ekstrom. "I know the layout inside there, and I know where we can get a panel truck. It will take us a couple of hours to get everything loaded, but no one can see the hangar from the street. If we're fast and quiet there shouldn't be any problem."

"If I can't have them, I know you'll give them a good home and use them well, Len," said Fields with a sigh. "Len, if I was even twenty years younger, I think I might beg to join you. But I can't. I'm just too old and weary, and I can't risk leaving Mary Lou alone at our time of life, at least no sooner than nature intends. But this much I can do. You're right. It's time those guns did something besides sit on a shelf and gather dust. You'd better act fast. I don't know for sure when those BATFE goons are going to show up here. I'll make sure Mary Lou and I are in Portland tomorrow night. Make your move then. Now you'd better leave, Len. I don't want Mary Lou to come home and see you here. What she doesn't know, she can't spill. Besides, after you leave I'm going to take this bottle of cognac and a glass out back for a while. I'm going to say goodbye to my babies." Ekstrom saw there was a tear glistening in one of the old man's eyes.

* * *

Len Ekstrom was able to get all kinds of useful information out of the key file in his hardware store, including making a set of keys to a small waterfront warehouse unit long owned by the Portland branch of a Hong Kong based company that had gone out of business. The warehouse was technically part of some Chapter 11 proceeding in some far-off courtroom and no one seemed to remember that it existed. They hadn't even bothered to turn the power off. It became one of the D Company Trouble Trio's alternate meeting places, and the one they elected to use to receive out-of-state visitors along with the Kiwanis Club beach shack on the Washington side of the river. The three of them were gathered there on the night after Christmas. "One of the brigade adjutants is coming to see us in an hour or so," Hatfield told them as they sat in the small warehouse office on folding metal chairs around a folding table in a corner. Len had brought in a coffeemaker and an old space heater from his shop. The heater was rumbling away in a corner, but it was just barely beginning to take some of the chill off the freezing little room.

"A whosit?" asked Washburn.

"Brigade actually has a staff, of sorts," explained Hatfield. "This guy's Volunteer name is Larry Donner. That may even be his real name, for all I know. I met him briefly when I was up in Portland, after they brought me back from our little road trip around the city. Larry will be our liaison and primary communications with brigade command. By the way, he doesn't know our real names, and he doesn't need to. When he's here we address one another by job title. I'm lieutenant, Len is quartermaster, and Charlie's XO. That way if he's captured, he can't tell anyone who we really are even under pressure. That's one reason I set this meet up here instead of at your store, Len. We don't want anyone, even our own people, associating your name with anything NVA, unless they need to know. When we have to refer to one another in public, on the phone or in an e-mail with anyone in Brigade or with each other, we will use code names. They've come up with a kind of a Reservoir Dogs thing for that purpose. The CO is White, quartermaster is Black, and the XO is Green, and since we're D Company, our first names will all begin with D. I'm Dan White."

"Easy on the Twinkies, there, Dan," said Washburn.

"Yeah, I'm glad to carry the moniker of a famous queer-killer," said Hatfield with a chuckle. "Len, you're David Black, and Charlie is Donald Green. That way when somebody has a message for Dave Black on the phone, it's for the D Company quartermaster, so forth and so on. That's a simple system and easy for us to remember for the time being, but eventually the feds will figure it out. We'll be switching code names every few months at least, so we're going to have to be able to remember who we are at all times and not get it mixed up. Brigade adjutants are gofers, couriers between units. Larry's kind of a circuit rider. He does the rounds of some of the companies, not all of them, and briefs them on what they need to know from the brigade level and higher up, and he takes back to brigade staff what they need to know about each company, what they've been up to, their capabilities, and any problems they're running into. He will be one of our official contacts with Brigade. I have the other, i.e. the commandant himself. I'm sorry you guys haven't met him yet, because he's an impressive man and he inspires confidence, but once again it's need to know. Get used to it. You're going to hear that a lot. Larry is coming here to assess our progress toward Operational Ready status. Let's go over what we should tell him. First, how's our manpower situation? Charlie, how are your prospects shaping?"

"I took a chance and I flat out pitched Lee," said Charlie, referring to his younger brother. "He's in. No hesitation and all enthusiasm. You know in high school he was really sweet on Sally Wheatley."

"The cheerleader girl who was stalked, raped and murdered by the Mexican?" asked Len. "I remember that."

"Yah, one of their minority fellow students," said Charlie in disgust. "We heard last year the beaner had been paroled after doing less than 10 years. The local paper didn't even figure it was worth a mention; the only way Lee heard about it was from Sally's father when he ran into him on the street. Lee's the kind of guy who just files stuff like that away in his mind, but I could tell he was quietly coming to the boiling point, and if something didn't come along soon he was going into a McDonald's or someplace with a gun and start blasting every spic he saw. I can vouch for him as much as I could ever vouch for any man. I know my brother. He's made his decision and he's with us, rock solid till the end."

"Good," said Hatfield. "That's going to be one of our hidden strengths. It's reached the point where every white American has a Sally Wheatley somewhere in their past, someone they knew about or cared about who's been victimized. People don't forget these things. Okay, how about Al Wicker?"

"He talks a good racist rap, and he's politically knowledgeable," said Charlie. "He knows about the Jews. He got badly burned by the Republicans. Al had political ambitions once, but he came on too strong and got bounced for political incorrectness and taking Israel's name in vain."

"I recall that he had some contact with the Party but we could never get him to commit," said Zack. "Was that caution or flakiness, you think? You know him better than I do."

"Mmmm, not sure, and we need to *be* sure. To be honest, Zack, I think it may be kind of early days on Al. I think he'll be with us, but only once he sees that we're likely to win. Also, when I was talking with him in his den I was drinking Diet Coke and so was he, but he knocked back almost half a bottle of rum in the cokes during the course of the evening."

"You know the rule. No boozers," said Zack. "One drunk can get us all killed or buried alive. Think he could give it up and stay thirsty for the duration of the revolution?"

"I say put him on the back burner for now," said Charlie. "He's got a nice big house, a good job still, although you never know how long it will last these days, and he's got something to lose. That worries me. When the heat comes on, guys with something to lose will start getting nervous and thinking deal and Witness Protection Program. We need to start with white men who have nothing to lose. God knows there are enough of them around nowadays."

"Okay, let's just put Al on file for later as a maybe. You didn't let him know what we were up to, did you?"

"No, just the usual middle-aged white guy grousing. I let him do most of the talking."

"That's the way to do it. We can't let *anyone* know who we are or what we're doing until we're as certain of them as it's possible to be," said Zack. "How about Tony Campisi?"

"Coming along," said Washburn. "I think he'll throw in with us, but he's a strong family man and he's worried sick about his kids, what's going to become of them. That can cut either way. I'll say this, with Tony it will be straight up, yes or no. If it's yes, he's with us all the way. If it's no, it's no, but he won't rat us out. I'd stake my life on it."

"We are," said Zack dryly. "Len? How's your brother in-law coming?"

"Where do you think we got some of our new transportation?" replied Len with a grin.

"Did you tell him everything?"

"I didn't have to. I simply went over to Lundgaard Chevrolet and talked to him in his office. I told him I needed access to as many older-model used cars as he could supply, day or night. I told him some of them might come back to his lot and some might not, and he should ask no questions and be ready to cover the vehicles with paperwork. If he didn't want to do it, he had my word the subject would never be mentioned again. He looked at me and said okay, just let him know what was needed. He said, 'Only one question, Len. Does Eva know?' I told him yes, but there was no need to discuss anything. 'I won't,' he said. 'She'll be worried enough. Call me when you need me.' Jerry's another one of those quiet types who go to work, and come home, and live their lives, who's never made a political statement in his life, but he's like that character in one of the Shakespeare plays who says the less but thinks the more. He's just so sick unto death in his soul at what's been going on that he's ready. We can count him in."

"Great," said Zack. "And now my own *pièce de résistance*. I pitched Cat-Eyes Lockhart last night, and he's in."

"We have a Medal of Honor winner as a Northwest Volunteer?" exclaimed Washburn.

"You have no idea how many white men came back from Iraq burning with rage at the bastards who sent us over there," said Zack. "We have a Medal of Honor winner who can't be a fisherman anymore because his ancestral waters have now been reserved for an Indian tribe that no longer exists except for a handful of alcoholic half-breeds who never touch a net and who spend their time drinking up their welfare checks. We have a Medal of Honor winner who can't be a logger anymore since half the forests have been gobbled up by

the Parks because of the damned spotted owls and pine weasels, in order to let Halliburton make billions by importing Siberian paper pulp. We have a Medal of Honor winner who hasn't known a single decent paycheck or had any medical insurance or had any future at all since he left the military. We have a Medal of Honor winner whose wife ran off to the city with a damned Indian-Polynesian half-breed who flashed a big wad of cash and a big stash of coke, and took their kids. We have a man who can no longer get or hold any job at all because he keeps punching out his Mexican foremen and asshole bosses, and only his military record and some sympathetic cops and judges have kept him out of jail on a hatecrime charge. He knows his luck won't hold forever, and he was preparing to go out in a blaze of glory, until I came along and showed him how he could maybe have a second shot at a new life, and if not, he could make his death count for something. He is *so* in!"

"The deadliest American sniper in Iraq!" said Washburn with satisfaction.

"Yep. Cat racked up 104 confirmed kills. Not just hits, kills. He's a weapon we have to have. We've got a very dangerous man on our hands, guys. I honestly don't know if he's entirely sane, but I know he wants in on the NVA so bad he can taste it. I was a bit worried about the no-drinking rule and I gave it to him straight. I told him that any damned fool can drink himself to death, but he'd have to choose between the NVA and the bottle. He said, 'I'm always dry when I work,' and I believe him. We need to give him work, though, and soon. You'd better let me deal with him at first until he gets used to you. We've been in the same desert shitholes together. I speak his language. But once we turn him loose with a decent weapon in his hands, there is not a single Unionist or non-white in Oregon who will be safe. Cat will be a body count all on his own. Speaking of weapons, Len, how did old Fields's collection turn out?"

"Amazing," said Ekstrom, shaking his head. "50 years' worth, hundreds of weapons! A lot of them I had never even seen before!"

"Brigade's going to want some," said Hatfield.

"Fine, we've got more than we'll be using for a long time," said Ekstrom. "The only problem is ammunition, especially for some of his older pieces, and I'm not sure some of the collection will be usable at all, like his selection of Japanese and Italian weapons from World War Two, most of which were shit guns when they first came off the assembly line and they're still pieces of shit. But picking through all that stuff, I was in seventh heaven! Winchesters, Remingtons, .22s, bolt actions and semi-autos, Model 98 Mausers, for which we can still get 8-mm ammo. At least two dozen fine hunting rifles with scopes,

.30-06 and .30-30 and .243 and .440 calibers. Over 40 shotguns, 12 gauge, 16-gauge, 20-gauge, .410s, everything from a $20,000 Purdy His Lordship shoots grouse with in Scotland, to police-model pumps and Sicilian *lupara* style double-barrels! And the *pistols!* Good God! Glocks and Brownings and almost every other 9-mm made, Berettas and Walthers, Rugers and Charters and Smiths and Colts of every description, .45s and .38s and .44s, old Police Specials, derringers, Russian Makarovs and Nagants, I don't even know where to begin!"

"Easy there!" chuckled Zack. "Now for the icing on the cake. What about his full auto?"

"God knows how Fields kept the BATFE from finding some excuse for seizing it, lawyers or not," said Ekstrom, shaking his head in wonder. "The annual license fees alone must have cost him a fortune. Only one of each, but we are now the proud owners of an Uzi with seven magazines, a BAR with four magazines, a Thompson .45 with one hundred-round drum, one 50-round drum, and three stick magazines, one AK-47 with six banana clip magazines and a hundred-round drum, one AK-74 also with six magazines and a drum, one full-auto military-issue M-16 with five magazines, one Czech-made RPK with one drum, an Israeli Negev 5.56-mm with no magazine but I can make some, one MAC-10 with two magazines and one Tec-9, also with two. And last but not least, one World War Two vintage Browning .30-caliber machine gun, belt fed and air cooled, with tripod, decommissioned but only with solder down the barrel, which I can bore out in a jiffy. The ammo and the belts for the Browning will be a problem, and it's heavy as hell and no good except in a fixed position, which I gather we won't be defending. Interesting museum piece, though."

"I'm sure we can find something to do with it," said Hatfield. "You know, it's odd, but one thing we found in Iraq was that when it came time to dance with the hadjis in the dust, it was the older weapons that worked best, the .45s and the M-60s and good ole Ma Deuce, the Browning .50-cal. Armalite and night scopes and plastic parts are fine, but there's simply no substitute for good old fashioned punching and stopping power and a steady machine gun that can fire all day and throw thousands of rounds at an even pace without jamming or overheating. And that Kalashnikov just can't be beat. We used to get shat on from a dizzy height from the Baghdad Green Zone for leaving our M-16s behind and going out on patrol or door-kicking with an AK in our hands instead, whenever we could get hold of them and enough rounds."

"We don't need all this fancy new ballistics and small arms tech for the kind of war we're fighting," said Charlie. "Most of our jobs are going to be

more like Mafia hits or L.A. gang-bangs and drive-bys than pitched battles. A simple revolver or a bolt-action rifle will do us quite nicely, nine times out of ten, just so long as we hit what we aim at. We shoot and then we scoot. The idea is for the NVA to stay light enough and fast on our feet enough so the cops and the feds don't surround us and bring up all *their* high-tech toys and super-guns, then slide around back of them while they're chasing their tails and hit them again in the soft underbelly. Like killing a giant diseased armadillo. They're hard on top but soft underneath and behind. We will slash that soft underbelly so often ZOG bleeds to death beneath their armor."

"You got it, Charlie. How about Bert Field's ammo, Len?" asked Hatfield.

"About 20,000 factory rounds and almost as many of Fields's reloads. A very mixed bag," said Ekstrom. "Mostly for the handguns and the less exotic long-arms, of course. We've got enough 9-mm, .45, .357 and .38 Special to be getting on with for a while, and a fair amount of 5.56 and 7.62 for the rifles and automatics. The .30-06, .22 and 12-gauge shells you can still get locally so long as we don't buy too much at once, and we can diddle the paperwork so it doesn't get back to us. I am assuming that the feds will try some kind of gun confiscation very soon and make both weapons and ammo impossible to obtain legally at all, but we've got our start, Zack. I should mention that I've talked to Fields. He tells me the BATFE has been onto him twice since the initial theft report was filed, and he assumes his phone is tapped. The feds have got a good idea where all those weapons went to, and they're not happy campers."

"Okay, caching?" said Hatfield. "It is absolutely essential that those weapons we're not using be stored some place safe, and not all in one big arms dump that the enemy can raid and snatch it all back in one big gulp. I've got some at my place and Charlie's got some at his, but we need to get them dispersed, a couple of dozen weapons in each hiding place. There won't be as many as we've got now, since like I said, Brigade will be expecting us to pass a lot of this hardware on up the line."

"Zack, did you ever decide what kind of personal issue there should be for D Company Volunteers?" asked Ekstrom.

"I was told that's being left to the discretion of each company commander, since everyone's situation is a bit different," said Hatfield. "For our boys here, I want every Volunteer to be prepared to fight his way out of any situation, or at least die trying. Unless there is a tactical reason for it, like having to go through a metal detector, we should all be strapped. Boys, I don't know about you, but I know what's waiting for me if I allow myself to be arrested, and I have no intention of doing so. I would quite literally rather be dead than

rotting and going mad in some place like Leavenworth or Marion. So each Volunteer should have at least one heavy handgun, 9-mm or bigger, powerful enough to do some damage, a .45 or a .357 for preference. As well as that one, they also need a small, concealable handgun, a .38 snub or a .380 automatic, as a holdout, just like cops carry. Both fully loaded and with at least one extra magazine. Okay, that won't always be practical, like at our jobs, but we need to be able to get to a weapon quick, always. Every Volunteer should also be issued one personal long-arm, something like an M-16 or an AK if we can get them. If not, then a good hunting rifle, and I would also say one sawed-off or very short 12-gauge shotgun for immediate defense in indoor situations, if they come barging in the door."

"Which brings us to the next item on the quartermaster's agenda, premises," said Ekstrom. "We have our own houses and apartments, but those shouldn't be used for obvious reasons." Ekstrom pulled out a map and unfolded it. "I'm going to burn this, by the way, once you guys and this adjutant feller get a look at it. We're going to have to memorize all these locations and keep them in our heads. Charlie was extra helpful here, since he knows the state forests and logging roads so well. There are all kinds of trailers, shacks, old and current park rangers' facilities, construction sites, logging camps with pre-fab structures, firefighting stations, you name it out in these woods. They're not the Hilton hotel chain, but they'll do. I was thinking about making sure every Volunteer was issued with a sleeping bag and a kind of woodland survival kit, including rations and bottled water. Okay, once ZOG cottons onto it, that might be a bit of a giveaway if their home or car is searched and they find the kit, but if we try stocking these places up with provisions and cots and things, then someone might find the stuff and either steal it or report it, and the feds will put two and two together and lay an ambush for anyone who shows up."

"Mmmm, yes," said Zack, rubbing his chin and thinking. "We should stockpile as little as possible, keep everything we have by way of supplies as dispersed as possible, not just guns and ammo. The Volunteers need to have the stuff on them, but not together in a kit. Just somewhere handy they can put it all together quick so as not to make it obvious to any ZOG gun thug who tosses them that they're planning a camping trip."

"Anyway, some of these places can also be used as arms and supply caches," continued Ekstrom. "The red crosses are rural retreats of various kinds, shacks and old logging trailers, whatever. You see they run all through Clatsop, Columbia, and Tillamook counties. We've got more bolt-holes than we'll need, I think."

"We still need as many as we can get," said Hatfield. "Charlie, over the next couple of weeks I want to ride along with you, and I want to see all these places myself and check them out, check the lay of the land, look at possible escape routes, anything that could end up being a death trap for us, etc. One thing I want to know is who besides us will know about these places? Also, how visible would they be from the air or from satellite reconnaissance? We need to find as many places as possible that are under a lot of trees so they won't show up from the air or on satellite recon."

"Okay," said Washburn. "The forestry service started using temps years ago, as you know, or contractors as they're officially known, so they don't have to hire anymore permanent people and pay for what few benefits state employees still have. Len tells me your boss Brenda is a cool lady, so I'll talk to her and I'll get you on as a temporary survey helper or something starting Monday. My boss will go for it as long as you're not a Mexican. He despises beaners because he's had so many problems trying to supervise them and control their behavior on the job, which is always a nightmare. This crap about their being hard workers is an urban legend. McIntyre might eventually be approachable, by the way, but I don't want to do anything on the job as yet."

"Sounds good," said Hatfield. "I'll select some of these places out in the woods for use as arms dumps and then we need to start dispersing the weapons and ammo, fast. Len, what are these blue crosses?"

"Those are actual houses or mobile homes that we can use for maybe a couple of days at a time. The owners are away for the winter, they're summer homes or vacation or tourist rentals, things like that. My understanding is that we're going to be sheltering Volunteers down from Portland who need a cooling-off period, and of course our own men as well. They're going to want things like cooking facilities, showers, a TV so they can keep up with the news and their favorite soap operas, something a bit more civilized than a bare shack in the woods. That may sound facile, but living too rough for too long can wear people down. Once we get the okay to start lifting some green, we can use the money to rent some places, although we'll need a well-dressed out-of-towner with a good paper profile to do the renting."

"We can work something out with Brigade on that," said Zack. "One kind of individual we really need to see if we can recruit is someone who works in a real estate office, especially one that handles rental housing. A motel owner will be top notch. One of the first things we need to do is waste a few of these Patels and Singhs who run all the motels, drive the rest of them out, and force in some white management, our kind of management. Now, transport?"

"I spoke with Jerry Lundgaard again today," said Ekstrom. "You know he's also got an extensive used-car lot down there, and so long as we can give him some cash to make sure his books balance and his home office doesn't get suspicious, we can obtain any vehicle we want with full papers. But he made a suggestion on his own. Where is the best place on earth to hide a hot car? In the middle of a used car lot! Jerry can keep a couple of vehicles on his lot down there ready for us at all times, gassed up and perfection-tuned. We will need to get a source for plates, steal them if nothing else, since if we're out doing hits in a car with dealer plates that will give the game away. We go in after hours and put on our plates, he leaves the keys in a special place for us, we go out and take care of business and then bring the car back, switch the plates back, and he comes in early in the morning and alters the mileage register so it matches on his records. Neat, eh?"

"Mmm, good idea, but I don't want to over-use it or become dependent on Jerry," said Zack. "Some of those cars might come back with bullet holes in them or get otherwise trashed along the way, or get captured by the cops. Have him keep a couple like that for us as an emergency reserve, Len, but mostly I'd like to get other vehicles with registrations that will pass muster in the police computers. Those vehicles need to be stashed in various places, and we will need to find safe houses and other facilities with off-street garages so the cars can't be seen from the street or from the air. Always remember the Eye in the Sky. Once we start heisting we'll have the money for Jerry. But we also need to get hold of some old junkers we can fix up for special jobs, with heavy suspensions and whatnot."

"What kind of jobs?" asked Washburn.

"Car bombs," said Hatfield grimly. "The Iraqis kicked our asses with those things when they weren't using them to slaughter each other. Okay, Len, good job. Now, Charlie, you're up. How's our intelligence sitch?" Ekstrom folded up his map. Washburn took out a list of his own.

"I need to burn this stuff too once we've got it all memorized," said Charlie. "Okay, here goes. In our operational area of Clatsop, Columbia, and Tillamook counties there are approximately 600 armed police officers, sheriff's deputies, Oregon State Patrol and correctional officers. That is excluding clerical and non-armed law enforcement bods of various kinds, and also does not include military police and so forth at the Coast Guard station, or the intermittent National Guard and Oregon State Police details at Camp Rilea, who will present a special problem. That sounds like a lot of cops, but bear in mind that we're talking three huge counties here, over a dozen separate and sometimes overlapping departments and jurisdictions. I haven't been able to

get any racial breakdown, but most of the cops are still white. There's only a handful of Mexicans and about half a dozen blacks. Also bear in mind that these guys work in shifts, and at any given time most of them will be off duty, or in court, or doing office paperwork, or whatever. I very much doubt if at any given time there will be more than a 150 or so police actually on duty over the area of several thousand square miles wherein we will be operating. Outside of the towns and main highways, our chances of accidentally running into a cop are nil. In the rural areas there are a few highly transient state and U.S. park rangers and game wardens, who may actually cause us more problems than the cops by stumbling onto our hideouts and arms caches. Morehouse was right. The Pacific Northwest is ideal guerrilla country. Once this fire starts burning good and hot, ZOG will never be able to stamp it out."

"Some of the police will be sympathetic," said Hatfield. "I know some of our teams elsewhere have begun their operations by killing certain cops whom they know are antagonistic to the Party and the revolution. That's their call, but I don't like the publicity it's been getting in the media. This isn't a big city like Seattle or Portland. A lot of these guys are local boys like Ted Lear, men we grew up with and men with families and roots in the community. For the time being I don't want us targeting any local police except non-whites, who have already been officially ordered out of the Homeland and have no business running around our land with guns and badges. That will be one of our D Company rules of engagement. No white cops unless absolutely necessary, or until we know for a fact that a particular cop is irreconcilably our enemy. The Army Council says for us to see if we can negotiate a live-and-let-live arrangement with them, so they at least don't come after us actively and we can make the feds do their own fighting. I want to give it a try. At some point in time, I am going to have to sit down and talk to Ted, and that's going to be pretty tense. One thing, though. We will urgently need intelligence contacts in the police."

"Chris," said Ekstrom quietly.

"I wasn't going to mention her unless you did, Len," said Hatfield with a sigh. "She's a dispatcher and she's right exactly where we need someone. She's also your daughter, and if you bring her into this you could be literally sentencing your own child to death. I can't ask you to do that, much less order you, lieutenant or not. At the very least you could be putting her into an absolutely impossible position morally. Besides, how do you know she's even sympathetic?"

"Do you know why Christina came back from Portland last year?" asked Ekstrom. "She had a good degree and she'd just started a good job. Now

she's back here earning barely minimum wage sitting behind a police radio every night. She wants to be a cop herself. She wants me to take her out to the range shooting all the time. She always wears long-sleeved shirts and dresses or slacks, and never a swimsuit or a halter-top. She broke off with Brad Gibbons, and she won't date now. Ever wonder why? In Portland, she came home one night and found a couple of nigger crack addicts who had broken into her apartment waiting for her. When they had finished with her they tried to stab her to death with a broken wine bottle. They didn't kill her, but not for lack of trying. Her body looks like she was fed into a McCormick reaper, inch by inch. It was never mentioned in the papers or on TV because of the press censorship laws Hillary Clinton rammed through on her first year as president, the ones that forbid what they call racial incitement, such as reporting black crimes against white people."

"Oh, Jesus, Len!" whispered Charlie.

"Why the hell did you never tell us?" demanded Hatfield roughly. "Why didn't you ever say anything?"

"At first, there was nothing to say," replied Len Ekstrom. "Then Red Morehouse came here, and I said it. I said 'I'm in.' In the night she wakes screaming for me, crying out 'Daddy, Daddy, help me!' Now when I go to her, I know that I *am* helping her. It will still be hard, and I confess I don't quite know how to approach her with this. But she will be with us soon. You were right earlier, Zack. All white people now have our own Sally Wheatleys, our own Christinas somewhere in our past, in our minds. We must make their ghosts rise and show their bloody wounds, and cry out for vengeance until we become men again, and march across this land and drive these animals out of it. Now go on, Charlie. We have business to do."

"Okay," said Washburn, still stunned.

"What about the Camp Rilea and the Coast Guard station over in Warrenton, Charlie?" asked Hatfield. "That will be the enemy's base of operations."

Hatfield nodded. "Rilea has been semi-mothballed for years, and if memory serves it doesn't have much permanent party of National Guard, more a custodial staff than anything else. Not surprising since almost the whole Oregon National Guard is in Iraq or Iran along with all their gear. They have some summer training camps there, and the Oregon State Police still run a couple of twelve-week basic courses through there every year, trainees and instructors. No armory, interestingly enough. I heard they moved all the weapons out of there after Coeur d'Alene. I think we can consider Rilea as a pool of potential targets, and one of our tactical goals will be to see if we can

pin them down, or better yet run their asses out of there by making it too dangerous and expensive to keep a few men in that exposed position. That will be a strong psychological victory if we can pull it off. But you're right, if the enemy decide they want to do some kind of full-blown occupation of Clatsop County, that's where they'll base the occupation army. We need to watch the place and pick off as many targets of opportunity as we can, but we'll have to see how that plays out in the long run. I'll need every map and piece of information we can get about the camp, Charlie, and we need to see if we can dig up anybody locally who's worked or done duty out there and pick their brains."

"I'm on it," said Washburn. "The Warrenton Coast Guard station is a different matter. They're full-time military, but not combat. They're mostly a lifesaving, air-sea rescue and medevac unit for the Columbia River bar area, the Graveyard of the Pacific. The staffing there is officially classified, of course, but it seems to be about 150 permanent party, plus whatever transients they have, the crews of cutters and aircraft, trainees and guys on temporary duty, and so on. Most of the actual lifeboat and rescue service is based north of the river on the Washington coast, so technically speaking that's not our bailiwick, but the copters and medical staff are out there in Warrenton. The station has an armory, of course, which I am sure has all kinds of goodies that we would like to get our hands on, but let's face it, with our current half-dozen rookie terrorists, I think an attack there is a bit out of our league for the moment. Besides medics most of the complement there are techs of various kinds, clerical and admin, supply, etc. There's a small Shore Patrol contingent of about twelve MPs, mostly traffic guards. I don't think they'll give us that much trouble, since counterinsurgency is not their function, but my guess is that's where the fed opposition will set up their intelligence headquarters, behind the fence and barbed wire, and with all that satellite and electronic stuff they've got in there. There's a helipad and they can get Navy Seals or whoever they want in there any time. If and when we ever get any heavy weapons like mortars or rockets we can drop them a few love notes, of course. Say, didn't the Palestinians raise all kinds of hell over there with home-made rockets?"

"Russian Katyushas are better, if we can ever get any," said Hatfield. "Mortars would be even better yet. I was cross-trained on them in the U.S. Army. But you're right, that's a long way down the road. FBI, BATFE?"

"None nearer than Portland at the moment. I assume our comrades in the city will be stalking them. That will keep them occupied. All this may change when we get things hopping down along the North Shore, though. I haven't

conferred with any of my fellow intelligence-type dudes, of course, since I don't know any of them yet, but it seems to me from what I see on the tube and read in the papers that they haven't yet come up with any concerted or coherent plan on how to deal with us. They're still treating each NVA attack as a crime scene, going over it and dusting it for prints and all that, and since our guys are booby-trapping wherever they can, they're tiptoeing up like mice trying to steal some cheese. They're treating an armed insurrection against the state like it was a liquor store heist. Do these guys have shit for brains or what?"

"It won't last," said Hatfield grimly. "What little is left of the Constitution will go right out the window and the iron heel is going to come down hard, and soon. Okay, now, my favorite and most anticipated part of the evening. What about our local lefties and anti-fascist scum?"

Washburn grinned and pulled out a list. "That was easy, thanks to the public library and a stroll through our four or five lefty bookstores and coffee bars in Astoria. These 55 names are just about everybody in our three counties who has ever written an anti-racist letter to the editor, organized some left-wing demonstration or event, run some lefty activism group, or worked for the Hillary Clinton campaign."

"Surely there's more than that?" asked Ekstrom. "In Astoria alone there's some liberal airhead under every rock."

"I removed overlaps from the other lists," said Washburn. He pulled out a second paper. "This one is bugger boys and dykes, 112 names. I won't say that's all of them, but damned near. And finally," out came a third list, "119 Jews. May I make a suggestion? We don't burn these lists. We should find some way to blow them up poster-sized, and then when we've popped a couple of Reds or sodomites or hebes, we start posting them around town in the dead of night with the appropriate names crossed off. Psychological warfare."

"Bet you by the time we've killed half a dozen of them, the rest will scatter like quail," said Ekstrom.

There was the sound of a car pulling up outside and headlights gleamed through cracks in the corrugated steel walls of the warehouse. Zack drew his 10-mm Browning High Power from the holster at his back and clicked the safety off. "Let's hope that's the brigade adjutant," he said. "Otherwise this may turn out to be a short revolution."

The newcomer was Larry Donner, alone, a brisk sandy-haired man of about 30 who was wearing a neat suit and tie beneath his overcoat. He shook hands with all three of the men with a bright smile; they all noticed the butt of an automatic in an interior clip holster in his belt, inside his suit jacket. "Good to see you again, Mr. White."

"Spiffy disguise," said Hatfield. "You look real yuppie."

"It's not a disguise," said Donner. "I'm an insurance salesman, which gives me reason for driving all over Oregon and Washington in a late-model car and being pretty much anywhere at any time. I actually spend about half my time writing policies and half on Army business. I'm trying to convince my boss at the company that we now need to offer our customers domestic terrorism insurance."

"This is Dave Black, our quartermaster, and Don Green, our XO," said Hatfield, introducing the other two. Washburn poured a Styrofoam cup full of coffee for the newcomer.

"Cream or sugar?" he asked.

"Two real sugars if you've got," replied the adjutant. "You'll find you end up living on sugar and caffeine in this line of work, and I don't mean insurance." They sat down in the little office. "All right, Lieutenant White, what have you got for me?" The D Company Trouble Trio spent the next half hour going over everything they had just finished discussing among themselves. Maybe it was his salesman persona, but they found themselves trusting Donner without question. It occurred to all three of them that he must sell a lot of insurance. "I have to say, I'm impressed," said Donner when they had finished. "You boys have done a lot in a very short time. Okay, once you nail down these potential recruits and get them instructed as Volunteers, trained and ready to go, we need to start looking at your first active service operations in this area."

"We've got some ideas on that," said Hatfield.

"Good, we'll talk about them in a bit," said Donner. "But first I need to go over the Army Council's policy on target selection with you. I'm sure Red and Tommy have already mentioned to you that we don't just want to run around slaughtering everybody with a dark face, the spiel about remembering the essential political objective we're all striving for, so forth and so on."

"Several times," said Hatfield. "We got it."

"Okay. That said, a lot of your work will still be gofers, GO-4s, General Order Four enforcement. It may *look* to outsiders like we're just gunning down non-whites at random, but actually the whole issue of target selection is very complex. The selection of targets will primarily be the duty of the company commander, with the assistance of the XO in his intelligence gathering capacity, but anyone can propose an enemy target for the CO's consideration. Every target that we destroy, human or material, needs to have some kind of clear and visible value to the Zionist occupation government. The public needs to be able to see and understand *why* we shot so and so or blew up or burned down such and such a place. Once the target is proposed, the XO

does a feasibility study, including surveillance of the target, looking over the ground, etc. Ideally you should never stage any attack without having scouted the terrain first, with the exception of floats, which we'll get into in a bit. If the XO reports that an attack is feasible with minimum risk to the Volunteers, or at least an acceptable degree of risk in proportion to the importance of the target, then the CO organizes and carries out the tickle."

"Tickle?" asked Washburn.

"It's kind of a slang term the Boys seem to have come up with for an attack on ZOG," explained Donner. "No idea how it got started, but it's already entered the Volunteer vocabulary. Now, before any NVA unit goes OR they need to have a list of targets in their operational area. I see you've already got your lists drawn up, and I have to say I like that idea of yours about circulating or posting them publicly with the names of the dead crossed out. That's good thinking and good psychological warfare, and it will accomplish the objective of removing these people from your operational area as efficiently as actually killing them would. The NVA tactical philosophy is that the minute hostilities commence in any operational area, we need to start *hitting* those targets, not sit there admiring our lists for the neat typing. The NVA must always *hit, hit, hit!* We must keep the feds off balance, never knowing when and where we will strike next, but knowing it will be damned soon. Right now they're still trying to maintain business as usual, trying to pretend that we're just ordinary criminals. They're doing full CSI workups, forensics, and legal documentation on each incident. We must present them with so many incidents that their ordinary procedures of criminal investigation and apprehension will be stretched to the breaking point and then snap under the strain, thus forcing them to fall back on brute force and institutionalized terrorism. Remember, normal law enforcement in America is already so swamped with ordinary crime, drug-related messes and the thousand-and-one problems that come from massive numbers of Third World people living in a Western society, that in many areas the system can barely function as things are. We need to tip the system over the edge. We have to hit them so hard and often that they can't keep up, so that all they can do is just follow along behind us and keep on picking up the dead bodies we leave for them."

"Sounds good to me," growled Hatfield.

"But still, there are some guidelines. Some very important guidelines," warned Donner. "First and foremost, *no kids!* Red and yellow, black and white, they *ain't* all precious in His sight by a damned long shot. Nonetheless, never *ever* deliberately hit a child, and bend over effing backwards to avoid harming a child accidentally. That's a child of any color."

"Even Jews?" asked Hatfield.

"Regrettably, yes. Killing kids is the worst possible image we can have in the public mind, and it's one of the things that might tip the psychological balance and lose us the war," said Donner firmly.

"Define child, in non-white terms," requested Washburn.

"Pre-pubescent. Young enough to still be cute," Donner told him.

"Baby rattlesnakes grow up to be big rattlesnakes," said Ekstrom. "Those two nigger crackheads who . . . who did something to a member of my family, they were cute little picaninnies once."

"You know that and I know that, QM," said Donner. "The overwhelming majority of these pale-skinned morons gawping at Fox News won't be able to wrap their minds around it, and we need to convert those people or at least neutralize them, not write them off and alienate them. They may be useless themselves, they may not be our nation's future, but their gene pool is. Non-whites generally start posing a threat to the white community at about age 13 or 14, when they join their first gang, puff their first crack pipe, and start committing their first thefts. If they're old enough to have a shitty little moustache or visible tits, they're old enough to do harm to white people and they're fair game, although personally I'd say play it safe by concentrating on adults. One obvious exception would be blacks or Mexicans in high school that can't seem to lay off chasing white girls. We need to get the word out: that shit comes to a *screeching* halt, now! But younger than that, lay off. You remember 1963, when the Klan blew up a nigger church in Birmingham that was being used as a political headquarters and operations center by the NAACP and the Jews who ran the so-called civil rights movement? And those four little black girls happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time? The liberals *still* play the sad violins over that one, and that episode became part of the image that destroyed the Klan as an effective force in the South and maybe gave this whole vile system another three generations of life. We have to make sure we don't have any Birmingham churches in the Northwest."

"Mmmm, Larry, what about bombs?" asked Hatfield. "I recall that the one thing that probably screwed the pooch for the Provisional IRA more than anything else was their seeming inability to pop the top in Belfast without blowing up some poor mother and baby in a stroller passing by."

"Yeah, and those dumb Paddies would also do crap like shooting a man down in front of his children, shooting teachers in front of a class full of kiddies, so forth and so on," said Donner in disgust. "What the hell were they *thinking?* I admit, one of our big nightmares is that some white child is going to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and get killed by one of our

detonations. I think we can all imagine the Roman holiday that the media will make out of something like that. This is one reason why each brigade is going to have a trained and experienced explosives officer with a military or engineering background, and a special EOD unit. You'll eventually have your own EOD team, Zack, and while you will still be in command of target selection and operations, you will have to liaise really close with your explosives officer and let him and his crew handle all the details. Bombing is a whole field of paramilitary expertise on its own.

"The trouble is that in something like this, what they euphemistically term collateral damage is damned near inevitable," Donner continued with a sigh. "The United States has proven in Iraq and Iran and everywhere else that they don't really give a damn. The white people they accidentally kill will disappear. Any witnesses will be silenced, their families will be bought off, and the media will make those incidents drop off the radar like they did in Iraq. The United States can afford collateral damage, but we can't. People will admire and eventually support men whom they view as gutsy rebels standing up for the underdogs against a corrupt tyranny. They will not admire or support a bunch of maniacs who run around killing kids. Guys, we're developing a separate propaganda section that among other things is making contingency plans for the various kinds of accidents that might happen in the fog of war, but baby-killing is the one thing we can't explain away or gloss over. For Christ's sake, don't give us a Birmingham! Keep your heads, plan your jobs, and don't do anything that's going to put a child at risk."

"Got it," said Hatfield.

"Okay, second no-no in target selection," Donner went on. "Christian ministers, priests, and for the moment, church buildings themselves. This one may change later, depending on how serious a threat the evangelicals and others become to us. For over a generation since the first neocons, evangelicals have shown they can be a powerful political force, since they're the only ones who still support this insane endless war for oil and Israel. It was their bought-and-paid-for preachers who deftly and subtly switched their flocks' attention away from abortion and buggery and into the great holy Ninth Crusade against Islam. Those men are the world's worst assholes, and you're going to want to bust a cap on them bad, but for now, go a bit easy. Again, we have to bear in mind the low level of political sophistication and awareness of the average white Amurrican. We don't want to give people the impression that we are making war on Christianity itself, as much as some of our comrades of other persuasions might want to do so."

"Look, you know damned well that every middle-class minister and every tub-thumping Holy Roller hoot-and-holler preacher in three counties is going to be bellowing against us from the pulpit and on every Christian radio station," protested Hatfield. "Hell, they already are! I was listening to Radio Salvation out of Longview today and some yammerhead was calling us the devil's disciples. What about General Order Seven, which prohibits incitement against the Republic or its armed forces and public expressions of sympathy and support for the enemy?"

"When some preacher is getting really out of line, then you pay him a visit and give him a very thorough, painful, and damaging beating," said Donner. "The sight of one of their brethren sitting in a wheelchair in bandages and eating through a tube will convey the message to the rest of them. That's already happened in Idaho and some other places, and the units there report that it really results in an attitude adjustment on the part of the clergy. The Boys in Coeur d'Alene have already forced one Christian cable channel to shut down, and they didn't kill anyone to do it. Sometimes the baseball bat speaks louder than the gun. Now, if you've got a really egregious case, where a preacher is involved in active informing or something like that, something we just can't let pass, then make your case to Brigade and get an okay before hitting him. You have to remember that for a lot of poor white people, church is still an important part of their lives and we don't want them to get the idea we're devil-worshippers who are going to sacrifice their kids to Moloch or any such happy horse shit. Remember, we have to get the silent support of a majority of the white population here *at least* to the extent that they do not inform or actively collaborate with the occupation."

"Understood," said Hatfield.

Donner continued, "Now, third no-no, and once again, this may change down the road. For the time being, no targeting airlines, airports, or civilian passenger airplanes. There was a big debate on this in the Army Council, and they'll be reviewing the issue periodically. Even with the few people we have, we could shut down civilian air transport in this country and pretty near wreck the whole shebang, and there is a lot of temptation to use that penultimate weapon, but for the time being, we're not going to. Three main reasons."

Donner ticked them off on his fingers. "First, the feds understand how vulnerable they are and how dependent this empire is on air travel. They are doing their nuts surrounding every major airport in the country with more security than has been seen since the days after 9/11, security that is costing them untold millions of dollars every month, and that's driving airline passengers around the twist with long lines, intrusive searches, flight delays,

attractive white women getting felt up by the Third World guards, having to get to the airport five hours ahead of flight time because of all the bullshit they have to go through, you name it. So far, our psych warfare guys are getting the vibe that they're blaming the régime and their ham-handed security hirelings, most of whom are non-white. Not us. We blow a few airliners out of the sky and they'll blame us. We want them mad at the federal government and Third World airport security people, not the NVA. All of the above is already causing the kind of economic shock waves that are cutting profits, losing jobs for white people who still have any, and making them lose hope for the future. The United States of America is in bad shape already. We want it to continue to get worse, but in a bit longer and slower slide than would happen if we shut down all the airports and created a massive implosion that could credibly be blamed on us.

"Secondly, the prospects for collateral damage and the loss of innocent white lives if we bring down an airliner are unacceptably high, especially if we shoot one down while it's taking off from Sea-Tac and it crashes into an elementary school or a hospital, some horror like that. We can't risk that kind of propaganda blowback. Finally, believe it or not, the Army Council and the Party do maintain some hope of foreign aid or at least quiet collusion, notably from Russia and France and Japan, but also from the Muslim world, although that will have to be handled really carefully. All established governments everywhere are very skittish about dealing with people who blow up airliners. Everybody is too vulnerable on that front and everybody has had bad experiences with weirded-out skyjackers and fanatics who do that kind of thing. It is considered a major international *faux pas*. So for the time being, stay away from airports."

"What about military aircraft?" asked Hatfield.

"Military, police, or media planes and helicopters are fair game," said Donner. "Any plane carrying a major politician or enemy effective is fair game. Knock their asses out of the sky or destroy them on the ground if you can. It might be good to do that just to remind ZOG what we're capable of, if the spirit moves us. Just for God's sake don't shoot one down over a residential district where it's going to crash into the aforementioned school or hospital."

"So just who *can* we hit?" asked Charlie Washburn. "I mean besides General Order Number Four attacks aimed at taking out the garbage?"

"Obvious targets like racially mixed couples and faggots. That shit *stops!* It stops *now!* No more! If you know where any live, waste them and burn them out, just make sure you don't kill any cute little mulatto kiddies."

"They'll be on the 6 o'clock news crying for their mommy and daddy," rumbled Ekstrom with a scowl.

"The first few times, yes, but we'll also be having a few quiet words of prayer with the media people, and they'll learn not to play that moo, once a bat or two cracks across some of their skulls," Donner told him.

"Who else is on the hit parade?" asked Washburn.

"Basically, we hit anyone who is part and parcel of maintaining federal authority in the Northwest. Start with lawyers, judges, and anyone to do with the courts. It is absolutely essential that the enemy court and judicial system come to a grinding halt. From now on courts do not sit, unless it's behind a Bremer wall, and not for long even then, until we get at them somehow. These courts do not judge us, or anybody else. They are no longer lawful and the government they serve no longer rules in this land. We do. If someone in the community is causing a real problem with drugs or genuinely anti-social behavior, the NVA will deal with them, not the American law and not the American courts. All attorneys are considered officers of the court, and the court is an alien and enemy power occupying our land. All attorneys are therefore legitimate military targets. All judges will immediately resign and leave the Homeland, or die. We thus force the enemy to fall back on military tribunals or simple arbitrary internment."

"That's coming anyway," remarked Hatfield. "Let me hear some more about the goddamned lefty media."

"Media personnel are much more delicate," said Donner. "We not only need to neutralize them as enemies, we need to make use of them for our own purposes, no matter how reluctant they may be. We can do this by punishing a few of their more excessive individual personnel, but letting the rest continue to function so long as they provide balance in their coverage. For example, if they have to report federal government press releases and statements, fine. But they also report statements by the NVA, verbatim, and they do it with a straight face and no unseemly comments. They give us the same air time and they refrain from any snide side remarks or manipulation of the news. Oh, and by the way, they don't use the term 'terrorists.' They call us the NVA, or Northwest Volunteers, or white separatists, or even insurgents is fine, but terrorist is the ZOG word for us, and the media will not use it. It is not beyond the realm of feasibility that we might develop special relationships with certain ladies and gents of the Fourth Estate. The thought of that Pulitzer Prize for front-line reporting on the war on domestic terror could be a powerful motivating factor."

"You mentioned something you called floats?" asked Hatfield.

"Floats are the most dangerous of all NVA operations, because they're more or less spontaneous and unplanned," said Donner. "That's when some of the Boys lock and load, pile into a couple of cars, and go out cruising to try and find somebody to shoot. The drawbacks are obvious; there's a possibility you will run into something you can't handle or get jammed up in traffic with the cops after you, something like that. But they're a valuable tactic for the same reason. The enemy doesn't know when and where we will hit. Once you guys here get a few notches on your guns, most of your targets, the people on those lists, are going to flee the area or go to ground, and most of the stationary targets will become heavily guarded and secured. In an area like this, most of your possible targets are in town and close together. There aren't that many of them, and the enemy can figure out who we're going to want to hit as well as we can, then take precautions and arrange nasty surprises for any Volunteers who show. Floats introduce a variable that the enemy can't predict. They will be especially valuable in your General Order Four operations. How often have all of us been driving down the street and seen a racially mixed couple and wanted to blast the creeps? Well, here's your chance.

"There's no real hard and fast rule here," Donner continued. "You guys are going to have a more independent command out here in the great north woods than our urban units, and you're going to have to play a lot of it by ear. The basic operating principle for now is this: we cannot allow the enemy to maintain any pretense of business as usual, any pretense that they are still the law and we are criminals of some kind. From the moment of the Declaration of Northwest Independence in Coeur d'Alene, from the night the Old Man gave that address to the world on TV, *we are the law* and *we are legitimate*. They are the criminals and the interlopers. Be good cops for the Republic and take 'em out, boys. Okay, lieutenant, you mentioned you had some ideas on your first targets?"

"We need money, and we kicked around the idea of getting started by taking out convenience stores and such run by non-whites," said Zack. "Walk in, plug whatever gook or Paki is behind the counter, and clean out the register before we leave. But I don't like the psychology of that. It's necessary to finance the company, but it also means that average people will see us as mad-dog stickup men instead of revolutionaries. You know the old saying about first impressions being the most important."

"Good," said Donner approvingly. "You're using your head."

"Then something came up that's the perfect opportunity for us," said Hatfield, pulling out a copy of the *Daily Astorian.* He pointed to an article that was headed A HELPING HAND ACROSS THE RACIAL DIVIDE IN SEASIDE. "You remember a black family named Chambliss that our guys

burned out in Portland a month or so ago? Chambliss is some affirmative action nigger in a suit with some big title and a $100,000 a year paycheck, who bought himself a nice big mansion in some ritzy white gated community."

"Mmm, yeah," said Donner, glancing over the article. "Actually, that wasn't the NVA per se. That was some local white kids who took advantage of the unsettled political situation. The two teenaged Chambliss monkoids had been doing some bad acts. They tried to force their attentions on a couple of the kids' sisters after getting them high on weed, brought in their gang-banger friends who did some swaggering and shoving at the clubhouse swimming pool, little white kids got head lice from playing with the picannins, played their blaring hip-hop at all hours, usual congoid crap. After they'd torched these coons' upscale crib, the teenagers wrote NVA on a nearby wall. We were glad to take credit, though, and we've made contact with the boy who led the bonfire party. He's got potential."

"You see where these bubble-lips are now ensconced in a lovely beach house down in Seaside? Breathing the clean ocean air and walking in the untroubled, non-racist air of wonderful liberal Clatsop County, which just oozes with tolerance and diversity and brotherhood, where all us honkies just love them to death and tap-dance and bow and scrape to them?" asked Zack with a sneer.

"Mmm, yes, I see," said Donner dryly. "I also see in this picture the very type of cute little picanninny with the missing front tooth and the braids in ribbons whom I just told you to lay off of. I can envision that picture going nationwide as a victim of wicked evil racist violence and a collective *aawwwww* going up from every skull full of mush. Birmingham, remember?"

"No, you don't understand, I'm not proposing to hit the monkoids themselves," said Hatfield. "Read on."

"Hmmm . . . ." Donner said, pursing his lips. "Says here that Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Goldman donated their own personal beach house indefinitely to these poor Affikin-Amurkin refugees from racist fascist terror, and Mrs. Irene Goldman tells us she thinks that Oregon needs more diversity in the face of this growing threat from us evil white boys. Do they live around here?"

"Big Victorian mansion up on the hill in Astoria," said Hatfield. "He's retired from some New York merchant bank, he's a wheel in the local Democratic Party and a known ADL asset, and she runs the most upscale art gallery in town. Big contributors to every known Jewish and liberal charity, including hosting our annual Israel Bonds dinner at the Elliot House. Both of them really tight with the local evangelicals who of course fall down and adore them as God's Chosen People. I can't think of any opening target that

will send our message louder or more clearly. The Goldmans, their kind, and their day are done in the Northwest." Donner looked up, his lip curled in a sardonic smile, and he raised his hand and quickly drew his finger across his throat in a slashing motion. "It's done," said Hatfield grimly.

"When?" asked Donner.

"Give us another few weeks. I'd kind of like to give the Goldmans a very special Valentine," said Hatfield with a chuckle.

"Okay, this fits in really well with something else," said Donner. "Brigade has a strategic objective we need your help with. If you watch the news, I'm sure you're aware that both First and Second Portland Brigades are both starting to strike on a regular basis. We've taken out some blacks and gooks and Mexicans, and the city is already beginning to get noticeably whiter. We've also taken down a few Portland cops, mostly of the black and brown persuasion, and we've popped the top on a couple targets, mostly Korean stores, the Holocaust memorial, petty shit like that. But the one thing we haven't been able to do yet is to take out any FBI or Homeland Security. Our friends in the silk suits are getting antsy, and they've gone cautious as hell on us. They know they're being hunted. They've fortified the federal building on Southwest Third Street and all the offices and facilities they use. They've created a whole huge Green Zone in the Justice Center surrounded with Bremer walls and razor wire and every electronic security device known to man as well as an army of police and federal security guards. It now takes a triple-threat security clearance even to get upstairs. Most of them have sent their families out of the city and in most cases out of the Northwest. They've taken over the downtown Holiday Inn for most of their staff, and they take armored shuttle buses to and from work. Those who still live in their own homes now drive bulletproofed cars and vary their routes to and from the office, etc. etc. I guess these assholes did learn something in Iraq. We've come close enough to pop a few rounds at them from a distance, but no hits. That's given them something to think about and made them even more nervous, but we haven't been able to nail any of them yet. The fact is that in the city, they're hard to detect and follow. We know who some of them are but not all, and they've started to shift their agents around every couple of months so there are a lot of new people we don't know. What we want to do is flush the FBI or U.S. Marshals out, get some of them out in the open, out here in one of these small towns or on some rural road where they'll stand out like statues and we can get a clear shot at them."

"The assassination of two very prominent left-liberal Jews in Astoria sure sounds like a hatecrime to me," said Hatfield. "The FBI would pretty much

have to investigate something like that, would they not? Especially with the Blue State establishment in this county howling like banshees demanding immediate action?"

"I think the FBI would understand that their absence from the scene would be a very bad message to send, politically, especially after they sloughed off your killing of those two lesbo bitches. Their absence from the scene of a second double hit would look very much like they're scared of us," agreed Donner. "They are, of course, but they don't want to be *seen* to be scared of us. Okay, after the hit, you will need someone to watch the local sheriff's office, the hit scene, and the entrance to the Coast Guard station, which is probably where they'll bunk for the night and maybe even set up their operations room, although they might trust the local sheriff's department enough to do that in his offices. The idea is to get names of the feebs if possible, but especially descriptions of them and the vehicle or vehicles they're driving. I think they're too rattled to check in at a local motel, but you never know. When you take credit for the first hit, the Goldmans, you'll need to state that you're D Company of the First Portland Brigade. Maybe that will throw the FBI off enough to think you came down from the city and the NVA doesn't have anyone local they need to worry about."

"I think by then we'll have someone in the sheriff's department who will tell us what's going on," spoke up Ekstrom.

"You're sure?" asked Donner.

"Not completely, but I think so, yes," Christina's father replied.

"I don't need to know who," warned Donner. "Especially a sensitive contact like that. Just be very, very sure. Anyway, when you do get a fix on them, this will probably have to be done as a float. You won't have the chance to rig a bomb or booby trap, you'll have to take them on the wing, tail them and nail them as targets of opportunity. Are you going to be able to handle that? Do you want me to send down a couple of buttons from Portland? We've got some heavy hitters shaping up in the City of Roses."

"I think this will be a good opportunity for Cat-Eyes Lockhart to make his NVA debut," said Hatfield. "I'll be his driver and spotter myself."

"I agree," said Donner with an enthusiastic nod. "Now, a few words on the Goldman hit itself. We're starting to pick up enough experience in Portland and elsewhere so I can give you some tips. First off, try to take them down outdoors if you can. Remember, we're still looking at full CSI and forensic workups, and an indoor homicide scene always yields more evidence. If you have to break into a house or something, wear gloves, of course, latex throwaways—QM, you need to lay in a supply of those—but in an indoor

crime scene there's always more chance of somehow leaving a fingerprint. Always make sure you destroy the gloves afterwards, because they can lift prints from the inside fingertips. Any time you're indoors you always traipse in something from outside, enough dirt on your shoes to leave a print, stuff like that. Now, Mr. Black, you mentioned that among all those weapons you acquired, there are a number of more downmarket handguns? Saturday Night Specials? .32s, .22s, .380s, off-brand nines, Brazilian knockoffs, and so on?"

"Dozens," said Ekstrom.

"Well, Brigade has asked me to relieve you of some of them. Believe it or not, we'll need them more than a lot of the heavier stuff, at least for a while. We call those e-pieces, execution pieces. Short-range killing weapons for down and dirty wet work on the street, which can be thrown away afterwards without losing a really valuable heavy gun you might need for a firefight later. Most of our jobs are done like a Mob hit. Get in close, two in the head to make sure they're dead. Make sure you see the brains, as gross as that sounds. Then beat feet out of there and get rid of the weapon."

"Shoot and scoot," said Washburn.

"You've got it." Donner leaned over to them. "Gentlemen, there's something else I need to mention here, and I suppose this is as good a time as any for it. Now, what we have been talking about this evening sounds very bad and brutal. It *is* bad and brutal, but let's be very clear: this is the only way that this society and this foul world we grew up in is ever going to change.

"We live in a system that is specifically designed to prevent change. ZOG has turned this country into one great steel cage to keep us and our children penned like livestock all our lives, until we can no longer be milked or sheared, and then when we grow old and can no longer make profits for our masters, we're thrown away like empty beer cans. America has robbed white people of any hope, any future. They drag our sons away to be slaughtered in Iraq and Iran. They poison our children's minds and turn our kids into stupid white niggers, grown fat and lazy on fast food and computer games, trashed out on drugs and hip hop, while our daughters present us with mulatto grandchildren and our old people are injected with poison and murdered or simply left to die of neglect because they're no longer economically productive.

"The tyranny under which we live may still wear a velvet glove on occasion, but it is unspeakably evil and brutal, and only greater violence and brutality will bring it down. This was their choice. They made it this way, not us. You guys have to understand that in order to win through to freedom, we Northwest Volunteers are going to have to become hard, hard men. The

hardest history has ever known, because that hardness of soul is one of the few weapons we can muster against an incredibly powerful enemy who holds all the cards. Compassion and mercy are all very well, but they are luxuries that are possible only in a basically decent world, and that world is not this one. You are embarking on a journey that will become horrible beyond measure, but our fathers and grandfathers sloughed it off onto us. We dare not pass it on to our own children, because we are the last generation that will have a chance to do anything about all of this. Can you be the kind of hard and brutal men you must be, in order to give your descendants the kind of world they have a right to?"

Lennart Ekstrom thought of the mangled body of his daughter, of her tears and nightmare cries in the night. "That will be no problem at all, sir," he replied.

IV

Valentine's Night

I am bid forth to supper . . . But wherefore should I go?
I am not bid for love: they flatter me:
But yet I'll go in hate, to feed upon the prodigal Christian . . .
I am right loath to go; there is some ill a-brewing toward my rest,
For I did dream of money-bags tonight.

The Merchant of Venice—Act II, Scene 5

On the night of February 7th, all of D Company's personnel assets got together in the Kiwanis Club hut, with the exception of Jerry Lundgaard and Christina Ekstrom, both of whom Hatfield had decided to keep completely in the background and as compartmentalized as possible. In addition to the original Trouble Trio, there were three new Volunteers in the beach shack. Tony Campisi was a short and stocky man in his mid-30s, a truck driver for one of the few local logging firms still in operation. Lee Washburn, Charlie's younger brother, was there. A slimmer and grimmer version of his brother, like Zack Lee had been forced into day labor for the temp agencies, doing whatever kind of work he could get for a horrifyingly inadequate weekly minimum-wage check. Jesse "Cat-Eyes" Lockhart was there as well, a man now in his late 20s, his auburn hair long and unkempt, lean and keen, a slightly wild look on his stubbled face in his bloodshot eyes, but sober and eager. "I haven't touched a drop since you talked to me, Zack," he'd promised Hatfield, and Hatfield believed him.

"This should probably be the most of us who ever assemble at one time in any one place," said Zack. "The thing is, you all need to be in on this.

Cat, you stick by the window and listen in, and keep a keen eye peeled for any movement outside or any sign of an approaching vehicle. You strapped?" Lockhart pulled a stainless steel .357 Magnum out from under his jacket. "Okay, let's get down to cases." They all sat down at the table except for Lockhart. This time it was Ekstrom who passed around the by now obligatory cups of instant coffee. Donner had been right; the men were starting to live on the stuff.

"This is going to be a doozy of an opening number for D Company, and we've got one week to work out all the details," Hatfield told them all in a cheerful voice. "We're going to try for two major takedowns within 24 hours, the second one flowing from the first. This means we've got to plan and carry out the Goldman hit in such a way as to leave us windows of opportunity for the FBI attack. I've thought about this, and I think the best place to hit the feebs would be at the same place we do Jake and Irene. I am basing this on the assumption that the FBI, when they do show up to investigate this nasty horrible hatecrime, will be constrained to at least put in a token appearance at the actual crime scene and pretend they're Sherlock Holmes looking for clues and dogs that didn't bark in the night. I think it's best to hit them there instead of trying to do anything at the Coast Guard station, if they show there, or around the courthouse or the sheriff's office downtown, just yet. Astoria is a nineteenth century town, laid out for horses and wagons and not automobiles. The streets are narrow and congested. Making a getaway out of that confined area would be a bit on the risky side, especially in the daylight, plus I think attacking in or near an actual enemy building or installation is a bit beyond us as of yet. I want to do the Goldmans up close and personal, with handguns, so that the FBI and the cops don't get an inkling that we have somebody of Volunteer Lockhart's skill and stature on our side. We'll introduce 'em to the boy on bigger targets than a couple of Jews. That's why I don't want you in on this first job, Jess. When they get here, I don't want those feebs to suspect that a sniper's clocking them, at least no more than they would anyway as a standard precaution. This means we're going to have to cook the kikes outdoors, in an area with plenty of firing positions around it, which is vulnerable to Cat's ballistic derring-do later on, most likely in the daytime. Our guys have taken a couple of long distance shots at them in Portland, but if possible I want the suits to think they're safer out here and let down their guard a little."

"Why not tag the Goldmans outside their house?" asked Lee Washburn.

"That's one possibility, yes," said Zack. "Although that's a residential neighborhood, so we'd have to lay in wait somewhere, and there's always the

chance of nosy neighbors peeping out their windows and seeing something they shouldn't. Plus we'd have to park the cars somewhere, and there's more chance they'd be noticed and remembered by some little old lady walking her dog or something. I'm basing this on the assumption that a long-time married couple will most likely go out to dinner on Valentine's Day, and so we need to find out where they're going and if possible take them down at the destination. One of those yuppie fern places downtown would present problems of escape; even at night these narrow little streets and small blocks and blind intersections around here would be a bitch to do a high-speed chase through, if it came to that. We'll be working downtown eventually, and so we're going to have to figure out some way around that obstacle course, but for the moment we don't have to. It seems our illustrious XO has achieved his first major coup as an intelligence officer."

"We know where they're going?" asked Campisi excitedly.

"Rigoletto's Beanery on the 39th Street pier, reservations for 8 p.m. on February 14th," said Hatfield. "You have the floor, Charlie."

"It's amazing how you can pick up stuff about other people if you'll just sit and listen and pay attention," said Charlie with a grin.

"Something all of us need to be doing, all the time," put in Hatfield.

"We lucked out like hell on this, and I didn't have to investigate anything or do anything, just be in the right place at the right time with my ears open," Charlie told them. "For the past couple of months they've had me down at the Tongue Point Job Corps depot. Instead of doing what I'm supposed to do for the Forestry Service and being out in the woods helping Mother Nature along, now my purpose in life is trying to teach disadvantaged urban yoot the ways of the forest, the ins and outs of the timber industry, basic woodcraft, culling and how to set a choker and how not to cut your own leg off with a chain saw. You can guess what kind of so-called students I've got, including some charming youth offenders and gang-bangers from Portland, whom I would suggest as worthwhile targets in themselves if they're still here in a few weeks. I think there are maybe four white kids in my group. Then there are about a dozen wetbacks who don't speak English. They snuck into the program courtesy of Bowater and Cascade Paper who want some free training for their cheap labor supply. Plus there are a couple of nigger kids from Portland who disappear into the woods and smoke weed most of the time. All at the taxpayer's expense, of course."

"Sounds like our target list is growing," commented Ekstrom.

"Oh, yeah," agreed Charlie with a vigorous nod. "Anyway, the state has also hired at taxpayers' expense some so-called vocational aides, mostly yuppie

wannabe mamis from some community college in Portland. They show up wearing those skirt-and-jacket dress-for-success business suits and carrying briefcases that contain nothing but their makeup and their lunch, and they act as so-called communications facilitators, i.e. Spanish interpreters. I had to learn some Spanish when I was in the U.S. Army after the invasion of Venezuela, but I never speak it with these women or when I'm working with the so-called students, and they either don't know I *hablamos Espa ol* or else they don't care. One of them is a girl named Conchita Ramos, and apparently she knows Kyle Wapner, the owner and manager at Rigoletto's Beanery."

"I was in there once," said Ekstrom. "Took Eva there for dinner, and unfortunately we'd already sat down before I saw the prices on the menu. I had to max out my one remaining Visa just for salad and a couple of sandwiches."

"It's a *trés chic* watering hole for our Blue State élite, all right," agreed Hatfield. "One of those places where if you have to ask the price of something, you can't afford it."

"Yeah," continued Charlie. "Wapner isn't officially on our Jew list, although with that name I'm suspicious, but he's on the liberal scumbag list. He toadies to the Goldmans and their ilk, probably because he makes his living off of them. I'd say he's a future candidate for the hit parade himself as a race-mixer, because apparently he likes hot tamales. He threw a pass at Conchita and apparently he connected. She's been showing off a new wristwatch and some snazzy new threads he's apparently bought her, plus there's been a lot of girl-giggle in Spanish. Anyway, getting back to the point, the other day I'm sitting in the break room having lunch, and Conchita and some of the other girls are over at another table. To them I'm just another middle-aged gringo guy with a big belly, and we're invisible now. I doubt they even knew I was there, or it even occurred to them that I might understand what they were saying. I listened and I got an earful. It seems Wapner doesn't speak Spanish, so he asked Conchita to run down his Valentine's night program with his kitchen and wait staff. The Goldmans were a big part of it. They've got a special private dining room reserved, but get this—they're not going to be eating off the regular menu. Goldman has ordered in a special ten-course glatt kosher dinner for two, flown in from, get this, some high-toned restaurant in *Jerusalem.* This special nosh is going to be coming in from Israel by chartered Lear jet and helicoptered in from Portland to our little airport, and then rushed to the Beanery by taxi, where Wapner will give it a quick warm in his ovens and microwave, specially rabbincally kosherized for the occasion, and serve it up to the happy hebes. Plus all the trimmings, kosher wine and *hors d'oeuvres*

and whatnot, and the whole dining room covered in sheaves of roses. Total cost for this evening of conspicuous consumption, including a handsome backhander to Wapner himself for using his restaurant while not deigning to eat the same food as the rich *goyim* eat, will be over $60,000."

"Mother of God!" gasped Campisi.

"Hey, you ever been to a rich Jew's bar mitzvah?" said Hatfield sourly. "Among the *hofjüden* it's not unknown for them to rent whole stadiums and spend hundreds of thousands on celebrity entertainers, exotic food and drink, and weird shit like having the bar mitzvah boy ride in on a baby elephant. The Jews are the high priests of conspicuous consumption."

"I've never even seen $60,000 in one place," said Campisi in anger. "My family has to make do with meat twice a week, and that's with me and my wife both working. My boys will never enter the door of a college because they're males with white skins, and we'll never be able to afford to send the girls either. My father died last year because we couldn't raise a few thousand dollars to pay medical bills and the bastard clinic cut us off. Said the two of us made too much money for their assisted program. My mother is going to follow him soon, because we can't buy her medicine, and if we put her in a state home some Paki doctor will decide she's lived too long and shoot her up with poison under the Senior Citizens' Quality of Life Act. And these Jew swine are spending sixty grand on a single night of lovey-dovey oy vay? They deserve to die for that alone!"

"You want to back that up?" asked Hatfield quietly. "We'll need a second shooter."

"You got one," said Tony.

"Good," said Hatfield. "This new information gives us a perfect lay-out for both hits. Rigoletto's Beanery is on the old cannery platform out over the river at the end of 39th Street. I paced it out this afternoon, and allowing for the curve of the access pier I make it almost an even two hundred yards from shore, an extra ten to the river walk. I'll need the second car, that's Lee and Charlie, to wait outside the Goldmans' house and let us know when they leave. We've got some special cheapo cell phones for that purpose. After this double feature is concluded, the phones go in the river along with the e-pieces, the handguns we use. We need to make sure every piece of physical evidence vanishes, except for the vehicles, which we don't have enough of yet to deep-six."

"Jerry Lundgaard is arranging for the Yukon to be re-sprayed afterward, legitimate plates put on, etc." said Ekstrom. "He'll be using one of his mechanics, a guy named Mackenson, whom Jerry recommends we speak to

about joining us. For now, though, Mackenson will do what he's told and won't ask questions. Then we need to stash the Yukon up at that location I mentioned, unless it gets ID'ed, in which case we'll have to make it vanish. Charlie, you and Lee will have a used Toyota from Jerry's lot. The plates will be stolen but you're only going to need it for a few hours in the dark, in a town that is still very lightly policed. We think the risk factor is acceptable. Jerry will ship it out the next day on an exchange with another dealership up in Seattle. These dealers do a lot of trading back and forth to keep their inventory flowing, one guy down here has too many Toyotas and another guy in Seattle or California has too many Nissans, so they level it out. Just try not to bring it back all shot up."

"If we do this right there shouldn't be any shooting except the holes we put in Jake and Irene," said Hatfield. "Charlie, once you see the targets leave the house, you call us and give us the signal. Tony and I will then pull the Yukon out onto the platform and into the parking area, get into position, and wait."

"Do we take them before or after their big imported kosher banquet?" asked Tony.

"Before, on their way into the restaurant. We don't need to be waiting around for a couple of hours with guns in our pockets. Besides," Hatfield continued in a grim voice, "I don't want one single sixty thousand-dollar kosher morsel flown in all the way from Jerusalem to go down those kikes' gullets. I want that vile slap in the face to my people to sit there on the table getting cold and gooey while the roses fade and the petals fall to the floor. Call it a symbolic act. The Goldmans' day is done, is every sense of the term."

"Lieutenant, you have the soul of a poet!" laughed Lee. "What if there are people around who might see the whole thing?"

"Then they see the whole thing," said Zack with a shrug. "We'll be masked and I will screw out the night bulb on the Yukon's rear plates so it will be hard to read in the dark. It will most likely be raining, anyway, this being February. Or at least cloudy and very dark. The one thing I don't like about this is there's only one way on and off that platform, over the pier. I am assuming Goldman will be driving his Lincoln Town Car, right?"

"He might take the SUV to a Valentine's dinner, but most likely not, for romantic reasons," said Washburn.

"Okay, when they reach the restaurant, you guys pull over on 39th Street and wait. Cover the exit ramp on the pier on the wild off chance that something goes wrong, and either they make a break for it or else we get into trouble and need help. When Tony and I see Goldman's Jew canoe come

across the pier and into the parking lot, we pull out in the Yukon, right up to the edge of the pier so we're ready to roll," said Zack. "We leave the engine running. We get out of the vehicle, closing but not slamming the doors, doing nothing to alarm them. We intercept the targets on their way inside, when they clear the parked cars so they can't duck down and cover behind anything. We shoot them both, triple tap, first bullet dead center to put them down and two more into the head to complete the execution. We walk at a quick pace, but do not run, back to the Yukon and we drive at a normal speed off the pier, and then we rendezvous at Shangri-La." Shangri-La was a code name for a vacation-rental RV on a scenic bluff overlooking the river in the nearby crossroads village of Knappa, which Len had been given the keys to in order to install a new water tank and which keys he had copied.

"Sounds simple enough," said Len.

"Yah, but the simplest plan can go haywire because of the smallest missed detail or unexpected occurrence," said Hatfield. "We need to get into the habit of going over these things two dozen times, extrapolating anything that might cause a hitch or go wrong."

"One question," asked Ekstrom. "Have you thought anymore about booby-trapping the Goldmans' Lincoln after you send them off to the great Catskills resort in the sky? You remember we're supposed to booby-trap everything we can. I can give you a PVC pipe bomb with six sticks of dynamite. PVC is light and won't fall off, with a pull-tab detonator and a goop strip you can use to stick it onto the underside on the driver's side. You use a small magnet to stick the other end of the detonator cord onto the door, and when someone opens the door it will pull the lead foil tab from between the battery contacts, and ka-blooey!"

"I thought about that, Len, and I think we'll pass on it for this one," said Hatfield. "Three reasons. First off, we don't know for a fact we'll have time to do it. Secondly, if anyone sees us planting the charge, they'll be able to warn people off. No point in making a bomb that doesn't go off so that the BATFE can disarm it, examine it and analyze it for evidence. Third, most likely the first person that opens the Goldman's car door will be a local cop, maybe someone we know. Remember what the adjutant said about collateral damage. I have to admit, I'm still a bit squeamish about popping the top with a bunch of people milling around, spectators and white police, so forth. God knows this will all get nasty enough, soon enough. But make up that banger and keep it handy. We never know when we may need it. Now for hit number two, the one that will put D Company on the rebellion's map. Those dead FBI agents we promised Brigade. That's where you come in, Cat."

"Mmmm, lot of assumptions there, Zack," said Charlie, shaking his head.

"I agree," said Hatfield glumly. "Trouble is, the ball is in the enemy's court to a large extent on this one. We're assuming that the FBI will send someone down to investigate the wicked hateful murder of two prominent and highly connected Jewish citizens, but we don't *know* that. The adjutant tells us they're jumpy and paranoid, and they may sense that we're setting bait for them. They may even try to set a trap for us in return. We're assuming that if they do send someone down, that they will at least visit the crime scene to look it over. We don't know for sure that any of this will happen. They may not come. We may have to make do with popping some U.S. Marshals or Homeland Security goons, or even state police detectives if they're all that offers. The FBI may come, but a week from now, or more. I want to put together a plan based on the probability that the FBI will send some agents and possibly a forensics team on February 15th, but we may have to wait and we may have to change the plan half a dozen times or even chance a float, just plain running them down on the street somewhere and blasting them in a drive-by. The main thing is, we've got to know when they're in town, who they are, how many, and what they're driving. I'm assuming they'll be checking in with the sheriff first, if only as a courtesy. We're going to need Christina bad, Len. Was she able to get on day shift?"

There had been a lot of discussion between Zack and Len and Christina herself as to how widespread the knowledge of her new affiliation with the NVA should be within the company. Obviously, the more people who knew her identity, the greater the risk. Zack decided to restrict it to the six people in the room at present, because in this first operation it would be impossible to conceal from the members of the team that the fledgling D Company had a contact in the cop shop, and since all of them knew Christina and knew she worked as a dispatcher, trying to hide her identity was pointless. They made an agreement that if any of the six were arrested, Christina Ekstrom would drop out of sight immediately and disappear to Portland or Seattle or some other point in the Homeland and join an NVA unit there. "No problem," said Len. "One of the other dispatchers is on maternity leave, and the schedules are all out of whack, so no one noticed. They don't care so long as the board is covered."

"Is she solid on this, Len? Does she know she's going to be helping kill some people?" asked Zack anxiously.

"Representatives of the same organization that refused to classify the attack against her as a hatecrime and warned her that if she didn't shut up

about it she'd be investigated for racism herself?" replied Len. "Yes, she knows, and she's happier than I've seen her since it happened. She'll be there for us, Lieutenant. Whatever she learns, we will know."

"Let's get back to the part where I get to plug those FBI droids," said Lockhart. "I still don't have a proper weapon. I presume I get to choose from Mr. Fields' private stock? I like that Russian Dragunov."

"Sure, if that's what you want," said Ekstrom with a smile. "But before you choose, you might want to check out a little present from Commandant Coyle and the boys in Portland."

"Cat, in exchange for that shitload of weapons we sent the First Brigade quartermaster, they gave us something for you." Hatfield went out to his truck and came back carrying a long box with a brown leatherette finish. He put the box on one of the picnic tables and opened it, displaying a red velvet interior containing a number of dark inset contents. Lockhart's eyes lit up in the pure joy of the true gun-lover as he lifted a long, elegant rifle with a black walnut stock and butt out of the case. "Christ Almighty!" he exclaimed. "An M-21!"

"Sniper version of the old M-14, semi-auto, with complete cleaning kit and accessories," said Ekstrom proudly.

"We had a familiarization course on these at sniper school at Fort Benning, and I think I remember most of it, but I never thought I'd get to use one in action!" said Lockhart, balancing and presenting the rifle. "The older guys in the sniper school swore by them. They were all pretty much out of service by the time I went through. Where the hell did they get this beauty?"

"No idea, and I didn't ask," Ekstrom told him. "The Commandant just said our brigade's best sharpshooter needed our best weapon. The cleaning kit and sling and other stuff are down in this drawer here at the bottom of the case."

Cat was examining the barrel. "Oh, this is great! You know, I was hoping to get hold of a .50-caliber weapon, maybe a .50 BMG Barrett or an AR-50, and blow some big holes in some bad people, but this is even better. This baby's chambered for standard .308, so the ammunition will be a lot easier to get, and if I can get first dibs on any armor-piercing ammo we pick up, that will somewhat make up for the kinetic striking force of the .50-cal. Or I can just plain notch my bullets." He picked up the telescopic sight from its cradle. "Infrared night sight built in. You know, they trained us for kills up to 800 yards at Benning with the M-24, but if I recollect correctly some of the old guys in 'Nam claimed they killed at a thousand yards with this."

"They were able to provide six magazines, and we can load you up with .308 ammo," said Ekstrom. "Since it's semi-automatic, you can get off

multiple shots more quickly and accurately than you could if you have to use a bolt to chamber every round, like the M-24. That extra firepower will come in handy when you need to keep multiple enemies' heads down after your first shot."

"Oh, yes," said Lockhart, hefting and leveling the rifle, sighting down the barrel. "In a good covered position, with enough ammo, I could hold off an infantry company. They'd have to bring up copters or artillery."

"You won't be standing anyone off, Cat," said Hatfield. "Shoot and scoot, remember. Don't risk yourself. If ever it looks like it might be too dangerous, I want you to fade. Remember General Order Number Eight."

"Well, that's one thing I wanted to talk to you about, sir," said Lockhart. "When I was in Iraq, we all had cards or some kind of mark we used to put on or near our kills. Signing our work, so the hadjis would know who was on their tail, a psychological warfare thing. I was the Jack of Diamonds. I was wondering if it would be allowable for me to do the same here? When I can do so safely, of course? Maybe leave the card in my firing position for them to find?"

"Wouldn't that be just broadcasting your identity to the enemy?" asked Hatfield.

"Look, they're not dumb. I've already got a record for horrible evil racism and male chauvinism and God knows what else," reasoned Lockhart. "Why the hell do you think nobody will hire me? When bodies start dropping around here and it becomes clear that they're up against someone who knows what he's doing with a rifle and scope, it's not going to take them too long to figure out I'm involved, and they're going to come looking for me. Why not make some political capital out of my reputation and my Medal of Honor? I'm not a glory hound, Lieutenant, but I think it would be a big boost to our side if they know that we're not all losers and criminals and ignorant inbreds, which is how we're portrayed on the news these days."

"You realize that will make you one of the most hunted men in the Pacific Northwest?" demanded Hatfield.

"They've already hunted me out of everything," said Lockhart bitterly. "This filthy society has hunted me out of my wife, my children, my future, my dignity, and my hope. Good honest bullets will make a nice change."

"Then we'll start you off with each one of us buying a Bicycle deck and giving you the Jack of Diamonds, only let's all make sure we wear gloves when we handle the cards. No sense in deliberately leaving the enemy a fingerprint. Now, once again assuming the feebs will show at Rigoletto's, what about firing positions? Cat, you know that big hill overlooking 39th Street, the heavy woods?"

"Yeah," said Lockhart.

"How far would you make it from more or less the ridge line of that hill down to the parking lot on the 39th Street Pier yuppie-ville?"

"Mmmm, if memory serves, seven hundred, closer to eight hundred yards," said Lockhart, pursing his lips. "That's within the M-21's range, sir, but to be honest, I'd like to get a little closer. I'd better admit I'm still a bit out of practice. I think I can do it from the hilltop, but for something of this significance I shouldn't think, I should *know* I can do it. Second, there would be a pretty sharp downward angle, maybe even as much as thirty degrees depending on what firing position I choose. Third, there's a lot of gusty wind on that river, and the longer the shot the more chance it's going to buffet the round off that slight fraction of an inch that will make all the difference between a dead feeb and one who merely has Fruit of the Looms full of shit. How about the roof of those apartments down on 39th? If that's an inch more than 250 yards I'll eat my hat, and the angle would only be about seven to ten degrees."

"Mmm . . . here's the problem with that," said Hatfield, drumming his fingers on the table. "That's going to be a crime scene, it will most likely be daylight, and we have to assume it will be all roped off and there will be all kinds of state and local cops in attendance as well as the FBI. If we get that close, E & E may be a problem. It will take us at least half a minute to get you down from the roof once you've made your shots, maybe more, then we'd have to get into the vehicle and beat feet. They'll certainly try to move on the firing position if they can tell where the shots are coming from."

"Have one of us cover your withdrawal with a good spray of bullets from the Uzi or an AK?" suggested Lee, clearly longing to do some spraying.

"And then who will cover *your* withdrawal?" demanded Hatfield. "We may get chased if they make the Yukon or any of us fleeing the scene. I know the roads around here pretty good and I could lose any ground pursuit, but if they have any helicopters on standby to give them an eye in the sky, a daylight car chase is a chance I'd rather not take. Look, what I said about killing white cops: I know it's going to be necessary sometimes, but again, I'd rather not be forced into that position just yet. I want D Company's first blood to be the blood of our racial enemies, not former friends and neighbors, and I damned sure don't want any white cops killing *us."*

"Tell you what, sir," said Lockhart, "We've still got a week. Let's you and me take a stroll around that whole area and see what we can see. You know the idea I had about using the roof of the Yukon itself as a firing position? We might find some way to make that work."

* * *

On Valentine's night, Zack Hatfield and Tony Campisi sat in the front of a battered old GMC Yukon, parked behind a loading dock just off 39th Street. The night was dark and cloudy, and there was a light drizzling rain, a perfect cover for the Volunteers. The cell phone on the dashboard rang. Zack answered it. "Hello?"

"Is this Luigi's Pizza?" asked Charlie Washburn on the other end.

"No, I'm sorry, you have the wrong number," said Zack in an exasperated voice, in case anyone was listening in. He folded the phone. "Okay, they've left the house. Charlie and Lee will be behind them. He'll let us know if there's any delay or change in their destination he detects, but we need to get into position." Hatfield started the Yukon and turned on the lights, and a moment later he rolled onto the long, curved 39th Street Pier. He pulled up into the parking lot on the former cannery platform and found the one available remaining space, which he carefully backed into. The restaurant was crowded, no doubt with Valentining couples. They could hear the noise and clinking of dishes and voices even through the rain.

"Where the hell are the Goldmans going to park?" asked Tony, looking around. "They're chock-a-block in here, it looks like."

"We will kindly give up our space, of course," said Hatfield with a chuckle. "Okay, we've got a few minutes. Check your weapon, once, and then leave it alone until it's time to use it." Tony took out a .38 snub and broke the cylinder, and saw the five .38 Special Black Talon rounds. He closed the cylinder. Zack did the same with his old police-issue Smith & Wesson .357 Magnum. They were both using revolvers so as not to have to go scrambling around looking for ejected cartridge casings. In addition to the e-pieces, Zack was carrying his Browning High Power in a shoulder holster beneath his denim jacket, and Tony was packing a 9-mil Beretta. In the backup car, Charlie and Lee were carrying a Kalashnikov and a 12-gauge pump as well as their handguns. "How you holding up, Tony?" asked Hatfield, noticing a slight shake in Campisi's hands.

Campisi understood what he was talking about. "It's not fear, Zack. It's rage. I'm worried I'm going to fuck up, not because I get scared or nervous, but out of sheer blind murdering rage. I'm scared after I shoot them I'll just jump on them and beat their faces to a bloody pulp with the gun butt. Did I ever tell you how my people came out here? Some big Jew developers bought up block after block of Bensonhurst, turned the family homes into rental properties, rented to Mexicans and Puerto Ricans to drive the Italians

out, and then evicted the spics to build a big gated community for rich Jews and faggots and liberal yuppie assholes. A million dollars for a lot that used to hold four working-class houses. Jobs were bad for blue-collar white men even then, and the only thing Dad could find was up in Tacoma, and that's where we lived until it got unlivable there too. When the oil wars started up, Fort Lewis flooded the city with military niggers and spics and whores and drug addicts and honky tonks and sleaze. But we never forgot that it was Jews who drove us out of our homes to begin with. Then I read those illegal books you and Charlie gave me, and I understood *why* I hated them, why they *should* be hated. I never thought I would look forward to killing anyone like this, that I would so long to see their blood and hear them scream in fear. I guess I still have the vendetta in my blood, from my ancestors. I want it bad, Zack. I know what they've done just to me and my family. When you multiply that by the entire world and three thousand years, the mind simply can't comprehend it."

"You'll do fine," said Zack with a smile. "Just remember, let me fire first. I'll take the yenta, you take Jake. Call it psychology. I've killed women before, here and in Iraq, and so has Cat-Eyes, and it doesn't bother us, but for their own self-image and emotional strength I think every Volunteer's first kill needs to be a man, and a clear racial enemy, a Jew or a nigger or a fed of some kind. God knows all the horrible ambiguities of war will set in for us all, in time." The phone rang again. Zack opened it. A silly child-like voice said, "Is your refrigerator running?"

"Dickhead," said Zack, and closed the phone. "They've just turned onto 39th Street." Zack started the Yukon's engine but kept the lights off. "Gun in your left hand, keep your right to open the door." Campisi took out the .38 and complied. They could see the lights of the Lincoln rolling slowly across the pier toward them. "I'll wait until he comes down this side looking for a parking spot." The Lincoln rolled onto the platform at about five miles an hour, went down the row behind them, and turned left, then left again. Zack turned on his lights and eased the Yukon out of the space, turning left toward the bridge.

"Oy, honey, look, that nice man is leaving us his parking space!" mocked Campisi in a girlish voice. The Lincoln slid into the vacated space, and the lights turned off. Zack hit his windshield wipers; the rain was light but steady. He stopped the Yukon at the edge of the bridge. "No one is coming. Couldn't be more perfect. All right, let's do it. Masks." The two Volunteers pulled navy blue wool ski masks down over their faces and got out of the SUV. At an even pace they walked toward the dimly seen couple going toward the restaurant

entrance, who were a bit more ahead of them than Zack had anticipated. They might have had to run to catch up, but the man stopped to close his umbrella in the well-lit doorway. They were perfect targets. "God, please don't let anyone open that door right now," whispered Zack in silent prayer.

When they were five feet behind the two expensively dressed people, some sound or sense made the Goldmans both turn. They stared at two men coming out of the darkness just beyond the pool of friendly light and laughter, masked so that only the black of their eyes could be seen, and leveling revolvers at them. The two gunmen said nothing, but Jacob Goldman gasped out in a strangled cry, *"You!"*

All four of them understood what Jacob Goldman had said. He did not know or recognize the men who were about to put him to death. They had always been far beneath him, part of the scenery he saw from the window of his luxury car or a plush office suite, animals who through some accident of nature resembled God's Chosen People in outward form, but whom the sages of Torah assured him were beasts without souls. Yet he knew who they were, and why they were here. Four thousand years of racial instinct crackled in a moment of cosmic, hideous recognition and knowledge. A timeless drama was once again about to be played out, an ancient debt was once more to be paid, and blood was about to be spilled once more in humanity's longest war. The men before Jacob Goldman could have been wearing Roman armor, or Crusaders' chain mail, or Cossack leather and furs, or the black tunic of the SS. Now they wore denim jeans and ski masks, but oh, yes, he knew them. Now he was going to die, because *they knew him* as well, knew him for what he was.

At the head of the plank bridge on the shore, Charlie and Lee Washburn had the windows rolled down in their Toyota. They heard the shots and saw the muzzle flashes in the rain. A minute later, the Yukon rolled by them, and Zack waved a friendly thumbs-up out the window. Charlie pulled around and followed him up 39th Street and out onto the main road, Zack turning left and he himself right. They would go to the de-briefing rendezvous by separate routes.

V

Hunting The Hunters

Turn, hell-hound, turn!

Macbeth—Act V, Scene 7

On the morning of February 15th, Hatfield, Cat-Eyes Lockhart, Charlie Washburn, Tony Campisi, Len Ekstrom, and Lee Washburn met in a trailer out in the woods, which had used by their circle of friends as a hunting lodge in times past. The two vehicles used in the previous night's assassination were parked behind the trailer under some trees to shield them from aerial observation. The Washburns arrived at 8 o'clock, and brought in paper bags of convenience store sandwiches and chili dogs, which they stuck into the microwave. "I was going to order us up some Early Bird breakfast specials from the Riverside Diner to bring out here, but I figured it wasn't a good idea for the two of us to be seen ordering six takeouts. That's just the kind of thing some sharp-eyed Mexican or white informer might remember if the cops come nosing around," said Charlie. "I suspect our revolutionary cuisine is always going to be pretty hit or miss."

"Yeah, we're going to have to eat a lot of shit in more ways than one," said Hatfield. "Tony, I need you on guard duty. From now on any time we meet in a place like this, there has to be at least one guy on the lookout. We have to make sure they never catch us indoors or in any closed space where they can surround us and bring up their SWAT teams, their gas and heavy weapons, their armored personnel carriers and helicopter gunships, all their fancy toys. I don't like this business of having us all here in one place like this today, even as important as this operation will be and as necessary as it is. We're doing

that too much, and it's dangerous. From now on, D Company has to split up into teams, with we three Trouble Trio members each taking on a team of three or four Volunteers to assist us, and then when more people come in, we split up into more teams or crews, and those people will use pseudonyms and hopefully won't be known to one another like we all are. Right now if one of us broke, then the feds could roll up all of D Company, and we can't have that. We need to make sure that there are never any more of us under one single roof than can possibly be helped, never more than three or four of us at once, and always with a sentry posted."

He handed Tony an M-16 and a radio handset. "Go down and watch the road, and sing out if you see anyone coming, see anyone in the woods, and above all if you see or hear any sign of a helicopter. I think those vehicles are shielded by the branches, but Len, we need to make up some old-style camouflage netting for situations like this so we can completely conceal a car or a truck or anything that size from aerial spotters. Tony, if you see anyone creeping up who is an obvious enemy, you shoot first and make sure you take at least one down, then we all beat feet out of here separately and try to rendezvous back at Aladdin's Cave."

"Uh, where?" asked Lee.

"The other trailer in Knappa, not the one we used last night," Hatfield reminded him. "We need to get into the habit of talking and thinking about our hideouts in code. One slip on the phone could break us all. Here's a thermos of coffee, Tony, and we'll save some of this wonderful breakfast for you. Len is going to be your partner for the day and he'll bring you up to speed afterwards."

"That's okay, I ate before I came, sir," said Campisi. Like everyone else he had known Zack Hatfield for years, but he had fallen into the habit of addressing him as "sir" or "lieutenant," and Zack didn't argue the point, because he understood the psychological necessity. "Marie made me breakfast this morning. I told her I had a load to pick up out in Clatskanie."

"Does Marie know?" asked Hatfield.

"She's pretty sharp. She knows I'm up to something," Tony admitted. "I just hope she doesn't think I'm screwing around on her with another woman. I know you're leery of bringing in married men because most white women can't be trusted nowadays not to betray even their own husbands for money or to save their lifestyles, but don't worry. They're not all like that. Marie is one of the good ones."

"I know she is," said Hatfield with a nod. "And yes, I know they're not all like that. It's just that so many white women have become so *damaged* by

life in this filthy society; we've got to tread very carefully. It's a real problem and we have to be aware of it. And somehow we're got to beat it, to bring white women around and show them that their future is with us. We can't do this without our sisters at our side, gentlemen."

After Tony left to stand watch, Charlie Washburn plunked down two newspapers. "Our little St. Valentine's Day Massacre last night made the front page in both the *Daily Astorian* and the *Oregonian.*"

Hatfield looked at the screaming headlines. "Yeah, I bet if you count up the column inches and the minutes of television air time on this one, you'll find that the Goldmans rate five times more than mere police officers. Dead Jews get the establishment's attention. Well, hopefully today or tomorrow we can give them some more to jabber about. But this is going to be a lot tougher, gentlemen. Last night we took down two unarmed targets, hit the Beast in the soft underbelly like we're supposed to. But this second act is going to be different. Now we have to attack armed targets who are trained in firefighting techniques and who will shoot back. Even more than the Goldmans, we need to make sure we have our shit together on this."

"Any word from our girl in police headquarters?" asked Washburn.

"She went in to work early today at Ted Lear's request, what with all the hullabaloo," spoke up Ekstrom. "She does dispatch for both Clatsop County Sheriff and Astoria PD, as well as for EMTs and the fire department, so she's got her ear just where it needs to be. I bumbled into the ops center just before I came out here, brought her an Egg McMuffin and a pastry in a bag, dear old Dad just looking out for his little girl, you get the idea. No one thought anything of it, me being just old Len from the hardware store who's been on Commercial Street since time began selling the good folks their tools and washers and fittings. Chrissie gave me the lowdown on the horrible murder of our two prominent citizens, in suitably shocked and horrified tones, right there in the break room with a dozen cops and deputies strolling by outside. They haven't made anyone for the hit last night, but from what she hears coming and going, with this hit last night combined with the lesbo rubout in November and the mysterious disappearance of Bert Fields' gun collection, all kinds of bells and whistles are going off down in Portland FBI headquarters, and there's definitely some feds on the way. She's pretty sure they'll be in today."

"Good. We need to get this done," said Hatfield. "I talked to her yesterday, and we've worked out a text message code for our throwaway cell phones that will enable her to give us a pretty thorough report. She's not to call me in the clear unless she absolutely has to; I don't want anyone from Homeland

security who might be monitoring the cell sites to hear any of our voices, but especially not hers." There was a beep from the microwave and Charlie started putting sandwiches on paper plates and pouring coffee. Then there was another beep, from Hatfield's cell phone. He picked it up and looked in the little green window, where he saw the words MEET ME FOR LUNCH?

"That's it," said Hatfield. "The FBI is coming today." He texted back, WHAT TIME?

NOT SURE WHEN I CAN GET AWAY. GIVE ME A COUPLE OF HOURS came the reply. "Okay, that means the feebs will be in town in a couple of hours, so let's go over this again," said Hatfield. The five men hunkered over the small Formica table munching on gloppy convenience store grub, way too hot from the microwave. He texted back, DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU WANT TO GO? After a while the reply came, NO, ANYPLACE IS FINE.

"All right, that means the cops still haven't got any kind of viable description of us or our vehicles from last night, at least so far as she knows," said Hatfield. "No suspects, no APBs. It was dark and it was raining, so nobody must have noticed us. If there were any kind of description or APB out for anyone, it would have been Chris who put it out on the air. This means we can risk using the same vehicles as last night. This is a wealthy enough area to where SUVs and other gas-guzzlers are still fairly common, so the Yukon won't stand out."

Washburn said, "CNN says that some people in the restaurant who happened to be looking out the window saw two men in ski masks, and they fled in what appeared to be a sports utility vehicle."

"Mmm, yeah, we need to work on that," said Hatfield thoughtfully. "No one should have seen anything. They should all have been in the bathroom when the shooting started. We need to find some way to convey that message."

"I think a few more dead bodies will convey it with clarity. If that's all the cops have got, no problem," said Washburn.

"Yah, well, the FBI may be able to shake something out of those people in the restaurant that the local boys can't. The next thing we need to know is how many of them there are. It may be anything from two to a dozen agents, depending on whether or not the Bureau decides to give this Goldman thing a full court press. I want to pick off at least one from the herd, better yet two, but if there's a bunch of them this will have to be shoot and scoot. Now we've got to figure out the most likely place to catch them so Cat can take his shots. I figure they will be bound to show in one of three places: numero

uno, downtown, either in and around the sheriff's office on Seventh Street or the courthouse on Commercial. Secondly, the Coast Guard air station on 12th Street in Warrenton, if they're going to stay overnight. Third, at the crime scene itself. The best place for us would be Rigoletto's, because that's right out in the open. The other two sites are in town and there are going to be more people around, plus assorted armed enemies will be on call to return fire and chase us."

"I drove by 39th Street on the way out here," said Washburn. "The sun was barely up but all you could see was flashing lights. Those poor guys must have been out there all night. What the hell were they doing?"

"Probably they all trooped down there as soon as the sun rose to search the area in daylight," said Hatfield.

"Charlie slowed down and I checked it through the zoom lens on a videocam as we rolled by," said Lee. "Videocams with zoom capability are good for surveillance, since binoculars make it too obvious you're watching something or somebody. But nobody thinks anything anymore about seeing some dummocks with a videocam, especially filming some place where there's been a shooting and there are a lot of police milling around."

"Good. What did you see?" asked Hatfield.

"They had moved all the cars except the cop cars off the pier, they had the platform roped off with that yellow tape, and they had some cops and guys in civvies down on their hands and knees crawling around. I think they were looking for forensics, any cartridge cases or tire tracks or whatever," said Lee.

"That means they're already doing CSI investigation," said Hatfield. "They probably have a state police crime lab team down from Portland or Salem. That means most likely the feds won't be bringing their own, which is good. Fewer FBI means more chance of cutting a couple away from the law enforcement herd when they go for pizza or something. Okay, here's my educated guess. Two or more FBI agents are going to show up at the 39th Street pier late this morning or early this afternoon, even if the state and local boys have already done the work. The feebs will rock up at Rigoletto's Beanery if only to show the flag and convince the local lefty establishment that they're doing something. That's where we need to wait for them, with Cat-Eyes in place and ready to fire."

"Sir, what did you and Volunteer Lockhart eventually decide about a firing position?" asked Washburn.

"I'd be willing to take a shot from that bluff on the south side of Leif Erickson drive," said Lockhart. "But it's a little bit longer a shot than I would

be comfortable making. I'd like a good, sure hit or two on this, my first time out for the NVA. Plus the E and E afterwards would be a bitch; I'd have to spend the first few seconds after my shot or shots scrambling up or down a hillside to get to the vehicle. The lieutenant okayed a better way."

"We're going to pose as delivery men and see if we can get Cat up onto the roof of the Columbia Prospect condominiums on 39th Street," said Hatfield. "That will reduce the shots to between 250 and 300 yards."

"Piece of cake," said Lockhart with assurance.

"Breaking contact after the shots are fired will still be a bit dodgy, but we'll have the building itself to shield us from sight from the pier, and if we run like hell down the outside stairwell we can be in our own vehicle and rolling in thirty seconds, maybe less," said Hatfield. "I went in there yesterday wearing a suit and tie, pretending to ask if they had any upcoming units available, like I could ever afford to live on the river. By the way, Len, those phoney business cards you got us came in handy."

"They weren't phoney," said Len. "I was delivering some fittings to a plumber doing a job at Chez Cherie, which is almost as ritzy as Rigoletto's. They were having one of these silly contests about leave your business card in this jar and win a free dinner for two, so when no one was looking I helped myself to a handful. A good quartermaster needs to be a scrounger."

"You mean there really is a Martin Winfrey who runs a night club called the Mouse Trap in Seattle?" chuckled Hatfield.

"Sounds a bit lavender to me," said Washburn.

"Yeah, well, if they connect my visit with today's events on the pier, Mr. Winfrey is going to have some explaining to do to some very paranoid FBI agents," said Hatfield, smiling. "They don't have a front desk as such, but there's a little sales office there with a girl who sits behind a desk for four hours in the afternoon. Guess they're too cheap to employ a full-time receptionist. She won't be there if we get in before noon. There is a service sticker for Steinberg Security Systems on the front door, but Charlie was able to pick up a little more poop on them. He seems to be quite taking to this intelligence officer thing."

"Oh, Len has to take credit for this one," said Charlie. "They tried to stick him on their little deal. As you might guess from the name, Steinberg Security Systems is a Jew-owned outfit out of Portland, with the head office in Jew Yawk. They supposedly offer full security alarm systems, patrol services, etcetera, to their clients, but mainly the people they target are corporations or businesses who are required by their insurance companies to maintain a serious security alarm system on their premises. One of their salesmen tried

to pitch this to Len for the hardware store, and I looked into it from there. For a substantially reduced fee to the customer, you can get either simply a couple of Steinberg Security stickers to put on your doors and windows, or else you can get a reduced service, for example your doors and windows are only alarmed at night or from ten to six in the morning or whatever you want."

"But how would these Jews profit by reducing the price for their own services?" asked Lockhart, puzzled.

"There are a lot of ways. The customer gets a bogus certificate from Steinberg saying that they have installed an alarm and security system that is fully compliant with insurance requirements, so they save a bundle on their insurance without having to shell out themselves, and they kick back to the salesman, say half of what they save on the first year's premium," explained Washburn. "Then if the customer wants to have a burglary or a fire later on that destroys a lot of overpriced or nonexistent inventory, he's compliant and covered, and the insurance company has to pay up. Remember, this scam was started in New York, by Jews and for Jews. Also, Steinberg has been able to get a lot of contracts from the government for various bonded warehouses and office buildings, some of which don't even exist, but for which they have been collecting monthly checks of taxpayer's dollars for years. As well as contracts from major real estate developers, like that Jewish consortium that put up Columbia Prospect. One kosher hand always scratches the other. Jews always do business only with other Jews."

"Where'd you get all this?" asked Hatfield.

"This is just what's on the internet," laughed Charlie. "Steinberg has been investigated six weeks to Sunday, sued more times than anyone can count, and they just keep rolling along."

"How?" asked Lockhart.

"Major campaign contributions to the Hillary Clinton for President campaign," said Charlie sourly.

"One thing I did tell Charlie," said Ekstrom angrily. "Steinberg Security was supposed to be in charge of the alarm system for the apartment house in Portland where Christina lived. The two niggers who raped and tortured her just walked right in. No alarm was sounded."

"Looks like it was one of their special deals," said Washburn grimly. "There's no real way to know, but I think it's a safe bet that you guys will be able to just walk right into Columbia Prospect. What's sauce for the goose will be sauce for the gander."

"Okay, Cat, I want us to get into position in the area so that we can get in there quick," said Hatfield. "We'll wait at the Maritime Museum on Marine

Boulevard; there are always vehicles parked there, and anyone driving by will think we're just tourists gawping at all the shippy stuff. As soon as we get word that the feebs are in town, we drive to Columbia Prospect and park in front like we belong there. We go into the building through the lobby, with those boxes I showed you held up to shield our faces from the security cameras, just in case they're operational. Are the boxes all scrubbed down?"

"With alcohol and with a Scotch pad, clean as a whistle," said Lockhart.

"Good. Don't touch them again without gloves. We're going to be leaving them behind and I don't want them to find a single fingerprint. I hope you're as good with a lockpick as you say you are."

"When no one will hire you, you gotta make a living somehow," said Lockhart with a shrug. "I never starved yet."

"We have to hope the roof door isn't alarmed," said Hatfield. "I haven't been able to actually get up there and take a look. It should be okay as a firing position, but if it isn't we'll have to go to Plan B."

"Which is?" asked Charlie.

"If for any reason we can't get up onto the apartment house roof, or the roof isn't suitable, we'll have to break into one of the third floor apartments on the north side of the building, with a view over the river, and fire from one of the windows," said Hatfield. "That may involve hostage taking and restraint, if anybody's home. I'll be carrying a bag that will contain duct tape and some of those plastic ties we used to truss up Iraqis all the time, and also this little gift from Len." Hatfield took out a Ruger .22 automatic with the front sight filed off and the muzzle threaded for about an inch and a half down the barrel, and a long tube made of two concentric lengths of iron plumber's piping, the inner tube drilled full of neat holes and the space between the two cylinders filled with shredded Brillo pads. It was a silencer. "I hope we don't have to use any of these things. I'd especially hate to have to shoot some poor sod who simply doesn't know when to sit down and shut up. I really do want us to kick off the revolution here on the North Shore with no dead white civilians."

"All of this assumes the FBI will even show up at 39th Street," said Washburn. "Suppose they don't?"

"Once we know they're in town, if they haven't showed at last night's crime scene after a reasonable time, we're going to have to clock them, improvise and take them on the wing somewhere," said Hatfield. "That's why I want you guys in two other cars."

"We have last night's transport and I have that old blue pickup of Jules Corman's, with bogus plates," said Len.

"Okay, Len, you and Tony take the truck," ordered Zack. "You need to roll over to Warrenton in case they head for the Coast Guard air station to use the federal computer system or secure communications or to put up in the guest quarters for the night. Brigade tells us they've quit overnighting in motels completely, and they always stay on military installations or in some cases in special safe condos the feds are setting up for such purposes. See if you can find some excuse to hang around in the Walgreen's parking lot on 101, just off the Youngs Bay Bridge. If they're headed for the base they'll have to pass right by you and you can pick them up. Charlie, you and Lee need to float in the area of the sheriff's office because that's where we hope they'll show first. If you can spot them, fine, let me know. Otherwise wait until I contact you. We're all using the same code, but Christina will call me and me only; she doesn't even know you guys are out and about. I will pass on whatever she says to both your cars. The main info we're hoping to get is a head count and any description she can give us, plus what they're driving.

"Now, on that subject, the brigade adjutant was able to give me some interesting info when I went up to Portland Sunday," continued Hatfield. "Apparently when 10/22 happened, some kind of contingency plan kicked in, and the FBI's first concern was for their own safety, which is typical of them. They have trotted out a whole fleet of specially armored vehicles for the use of their agents, not all one make. Our targets could be driving anything from a Lexus to an SUV to a low-end Ford or Chevy, but appearances will be deceiving. These fed rides will all have normal Oregon plates, not government tags. The idea behind all the diversity is for them to be able to blend in to traffic and not be spotted as fed but they made one dumb-ass mistake which kind of defeats that whole purpose. The windows on these vehicles are all tinted so we can't see inside, which is against the law. You can assume that any motor vehicle you see with fully tinted window is a federal car. Don't ask me why they missed something so obvious."

"Because they're stupid," said Ekstrom.

"Bingo, and that's encouraging," said Hatfield with a smile. "Any agency dumb enough to pull a boner like that isn't smart enough to catch us, eh, guys? Now, on the armor. We haven't been able to get a look up close at one of these things yet, but it's supposed to be state-of-the-art armored chassis, a combination of steel and aluminum alloy encased in a molded sheath of some kind of heavy plastic based on nylon so it's not as heavy as pure steel. The windows and windshield are top-of-the-line bulletproof glass, which isn't really glass. It's what they call a polycarbonate compound, and don't ask me what that is, but whatever this stuff is, it's stopped whatever we've

thrown at it thus far, and not just in Oregon. The gas tank is self-sealing and can allegedly stand a tracer hit. The tires are some kind of super-duper steel belted radial that's supposed to be proof against caltrops and land mines and whatnot, and the underside of the vehicle is composed not of steel but these nylon-sheathed plates, so they're not magnetic. Reinforced suspension to carry the extra weight, self-contained air-conditioning with special filters that keep out outside air and any tear gas or other fumes, you get the idea. These fed vehicles aren't tanks. They can be taken out by a roadside IED just like our Humvees were in Iraq, and I'd be interested to see what an RPG could do against one, but the main thing is that when they're in the vehicle, the FBI agents will be likely shielded from a single rifle bullet."

"I've got a full magazine of standard USGI tungsten armor-piercing .308, if that helps," said Lockhart.

"It might," said Hatfield. "A lot of this so-called bullet-proof glass is quirky, and if you hit it at the right angle or velocity it breaches, as we found out on numerous occasions in Baghdad. There's no such thing as being completely bullet-proof. But that's not a chance we can take. We have to catch them out of their car. In certain extreme cases, we might be able to force them out. Len?"

Ekstrom pulled a plastic sports bag over to his seat and took out two dark, cylindrical objects. "These are crude and not overly powerful, but they'll make a bang. I decided against using PVC after all, because we may need a shrapnel effect, so they're iron pipe, capped at one end, each bomb containing three sticks of common or garden variety dynamite, the other end capped with a nipple as you see here, and that's the fuse dangling out of it. Both fuses should give you between six and seven seconds before detonation."

Hatfield nodded. "My idea is that if we get into a situation where we're in place and ready to fire, and their vehicle is stationary, we roll one of these under the car or van or whatever. It may not be able to pierce their blast-proofing, but it should knock them around and disorient them, set them on fire or convince them the car is about to blow, and scare them enough to make them abandon ship. Charlie, you guys carry one of these and Len, you and Tony take the other. Now, weapons for this operation, again bearing in mind that we will be facing armed opponents who will return fire if we give them the chance. Every man needs a handgun, of course, not an e-piece, a 9-mm or heavier that you can use in a firefight if it comes to that. One man in each car should carry a shotgun. Len has brought two of those 10-gauges from Fields's stash and .00 buck and slugs for both. In addition, the second man in each car will carry an automatic weapon."

"I call dibs on the Heckler & Koch," said Len. "Charlie, I brought you the Uzi, since you did so well with it during our session at the quarry. Here are the mags for it."

"And me?" asked Zack with a smile.

"You get a real blast from the past out of Bert Fields's closet," said Len with a smile, pulling out a small and sharp-looking weapon. "The old M-3 grease gun. I chose that one because we have more .45 ammo than we can shake a stick at. You seemed to like it at our firing sessions, plus you need something small enough to put in that box you're supposed to be delivering at the condos."

Hatfield nodded. "Good thinking. Okay, Charlie and Lee, if and when Christina or you can spot these feebs and you can make one car only, you need to follow them wherever they're going, at a respectful distance, and let me and Cat know by TM which way they're headed. Got it? Just one car. If there's a dozen of them and they're driving in a convoy, we're going to have to pull back and circle them for a bit and see if we can cull one or two of them. I don't want to take on a whole enemy task force; we need to make like the Swamp Fox, fight and run away, and live to fight another day. If they come out onto the 39th Street pier, Cat and I should be in position and we'll take them there. Charlie, if they do turn in, I want you to keep on going about a mile along Leif Erickson and turn left onto Tongue Point Road, like you're going down to Job Corps or those container docks down there at the bottom of the hill. Wait there at the turnoff for us to give you the signal and then slowly move back down into town. You should meet us going out halfway, in which case turn and follow us and be prepared to take on and take out any pursuit, maybe with that firecracker Len just gave you. If all goes well we turn off on John Day Road and take the back way into Knappa."

"That's a big ten-four, Thug Buddy," said Charlie.

"Now, that's if it goes down at the pier," continued Hatfield "If not, if the FBI head out over the Youngs Bay Bridge to Warrenton, you tell me and I'll pass it on to Len and Tony who should be sucking up an espresso or whatever around the Walgreens. Cat and I will abandon our position and come to you. They don't have any Bremer walls up yet down there, just a new chain-link fence which can be seen through, and we'll cruise around the station and see if we can get a shot, which Cat will take from the roof of the Yukon if one offers. That's where we start ad-libbing, and it will be tricky."

"What if they go to some weird off-the-wall place like up to the Goldmans' house, or go for lunch at Chez Cherie or something?" asked Charlie.

"Risk a clear call to me. You can be the Reverend Mister Green and I'll be Deacon White, and you can be calling on the Lord's business. Make up some gibberish, but name the place where they've stopped. Cat and I will go there and try to spot them, and Cat can get up on the roof of our vehicle and take them through the restaurant window or whatever offers," said Hatfield. "Guys, our little lady downtown says they're coming soon. We need to go ahead and get this done. I don't want to be following these mooks all over town all day. The longer an operation like this drags out, the more chance something can go wrong. One last little reminder, gentlemen," Hatfield went on in a grim voice. "These are bad people and they've done very bad things. I for one think they still owe us for Sam and Vicky Weaver. There are times when vengeance is thoroughly justified, and this is one of them. But there's more to it than that, much more. We're not just sending a message to the FBI today, we're sending our message to Joe Six-Pack. He has to understand that these people no longer rule the roost in the Northwest, that when he sees something he shouldn't or he has some kind of problem with the NVA, the last damned thing on earth he wants to do is call the police or the FBI, because *they can't even protect themselves,* much less him and his family. This is about destroying the occupation's credible monopoly of armed force and convincing Joe and Jane Six-Pack that whatever their options may be, picking up that telephone isn't one of them." The cell phone beeped. "I, on the other hand, need to pick up this phone." He did so and saw LUNCH DATE CONFIRMED IF U WILLING.

"The FBI has arrived at the sheriff's office. Damn, they're early!" said Hatfield. He texted back, HOW HUNGRY ARE U?

After a minute came the reply, PIZZA FOR TWO SHOULD DO.

TIRED OF PIZZA. SOMETHING ELSE PLS responded Zack.

HOT DOG FOR U, CHINESE FOR ME came the reply.

WHAT TO DRINK? asked Zack.

GREEN BEER, SNT PADDYS DAY EARLY, appeared the words on the little screen.

GOT IT, LET ME KNOW WHEN replied Zack, and closed the phone. "Jeez," he said softly, shaking his head. "Luck is with us. This couldn't be better. Only two FBI agents, one white male and one Asian female, driving a green SUV. Let's roll, boys!"

* * *

FBI Special Agent Rabang Miller practically pranced into the day room of the Clatsop County sheriff's office. In ten years with the Bureau she had

mastered what she saw as the necessary combination of brisk efficiency, no-nonsense assertiveness and a touch of arrogance in order to show a wide assortment of local yokel cops what was what, that the real players were now on the scene and they'd better shape up their sorry slack donut-eating asses. She had grown up around the U.S. military and so had absorbed a lot of the jargon and Mickey Mouse attitude, which stood her in good stead in her job by never failing to impress her superiors. The opinions of lesser forms of life such as local police of any race didn't matter.

She was a short, orange-ish woman with long black hair in a severe bun, dressed in a dark green pants suit with matching jacket to cover the 9-mm sidearm in a clip holster by her side, a Glock with a specially modified grip to fit the generally smaller hands of female agents. Rabang Miller was Filipino, the child of a Subic Bay bargirl and prostitute. Her father was an unknown American serviceman of undetermined identity or racial ancestry, but judging from her appearance, most likely a Hispanic of some kind. After entering her mother's trade at 14, she had eventually achieved the ultimate life coup that all Filipino bargirls dreamed of. She had fucked and sucked a dumb-ass alcoholic redneck Army sergeant from North Carolina into marrying her and bringing her to the Great Golden Paradise of the U.S.A.

Rabang hadn't waited the required two years for her green card; once she was past the airport, she had lost time to catch up on. Within three months after her arrival at Fort Bragg married quarters she paid a local Filipino dishwasher 50 dollars to take her out back of his restaurant and beat the living crap out of her, whereupon she went running to the local cops and thence to the base Provost Marshal on base, weeping and bruised and bleeding, with a terrible tale of drunken sexual and physical spousal abuse by her brutal husband. Under a special provision of U.S. immigration law, well known to every whore in the Philippines but somehow unknown to American GIs thinking with their gonads instead of their brains, Rabang had gotten her green card right away and Sergeant Miller had gotten five years in Leavenworth to try and sober up and figure out what the hell had happened to his life. From then on it was up, up, up all the way for this strong and valiant womyn of color.

Rabang proceeded to ride every available affirmative action program out of Bragg, into Duke University and an eventual law degree, and then into the United States Attorney's office, whence she slid into the Bureau as a trade-off for not bringing formal charges of sexual harassment against the federal judge who was her boss. She kept Miller's name because all of her original immigration documents were in that name, and she didn't want to provoke any official examination of them through a legal change that might

reveal certain discrepancies such as her age and the fact that her marriage to the sergeant was technically statutory rape. She was now married to another judge in Portland, with a twenty-room Colonial mansion in a wealthy gated suburb, a 13 year-old mulatto son who was already on the crack pipe, and her eye on bureau chief if she could find some way to finesse it. She was already throwing the present SAIC two-hour Subic Bay Specials in an assortment of motels around town, looking for his weaknesses, anything she could use to bring him down, but a good case clearance or two on her record certainly wouldn't hurt. Cracking the Goldman murders and reeling in a gang of white racist domestic terrorists would be just the ticket.

Agent Miller's partner was Special Agent Brian Pangborn. Pangborn was the kind of agent who would have gone far under the old régime of J. Edgar Hoover. He was tall and lean, with sandy hair and blue eyes, sharp from his freshly pressed suit and his spit-shined shoes up to his buzz cut, an All-Conference quarterback in high school and later on a star for Texas A&M, a law degree he'd actually earned through study and hard work. He was married to a nice Barbie Doll wife with two kids in a suburban split-level ranch. Although he wasn't one of the Mormons Hoover had favored above all, he didn't drink and he didn't smoke, and he was a regular churchgoer and active member of Promise Keepers and the 700 Club.

Pangborn was Rabang Miller's third partner in the two years since she had come to the Portland office. Her previous two had asked to be re-assigned, and he was about ready to do the same. Pangborn had come to admit to himself that he loathed the officious little Asian woman; being in her presence was like continually hearing nails drawn across a chalkboard. Pangborn had one serious drawback as an FBI agent—he suffered from occasional spurts of independent thought and initiative. Combined with his race and gender, Pangborn knew these character flaws were enough to blight him forever on the Bureau's career track. He'd already made his decision to put in his papers after twenty years, and try for federal or corporate security, hopefully with NASA or one of the big oil companies back in Houston.

Rabang Miller stomped up to the nearest deputy behind a desk. "Where's the sheriff?" she demanded. She whipped out her badge and ID with a practiced flourish. "Miller and Pangborn, FBI." She never identified herself to anyone without flashing the badge, and she always somehow gave everyone the impression that she expected her own theme music to well up in the background.

The deputy was remarkably unimpressed. "I'll see if he's in." He picked up the phone. "Ted, those people from the FBI are here."

Another deputy came into the day room. "Hey, is anyone here driving a green Chrysler Aspen with completely illegal full-tinted windows, parked in my parking space in the garage?" he yelled across the room.

"That's our vehicle," Rabang called back. "What about it?"

"Well, I just gave you a $250 ticket!" snapped back the deputy. "Tinting is against the law, and taking my parking space damned well ought to be!"

"We are FBI agents!" hissed Rabang in a rage.

"So you don't have to obey the law like everyone else?" demanded the deputy. "Oh, sorry, silly me! What a question!" At one end of the day room was a raised platform enclosed with three cubicle walls, which contained the combined law enforcement and emergency services 911 and dispatch radios, maps, and unit location board. No one noticed a slim blond girl in long sleeves and trousers, sitting at a computer with a radio headset on. The girl quietly leaned over, took a look, and then surreptitiously pulled out a cell phone and started texting a message.

Ted Lear came out of his office and extended his hand. He was a surprisingly young man of medium height and auburn hair, with a slim and strong physique. "Hi," he said, forcing a polite smile and extending his hand. "Ted Lear, Clatsop County sheriff."

"Miller and Pangborn, FBI," replied Rabang in a clipped staccato voice like a drill sergeant, flashing her ID again. She ignored the sheriff's outstretched hand and Pangborn reached over and shook it before the snub became obvious. "Brian Pangborn," he said with genuine warmth. "Glad to meet you, Sheriff."

"There seem to be an awful lot of people hanging around in here fourteen hours after a major homicide," said Rabang, looking around the day room disapprovingly. "I understand that your department doesn't give priority to hatecrimes, sheriff. This is the second double murder you've had in three months, both incidents clearly motivated by hatred against sexual orientation in the first case and racial hatred in the second. Why aren't all your people out there pounding the pavement, or better yet pounding your local racist inbreds and getting some answers as to who killed Jake and Irene Goldman?"

"We're kind of old-fashioned here, Special Agent, ah, Miller," said Ted mildly. "We like to ask the questions first, before we start beating on people. By the way, you said the homicide here last night was racially motivated?"

"Of course it was!" screeched Rabang. "Our information is that the fascist terrorists called in to your local newspaper and claimed credit!"

"Someone called the editor of the *Astorian,* yes," said Lear in the same mild tone. "No, I was curious because you used the term racially motivated. I didn't think Jews were a race."

Miller suddenly pulled up, realizing she had inadvertently made a potentially dangerous error in politically correct nomenclature that did not need to get back to her superiors. "Well, you know what I meant," she explained lamely. "Persons of the Jewish faith are one of the officially recognized politically protected special victim categories. All offenses against Jews are hatecrimes under the law."

"So they are," agreed Lear. "Would you step into my office, please?"

Once inside Lear's office with the door closed, Rabang launched herself at him again like a striking snake. "Alright, cut the bullshit, Sheriff! You know damned well that you've had four hatecrime homicides on your turf plus the disappearance of a large number of privately held firearms, and the NVA claimed credit for the killings last night! Time for you to wake up and smell the coffee. You've got a racist death squad operating right here in your little tourist paradise, and we are here to make sure it gets crushed out of existence, and fast! The Portland office doesn't want any of this disgraceful foot-dragging that occurred in the murders of Elizabeth King and Martha Proudfoot. If you don't get some results within forty-eight hours, the U.S. Attorney in Portland is assuming jurisdiction over these cases under the Patriot Act as domestic terrorism, the Bureau will be taking over completely, and I will tell you right up front that these murders and that gun raid aren't the only things that we will be investigating!"

Lear ignored the threat. He sat down behind his desk and replied calmly and rationally, like someone trying to explain something to a stubborn child. "As I have repeatedly briefed the U.S. Attorney, the Oregon Attorney General, and various people from your own office, there was no foot-dragging in the Liddy King and Martha Proudfoot murders," he told them patiently. "The case is still active and I have detectives assigned to the ongoing investigation. The reason we haven't arrested and charged anyone is simple. We have no idea who did it. It wasn't the husband, because he was in jail here on a potential domestic violence preventive detention warrant and also pending an indictment for hatespeech. Whoever it was left us not a jot, not a smidgeon of forensic evidence. It's true someone wrote the letters NVA on the wall, but that could have been a red herring to throw us off."

"You know perfectly well that ever since 9/11, evidence isn't necessary!" argued Miller. "The Patriot Act gives local as well as federal law enforcement broad proactive powers to protect lives and property and the security of the United States against both foreign and domestic terrorism! If you've got two brain cells to rub together as a law enforcement officer, you know or else you damned well *should* know every individual in your county who so much as harbors a racist thought!"

"I have to admit, I've never arrested anyone for their thoughts before," confessed Lear.

"Well, with two murdered Jews on your doorstep, don't you think it's fucking well time you started?" shouted Rabang in anger. "You've *got* to know who these people are! It's your business to know!"

"No, ma'am, I *don't* know," said Lear wearily. "Where do I start? Anyone who has ever complained about losing his job to an illegal alien or an affirmative action employee? Anyone who has ever had his son rejected by every college he applied to and then dragged away into the Army and killed in Bumfuckistan? Anyone who has ever been imprisoned for contempt of court because he is unable to pay his credit card company after they sued him? Anyone who ever had an elderly relative in a nursing home injected with poison and legally murdered under the Senior Citizens' Quality of Life Act? Anyone who has ever had a child raped or murdered or mutilated or their brains fried like an egg on drugs in our Brave New World here? Anyone who has ever walked through a public park with their children and seen two Third Worlders copulating like dogs under a tree? Where do I start? No, I mean it, really. Since we're just pulling names out of a hat, who would you like me to arrest first for unapproved thoughts?"

Pangborn and Lear both understood that this was terribly dangerous talk and if he kept it up, there was every chance he would leave his own office in handcuffs on a federal charge of hatespeech, but Lear couldn't seem to help himself. Pangborn caught Lear's eye and shook his head. Before Rabang Miller could explode he intervened. "Actually, Sheriff, we were rather curious about one individual whom we think is the kind who might be inclined to get involved in racist activity or domestic terrorism," said Pangborn, pulling out his notebook. "A man named Jesse Lockhart. Aged 29, military veteran, marginally employed white male, military veteran with a history of psychological problems and several arrests for hatecrime that he seems to keep slithering out of somehow. A man who can't appear to control his tongue or his fists around minorities. He fits the profile. Have you looked at Lockhart for these killings?"

"Yes, we have," said Lear, glad for the chance to get back to business and away from dangerous pathways of free expression. "You forgot to mention that Cat-Eyes Lockhart won both the Silver Star and the Congressional Medal of Honor. He was one of the best snipers in Iraq."

"Well?" demanded Rabang. "Have you ordered him to be picked up?"

"Yes, I intend to speak to him as soon as I can find him," said Lear. "Two deputies went by his trailer early this morning. He wasn't in, and his truck was gone."

"Well, there you are!" exclaimed Rabang triumphantly.

"Cat-Eyes?" asked Pangborn curiously.

"In Iraq they said he could see in the dark like a cat, without his night vision gear or his infrared scope," said Lear. "His not being home is not evidence that he did anything, and frankly it's not unusual for Jess. He may well be just out on a drunk. I don't figure him for either of the homicides, though. The MO is wrong. First off, Lockhart's problems don't seem to be with lesbians or Jews. He always has his run-ins with Mexicans or, uh, people of Polynesian heritage," he said, glancing at Rabang. "Secondly, Cat is a rifleman, a lifelong hunter, a long-range marksman, the best I have ever seen. These murders were committed at close range, King and Proudfoot with a shotgun, and the Goldman couple with handguns, by two masked assailants who were briefly seen by some of the restaurant customers. Finally, Lockhart has a clear alibi for King and Proudfoot. He was an in-patient at a VA alcohol rehab center in Longview in July, and the night manager swears he was there all night. When we find him I'll ask him where he was last night, most likely on the floor of some tavern, but if he can't account for his whereabouts, yeah, we'll take a closer look. It's called proper police procedure, Agent Miller. You don't make the evidence fit your suspect, you make the suspect fit your evidence. Even post-9/11. At least, that's the way we do it here."

Pangborn felt it was time to head off another confrontation between Rabang and the sheriff; she looked about ready to explode in politically correct indignation. "Now, about this phone call to your local newspaper claiming credit for the killing of the Goldman couple last night, sheriff?" he asked, notebook poised.

"It wasn't to the newspaper itself, it was to Steve Phelps, the editor of the *Daily Astorian,* at his home, about 9 o'clock last night. A man called and identified himself as one Captain O'Neill of the Northwest Volunteer Army. I understand that's a standard name these people use for this kind of thing?"

"Yeah, they stole that one from the Provisional IRA, and it's been in the papers and on TV," said Rabang. "Anybody could have used the name."

"True," agreed Lear graciously. "He asked Steve to write the message down exactly. Here it is." Lear picked up a torn sheet from a notepad from his desk and read, "At 8 p.m. on February 14th, an active service unit from D Company, First Portland Brigade, Northwest Volunteer Army, carried out an enforcement action under General Order Number Four issued by the Army Council on November 24th of last year, ordering all non-whites including Jews to leave the territory of the Northwest American Republic forthwith. The NVA accordingly has shot dead Jacob and Irene Goldman

for non-compliance with that General Order. All Jews and non-whites who are apprehended by the NVA will be similarly dealt with." He put the paper down. "That's it. I gather that's pretty much their style?" he asked.

"That's their racist fascist anti-Semitic jargon, yes," snarled Rabang. "And do you still deny you have one of these racist murder gangs operating in your county, sheriff?"

"I never denied that we did," protested Lear. "Maybe we do, God help us. But you will notice they said Portland Brigade. I think there's a very good chance the shooters came down here from outside, from your bailiwick up in the city."

Rabang was getting more and more steamed. "You need to get out of your denial phase really fast, sheriff, because I am starting to wonder about you."

"We passed the crime scene on the way in here, and we saw the units there. Did the CSI team from the Oregon State Police get here yet?" interrupted Pangborn. He was used to trying to keep a leash on Rabang, but it was getting harder and more distasteful all the time.

"Yes, they're out there now and I just came back from there when you arrived," said Lear. "I was out there all night, if that improves your opinion of my professional zeal any, Agent Miller, but there was damn-all to find. The rain washed away any traces of anything and they must have used revolvers, because there were no cartridge casings found."

"Or else if they were real pros, they policed up their brass," said Pangborn.

"Maybe," conceded Lear. "The medical examiner's preliminary opinion was medium-heavy handgun rounds, either .357 or capped .38s, Devastators or something like that. Both of them shot once in the chest and twice in the head. Judging from the blood splatter patterns, they got hit in the head when they were down, to finish them off. That sounds pretty professional and pretty damned cold to me. Like the kind of thing we're seeing in Portland or Seattle or Spokane."

"We'll take a look ourselves," snarled Rabang, getting up.

"Knock yourselves out," said Lear cheerfully, glad to be getting rid of them. "Agent Miller, if you guys can find anything out there I missed, I'll buy you both dinner when Rigoletto's re-opens."

Rabang ignored his tentative peace offering. "Bullshit," she said. "I told you. You get the cuffs on these racist motherfuckers within forty-eight hours or the U.S. Attorney is assuming jurisdiction and you can look forward to a career as a security guard at Mighty Mart." She stalked out, followed by Pangborn, who turned at the office door and looked at Lear helplessly with a shrug. Lear gave him a friendly wave, the unspoken acknowledgement of

helpless chagrin between white males in all strata of society that had been growing more and common over the years. When the door was closed, Lear picked up the intercom.

"Dispatch," said a female voice.

"Hi, Chrissie," said Lear in a weary voice. "Chrissie, could you radio Leo Galli out at Rigoletto's, and tell him to tell the officers on the scene and those state forensics people that they are about to have the edifying experience of a visit from two charming folks from the FBI? They're on they're way now."

"Sure, Sheriff!" chirped Christina Ekstrom brightly. "I'll let the guys know right away!"

* * *

After they received Christina's first signal, Hatfield and Cat-Eyes Lockhart had driven directly to the Columbia Prospect condominiums while the others headed out to move into their respective positions. It was a weekday morning and the condo parking lot was fairly empty. Hatfield carefully back-in parked the Yukon at the far east side of the building. "When we make our run for it we'll go down the outside stairwell," he told Lockhart. "Those trees and the edge of the building should hopefully prevent us from being seen." They got out of the SUV. Both men were wearing jeans, light canvas windbreakers of indeterminate color but with deep pockets, and rolled ski masks on their head like pea caps, with light sports shoes for running on their feet. They were within less than 400 yards of the pier platform and all the police activity, but the apartment building blocked the view. Hatfield scanned the area. No one seemed to be around.

"Gloves now, before we even go in, to make sure we don't leave any prints anywhere," ordered Hatfield, and they pulled on their latex surgical cloves. "Make sure we remember to melt these down. It's possible to lift a print from the inside of a fingertip." They opened the back of the SUV and took out two cardboard boxes from the Longview Mighty Mart, a large squarish one labeled "card table" that contained Cat-Eyes' rifle and scope and magazines, and the other a large but suspiciously light one which proclaimed itself to contain a 13-inch portable television set but that actually had Zack's M-3 submachine gun, magazines, and hostage-taking gear stashed inside. "No masks inside the building in case we run into anyone in the lobby or in the hallway. If that happens, heft your box to block your face from view. Let's go. We need to get up there and scope that roof out. We should have done that before, but there were always too many people about, and I didn't want anyone to notice me

prowling around on the roof. I don't like taking chances like that. I think I need to work on my planning a bit better next time."

"Hey, Lieutenant, you know what they say," responded Lockhart cheerfully. "No plan survives the first day of combat."

"I don't want the plan to survive, I want *us* to survive," said Hatfield.

They entered the lobby, boxes carefully held at shoulder height to block their faces from the security camera in the corner. Hatfield glanced over and saw that the small office was dark. There was no one there and no one in the lobby. They pressed for the elevator and got in, and rode up to the third floor, holding the boxes up again as the doors opened. They stepped out. No one was in the carpeted hallway, although they could hear the sound of a television from within one of the apartments somewhere on the corridor. "Left," said Hatfield. They went to the far end of the hall and opened the door into the stairwell. One flight of stairs took them up to the roof. Cat put down his box and tried the door. It opened. "Didn't even have to pick the lock!" he said triumphantly. Zack propped open the door with his own box as they stepped outside. It was a cold gray morning, and the wind whipping off the river rattled the branches of the trees along the river walk.

"Down," ordered Zack. "They might be able to see us out here, especially if they've got binoculars." The two of them low-crawled across the roof to a low brick parapet topped with an ornate iron railing, approximately twenty inches high, and Cat-Eyes looked around him.

"Uh, I don't know about this, sir," he said dubiously, shaking his head. Zack saw what he meant. From where they lay, they could see the 39th Street pier and the platform at the end of it whereon stood the yuppie restaurant and a series of smaller shops. There were at least eight police cars there or parked along the pier, blue and red lights flashing, and a large official-looking van that had to be a crime scene unit. Cops were standing in clumps, smoking and drinking coffee, or sitting in their cars, obviously waiting for something. But the view was blocked by several tall elm and maple trees along the river walk. It was winter, and the branches were bare, but they were shivering and waving in the wind. "I can try to fire through those branches, but they'd play hell with my visibility through the scope, and if the bullet hits one it will deflect. But there doesn't seem to be any place better up here." Lockhart pointed. To the Volunteers' left the roof sloped at a high angle and ran right down to the brick buttress, all along the building. It would be impossible for Lockhart to crouch behind the cover of the small brick retaining ledge anywhere but here in the east corner; in order to clear the trees and get a clear shot he would have to balance at angle on the sloping roof, and he and his

rifle would be clearly visible to anyone on the pier who happened to glance up. "The only thing I can think of would be to climb up and over the roof and lie full length on the other side of it, and use the roof itself for cover," Lockhart went on. "But I'd still have to stick my head up pretty far to see what was going on and take a shot."

"You'd also be completely visible to anyone on the other side of the building," said Hatfield, shaking his head in disgust. "Plus when we E and E after the shots you'd have to scramble down this side of the roof within range of their weapons, a dangerously exposed target yourself. Damn, Cat, I'm sorry. I should have gotten up here and checked it out first. Let that be a lesson for me. No, this is bullshit. We'll have to use one of the windows. Let's go back."

Back in the stairwell, Hatfield said, "Let's uncase the weapons and get ready, leave the boxes here like we planned." They both opened the boxes with their gloved hands and took out their guns, slapping in magazines and chambering rounds. Cat checked the mountings on his telescopic sight, which he had left locked onto the weapon, and briefly sighted it through the open door toward one of the trees to make sure it had not been jarred out of place and he'd kept his zero. Hatfield put the duct tape and plastic ties in his jacket pocket and a pouch with magazines for the grease gun over his shoulder on a strap, then screwed on the silencer for the .22 and put that in his other pocket. They moved down the stairwell to the third floor. "Masks," said Hatfield, and they pulled their ski masks down over their faces. He peeped out the door. The corridor was still empty. "Okay, twenty-four condos in this whole place, eight to a floor, four to a side. I'd say our optimum position would be the window of the last one down from here on our right. That would be 3-D. Get your lockpick ready." They swiftly moved down the hall, weapons at the ready, to the far end of the corridor and apartment 3-D. As they passed 3-C, they heard the television clearly from within. "That one's occupied," whispered Hatfield. "We'll have to be quiet once we get inside." They moved to the door of 3-D. Cat leaned his rifle against the wall and took out a small folding tool similar to a jackknife, with a number of thin and peculiar-looking blades and picks opening out of it. He was about to start worrying at the lock when he noticed something.

"Shit!" he said, pointing to the upper corner of the door. Hatfield saw a small glowing red light and a small shield with three tiny stars on it. "It's a TriStar alarm system," Lockhart said. "Those are quite legit, I can tell you. We open this door and we'll set it off. Whoever lives here must have armed it when he or she left this morning."

Hatfield looked at the nameplate on the door, which read *Finckbone.* "Sounds Jewish," he said. "A Jew would most likely know that Steinberg Security Systems was bent, and he wanted to make sure he got a real alarm system in his crib, so he installed his own. Damn! That means we'll have to use 3-C. Somebody's in there, which means any alarm system won't be armed, but I really did hope we wouldn't have to take hostages. Crap! Well, let's get on with it. We're running out of time. Those feebs may be on their way already." They moved silently to the door of 3-C. The name on the door said *Englehardt.* Cat quickly and deftly worked one of his odd blades in the lock, then another. The second one did the trick; the deadbolt sprang and the door slid open a notch, revealing a gold chain. The two men could hear the television clearly now. It was CNN news. "I'll kick it," whispered Zack. He stepped back and with a powerful kick snapped the chain and slammed the door open. He and Cat leaped into the apartment foyer and Lockhart kicked the door shut and locked it behind them. They charged into the living room.

A white-haired little old man was sitting on the sofa watching the television. He was fully dressed in a suit and tie, cleanly shaven, and on the sofa next to him was a aluminum medical cane. Apparently he hadn't even heard the door being kicked in. He looked up at the two intruders in some surprise, calmly picked up the remote and muted the television, and said "There ain't nothing in here worth stealing, muchachos. You don't believe me, tear the place apart if you want, and if you're gonna get all pissed off when you don't find nothing and kill me, then to hell with you and your beaner mamacitas who produced you through copulation with a goat and a burro respectively. Now how d'ye like them apples?"

"We're not Mexicans, Mr. Englehardt," said Hatfield. "My name is Smith, and this is Mr. Jones. We're with the Northwest Volunteer Army. Sir, I apologize for breaking in on you like this. It's damned rude of us, I know, but unfortunately it's necessary for us to make use of your windows. We'll be out of here as soon as we can, I promise you, but I'm afraid I'm going to have to restrain you to make sure you don't do anything foolish. Mr. Jones, check the rest of the apartment, make sure there's no one here." Cat headed first into one bedroom, then the other. He shook his head. Hatfield slung his submachine gun and pulled out the duct tape.

"Northwest Volunteer Army, eh?" said the old man keenly, studying them sharply as if he could see beneath their masks. "You're all over the news this morning. It's all I watch these days. News and old movies. Got satellite TV, three hundred channels and nothing on but crap. Never watch anything made

after John Wayne died. Would you be the same fellers who blew away those two Red Sea pedestrians out there on the pier last night?"

"Something like that," said Hatfield.

"Hell, sorry I missed your performance," said the old man. "I was watching Pollyanna, of all things. Heard the shots, of course, but you boys had hooked up and booked by the time I got to the window, just like I told those cops who came banging on the door at the crack of dawn. So now you're back, and judging from that M-21 it looks like you're planning on doing some more shooting. From my window. You gonna shoot down police officers, son?" he asked Cat. "That's kind of cold, don't you think? They're just ordinary Joes like you and me."

Cat looked at Hatfield, who explained, "I hope we don't have to harm any of the local officers, sir. We're after bigger game. Two FBI agents are on their way here, and they're the ones we want."

"Well hot damn!" cackled old Englehardt. "By all means, use my window! And tie me up too, if ya gotta. But I need to warn you, son, I had to get my prostate yanked out a while back, and my bladder ain't none too predictable. When I gots to go, I gots to go, so don't be offended if I piss in my pants. You might want to put some towels under my chair or something."

Thinking quickly, Hatfield decided to take a chance. "Sir, we really don't want to tie you up or gag you or inconvenience you any more than we have already, but we have a job to do here and we can't risk you cutting up rough or trying to telephone anybody or yelling for help at the wrong moment." Cat-Eyes was already peering out of both windows. He selected the one on the right, opened it, quickly removed the screen and closed the blinds to a small aperture of about eighteen inches. He moved a small table beneath the window and pulled up a chair. He sat down and attached a clip-on bipod to the rifle's barrel a few inches behind the muzzle, wrapped his left arm through the sling for extra bracing, and sighted left to right.

"Perfect," he said.

"Mr. Englehardt, will you give me your word that you won't try to interfere with us in any way?" asked Hatfield. "If so, we'll keep an eye on you but we won't tie you up."

"You got it, son," said the old man. "But on one condition. When the time comes I want to peep out this other window and watch."

"You don't like federal agents, Mr. Englehardt?" asked Lockhart in amusement.

The old man scowled. "I don't like anyone who has anything to do with the government that stole my Social Security that I paid into all my life,

blew it all in the stock market when they switched over to those personal investment accounts as they called 'em, and left me to live on $445 a month compensation benefit, which I only get because I was already drawing Social Security when it went belly up. When my grandchildren get to be my age they won't get doodly squat, but they still have to pay deductions to pay off the deficit those sons of bitches ran up in Washington when they gambled away the Social Security fund like so many drunken sailors."

"How can anyone live on $445 a month?" asked Hatfield in wonder. "And if you don't mind my asking, how can you afford to live in this place?"

"Oh, the Jews who built these condos got a complete rebate on all property taxes forever and a day from those corrupt leeches in the state and county government, no taxes or water or electricity rates at all so long as they reserve two apartments for codgers like me, so-called deserving seniors," snarled the old man. "Me and old lady Hoskins down in 2-B drew the short straws. I'm a veteran, Vietnam. That's how I recognized Jonesy's weapon there. I used to tote the old M-14 myself, back in the day. Betty Hoskins got in by claiming she was a dyke, which is kind of ridiculous for a woman of 75, and it shamed the hell out of her, but what the hell else could she do? If it weren't for this place we'd have both been sent to a home and probably gotten the needle by now. Damned wog doctors can't kill us old white folks off fast enough, once the private insurance runs out. But it ain't the whole $445 I have to live on every month, son. They still charge me $400 a month for this apartment."

"That leaves you $45 a month to live on. How can you possibly survive on that?" demanded Hatfield.

"I'll show you. Go look in my kitchen, in the cupboards over the counter." Hatfield went in and opened the cupboards. He saw long rows of cans.

"Dog food?" said Zack in a startled voice, incredulous and horrified. "You live on *dog food?* Mother of God!"

"Cheap dog food at that," chortled Englehardt. "Alpo is gourmet cooking for me. Oh, I do get some help from the local food bank, if I can get down there early on Monday morning before the Mexicans swarm in and grab all the good stuff. They give me some rice and beans, usually, and sometimes dried potatoes and onions, and I've learned to make up a kind of goulash. Also I can sometimes get some things like Louisiana hot sauce or garlic to kill the taste, although most anything that's strong enough plays hob with my old digestion. I cook it all up in one pot on the stove there and keep it festering. That's it in front of you."

Hatfield lifted the lid of a stock pot on the stove and saw a gooey mess that looked like vomit inside. "Dear God!" he moaned.

Englehardt shrugged. "My two grandsons and my granddaughter help me out whenever they can, although they're in bad shape themselves. My son Adam, their father, was killed in Iraq back in '07. Civilian contractor, his truck hit a mine. He was supposed to be working for Halliburton but it turned out he was actually employed by a sub-contractor himself, who filed Chapter 11 so they wouldn't have to pay all those death benefits they promised their employees. My grandson Todd was in Gaza, and he made me an allotment from his pay, which helped, but then he came back missing a leg and they kicked him out, so that stopped. My grandson George hasn't worked in a couple of years. He told a nigger joke and some white asshole informed on him, so he's blacklisted. My granddaughter Cassie's husband is in Afghanistan now; he offered me an allotment but I told him to keep it, he has his own family to worry about. Most of the things I would want to spend money on I can't do no more, anyway. And after all, this place does come with free cable, so I can watch the world go to hell every day. Tell me something, boys," the old man asked. "Is it true that those two kikes last night were about to sit down to a $60,000 imported dinner flown in from Israel?"

"Where'd you hear that?" asked Lockhart, his eyes still out the window.

"CNN. They had some rabbi from Portland on there crying his eyes out and sawing on the sad violins like mad, talking about how these two wonderful Jewish love boids was gonna sit down to this great expensive meal that Jakie had spent all this money on to show his love for his Irene. The hell of it is, I think he meant it. That's how a Jew shows his love, by spending huge sums of money. They quantify everything in money, everything in the world has a price tag for them. And when I heard this I was thinking about Todd, who lost his leg defending Israel from the poor nation they stole that land from, defending that Jew's right to sit down to a sixty grand feed not three hundred yards from where I sit eating dog food. That's a Silver Star from Khe Sanh hanging on my wall there, and now my son is dead and my grandson maimed for life defending those people and their shitty little stolen country, nothing but a blank wall ahead for those I will soon leave behind, and they sit there within my sight stuffing sixty thousand dollars in their faces. God *damn* them! God damn them to *hell!* Christ, I get so hungry . . ." Hatfield saw the tears rolling down the old man's cheeks now. Englehardt looked up and said quietly. "Boys, if that was you out there last night, you did right. You did a good thing, a just thing. Don't ever doubt that. I can die happier now, because I lived to see a little justice, for me and mine. Today you're going to give me some more. Do what you gotta do, boys, and don't worry about me."

Hatfield's phone beeped. He took out his phone and saw I CAN TASTE THAT GREEN BEER NOW. "They're coming," he told Cat. He closed the phone and it beeped again almost right away. This time he read TWO DELIVERIES SHOULD BE THERE SOON. "Okay, Mr. Green is on them. Green SUV, fully tinted windows, remember."

"They'll have to exit the vehicle when they get out there on that pier," said Lockhart confidently. "When they do, I'll knock both their asses into the river!"

In the Chrysler Aspen, Rabang Miller had finally finished tearing the deputy's citation into the tiniest possible shreds, and she rolled down the window and tossed the confetti out. Brian Pangborn, who was driving, looked over and said to her sharply, "Roll that window up! You know procedure! You heard that sheriff! It's possible one of these people may be a military-trained sniper!"

"Like these bumpkins are going to give me another ticket for littering?" Rabang sneered. "Besides, I think that sheriff is in with the racists."

"Oh?" said Pangborn politely, with a weary roll of his eyes. "On what do you base that brilliant deduction?"

"I'm a woman of color," she told him primly. "That means I have a feel for racists, a sixth sense."

Pangborn sighed. "Look, I'm going to tell you something, Rabang, and if you want to report me to the Diversity and Tolerance Office, fine, but you'd better listen up. This is for your own good. Not all white men are racists and engaged in some deep dark conspiracy to do down women and people of color. Not all white males are your enemies, but if you and your kind don't quit acting like horse's asses, by God, eventually we will be!"

"And just what the hell do you mean by my kind?" demanded Rabang frigidly. *Oh, shit, I've done it this time!* Pangborn moaned to himself. *It's Nome, Alaska for me for sure.* He was about to start framing a suitably groveling apology when Rabang's cell phone chimed with the first few bars of "I Am Woman, Hear Me Roar" and she opened it. Pangborn drove along in silence and turned left onto 39th Street while Rabang engaged in a conversation with someone apparently from her son's expensive private middle school in Portland. *Sounds like Junior has dropped himself in the shit again,* thought Pangborn. *Maybe it will take her mind off my politically incorrect lapse there.* He drove past Columbia Prospect on his right, onto the pier, and toward the police cars and yellow crime scene tape on the platform.

"There they are," said Hatfield, looking through a crack in the blinds. Old man Englehardt gingerly peeped out the second window through the blinds as well.

"Got 'em," replied Lockhart, sighting the rifle and slowly matching the Chrysler's pace.

In the SUV Rabang closed her phone in a fit of irritation. "What's Juan done now?" asked Pangborn, hoping to distract her from the previous conversation.

"The usual," snapped Rabang. "Just a few rocks in his locker this time, but this is one time too many and they're talking expulsion. If he gets kicked out of Westwood Academy that will be the second school this year! I told the principal I'd be in for a parent teacher conference at 1 o'clock."

"That's going to be cutting it pretty close," said Pangborn as he slowed to a stop by the state police forensics van. "We'll be at least half an hour here, then two hours minimum back to Portland, where we'll run into lunch hour traffic. I don't think you can make it. You better call him back and re-schedule."

"Fuck it," said Rabang. "I'm not going to risk throwing another eight thousand dollars down the tube because that little junkie can't even finish a semester. Let's go back now."

"Back to Portland? Now?" asked Pangborn, stunned. A senior Clatsop County deputy was walking over to their vehicle. "Aren't we supposed to be investigating a double homicide?"

"Screw that," said Rabang. "You heard me tell Cletus back there that he's got forty-eight hours to catch these racists, and since I doubt if he could catch a cold, in two days we'll be back here with full authority and our own team, with a list of names from Homeland Security. We will shake every tree in this county, gather up all the apes who fall out, and use the Dershowitz Protocol to get the information we need, as well as all the confessions we need." The deputy was knocking on the window. Pangborn rolled his window down and flashed his badge.

"FBI," he said.

"Hey there," said the deputy. "Sheriff said you guys would be coming out. We've been waiting on you."

"Can you give us a minute, deputy?" asked Pangborn, and rolled up the power window again. "I know why the Dershowitz Protocol was instituted and all, but I have to confess I'd like to get a confession once in a while without sticking hypodermic needles under people's fingernails," he told his partner in exasperation.

"Never mind that," said Rabang. "Turn around and head back for Portland. I'm officially Mommy-tracked and that means I can take personal time any time I want, and if you have any questions about it I will be glad to have SAIC Weinstein sit down with you and explain it all to you in words

of one syllable." For Pangborn that was definitive. The whole office knew Elliott Weinstein was banging her—the white male agents even referred to it as Ra-banging in the cafeteria and the club bar, after the obligatory glance over their shoulder to see if anyone was listening. *What the hell,* he thought. *I thought I was an FBI agent, but I draw the same pay as a taxi driver for this bitch, so why not?*

Besides, there was something else, a sixth sense left over from Pangborn's own time in Iraq. The sheriff's talk about Lockhart's sniper skills had bothered him at some deep level, and now he glanced over at the apartment building behind him. The roof, all those windows. In Baghdad he and his men would never have gotten anywhere near a building like that until it was cleared and secured with artillery or an air strike, or by dumb Marines who were adrenalin junkies in love with death and who liked nothing more than kicking in doors to see if anything went bang. Suddenly leaving here didn't seem like such a bad idea. If the SAIC griped he would simply tell him about Rabang's Mommy track, which she actually had quite right, Bureau-wise. "Fine," said Pangborn, backing the SUV around and driving slowly back off the pier and out onto 39th Street. "Home again, home again, jiggety-jig." Behind them the deputies stared at one another in astonishment.

"What in the name of the devil? They're leaving!" hissed Hatfield.

"They were tipped off somehow," said Lockhart.

"I can't believe it!"

"Do we abort, sir?" asked Lockhart.

Zack took a deep breath. "Like hell we do! Maybe they've been tipped, maybe they just got spooked, maybe they got called back, who knows? But I can *see* them, God damn it, and they're not getting away from right under our noses! No matter what, we're taking those bastards down today! Let's go!" Hatfield quickly pulled out his wallet, pulled out all the cash he had on him, and laid it on the table. "Mr. Englehardt, this is all I've got. I'll try to send more from time to time. Feed yourself and make sure you live long enough to die in the free, white Northwest Republic. Hang in there, old timer. The cavalry's coming over the hill one day."

"Git 'em, boys!" cried the old man in joyous excitement, waving his cane in the air as they ran out of the apartment. They pelted down the hall and down the outside stairwell, and they were in the front seat of the Yukon, Cat's rifle between his knees, and Zack was firing up the engine in twenty-eight seconds. Zack pulled onto 39th Street just in time to see the green SUV turn left onto Leif Erickson Drive. "Looks like they're going back to Portland for some reason," said Hatfield.

"Or luring us into a trap," suggested Lockhart.

"If it was an ambush they would have either hit us in the apartment building or at least outside in the parking lot," said Hatfield. "Feds always try to surround and contain. They never let their targets get mobile if they can help it. No, for some reason those two must have got spooked, and they're trying to make it back to their nest. Roll up your mask," he said, suiting the action to the word. "Don't want people to see two masked men driving down the road, after last night." After a little speeding Zack now had the Chrysler in sight. They were doing the speed limit of thirty-five miles per hour on the winding road out of Astoria. There was another vehicle between them. Zack took out his phone and hit the speed dial for Charlie Washburn's phone. It rang and Charlie answered. "Praise Jesus!" he shouted.

"Sorry about the call, Reverend," said Hatfield, "But I don't see any other way to do this. You know we were all gonna gather at the river, the beautiful, the beautiful river, but we got a couple of sinners here who done backslid and have turned their faces against salvation. They're headed in your direction, ETA maybe ninety seconds, green Chrysler Aspen, fully tinted windows, which I can't think of any way to say Scripturally. Could you please show them the error of their ways and await our second coming, that we may smite them with a rod of iron?"

"Verily, we shall vouchsafe unto them the Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch."

"Uh, Reverend, that's not the Bible. That's Monty Python," said Hatfield in exasperation.

"Just keep far enough back so you don't go to your own heavenly reward. And always look on the bright side of life, my son." Charlie hung up.

"I tell you, if that was recorded and played back in court, we could plead insanity," said Hatfield. "They're going to try and use their pipe bomb blow the feds off the road at Tongue Point. As soon as their vehicle stops, we take them. Somehow."

"I'll get up on the roof and fire from there," said Lockhart.

The funny feeling in the back of Brian Pangborn's mind hadn't gone away. Rabang had gotten back onto his own allegedly racist comment, and she was jabbering on and on about how she was astounded that Paleolithic attitudes such as his hadn't been rooted out in the Bureau, when Pangborn glanced in his rear view mirror and saw the car behind him turning off into a driveway. Behind that car came a battered OD green Yukon SUV. It was coming up a little too fast for his liking. He interrupted Rabang. "The witnesses in the restaurant said the shooters were two men who fled the scene in a dark colored SUV, right?"

"Yes," said Rabang. "Why?"

"That's a Yukon behind us," he said. "There seem to be two men in it."

Rabang twisted around to look back. "It could be anybody," she said.

"See the way he speeds up a bit and then slows?" pointed out Pangborn. "He's trying to keep a set distance between us, a bit too much distance, like he's hanging back for some reason. On this winding road at thirty-five, if he's a local yahoo he should be getting in closer. It's just a feeling, but I don't like it." They passed the point where Leif Erickson drive transmuted into Highway 30, and the speed limit went up to forty-five. "See? I'm speeding up now, and so is he, but he's still keeping about seventy yards between us."

At Tongue Point Charlie Washburn had turned the black Toyota Camry around and pointed it into the highway. "We gonna ram 'em?" asked Lee.

"Not unless we have to," said Charlie. "I'd like to get this car back to Jerry Lundgaard in one piece, since he was nice enough to let us borrow it. I'm going to pull out and see if we can force them off the road into that ditch there. You get into the left rear seat, behind me, so when we un-ass the car we'll both have it between us and the feds' guns. I'll hit them with the Uzi and you get ready to flick your Bic, light that fuse, and see if you can blow an axle off, and *not* endanger Zack and Cat who will be coming up behind them. God, I hope traffic stays this light and no one else comes driving along right into the middle of this! Masks on!"

In the Chrysler, Rabang Miller pulled out her pistol and jacked a round into the chamber. "Be careful with that!" snapped Pangborn, looking for a place to pull over so he could let the Yukon pass, or not as the case might be. He saw a possible pulling off spot right at the intersection of Tongue Point Road and Emerald Drive, and so he was actually slowing down and veering right when all of a sudden the Camry roared out of Tongue Point Road and stopped right beneath the blinking yellow light hanging over the intersection. Pangborn saw two men in ski masks leap out of the car. He heard the stuttering of the Uzi, saw the muzzle flash and heard the pop pop pop as the 9-mm slugs slammed into the windshield. The polycarbonate glass held, but big ugly white splotches blossomed on the windshield before him. *"It's them!"* screamed Rabang in terror. "Fuck the car behind us, you asshole! They're in front of us!"

Pangborn decided to try for a right turn up onto Emerald Drive, but he briefly saw a black cylindrical sailing through the air toward him. It banged against the windshield, bounced off, and just as he yelled *"Bomb!"* the pipe bomb exploded in the air about four feet in front of the FBI agents, with a weird crushing sound rather like a cross between a crump! and a clink! The

Chrysler's armor still held, but the front bumper was ripped almost entirely off and flapped up onto the windshield, and the force of the explosion crumpled the front end and caused all kinds of hissing and steaming fluid leaks and electrical shorts within. Pangborn lost control and the Chrysler slid into the ditch. The Uzi was still pattering bullets against the armored body.

A mere 50 yards behind them, the Yukon rolled to a stop. Hatfield got out and covered down on the disabled FBI vehicle with his submachine gun, leaning over the Yukon's hood, waiting for a target. Cat-Eyes Lockhart was out the other door and he slithered up onto the roof with the agility of a serpent, spreading himself prone and sighting the rifle. "If they don't come out I'll move in with our bomb. Get ready to cover me!" called out Hatfield.

Steam, smoke and the smell of burning began to fill the passenger compartment of the Chrysler through the vents from the damaged engine. *"We're on fire!"* shrieked Special Agent Miller. She tore her door open and bailed out of the car.

"No, wait!" yelled Pangborn. Rabang had thrown down her gun and she was running up the embankment, screaming hysterically in pure terror. She was completely open to the Uzi and Pangborn jerked open his own door and leaped out, crouching behind it with his handgun at the ready, planning on using the armored panels as cover to fire at the Toyota and the Uzi gunner, make them keep their heads down so Rabang might have a chance to get down or into the woods. He was convinced that the two men in the Toyota were the killers of Jacob and Irene Goldman, and the simple fact was that he had completely forgotten about the green Yukon that had been following them.

Nor did Pangborn have any more time to remember. Lockhart's first armor-piercing bullet entered the base of his skull from behind and decapitated him; he never even heard the shot. One second later, Lockhart's second shot snapped the fleeing Rabang Miller's spine, tore through her heart and sternum, and sent her spinning to the ground as bleeding rag that twitched and kicked and scrambled and then lay still. Cat-Eyes leaped down off the Yukon, ran up to the smoking Chrysler's open driver's door, leaned down and inserted a Jack of Diamonds from a Bicycle playing deck into the dead hand of Brian Pangborn. He snagged Pangborn's piece and stuck it his back pocket, ran up the hill to where Rabang Miller lay with her dead face staring at the sky, and stuck a second Jack into her mouth. He then ran back to the Yukon. Hatfield waved off the Washburns, who got into the Toyota and pulled off down Highway 30 toward John Day. The Yukon followed. From the moment the Toyota pulled out into the road until both NVA vehicles left the scene, the elapsed time was thirty-four seconds.

Cat-Eyes Lockhart turned to Zack Hatfield. "That's *it?*" he exclaimed in amazement. "That's the big, bad FBI? The rough tough G-Men that we've all been so afraid of for seventy years? Jesus, I've shot rabbits that put up more of a fight!"

Hatfield chuckled. "I think they've always been scared of this," he said. "Scared that one day we'd find out just how easy it is."

* * *

Late that night, when Sheriff Ted Lear finally got back to his office, he sat down in the swivel chair behind his desk and buried his face in his hands in sheer exhaustion and utter depression. It had been a madhouse all day, first the Goldman murders, and now two FBI agents killed in his county. The Bureau had helicoptered in a heavily armed SWAT force over 50 strong, as well as full CSI teams and many grim, angry and arrogant men and women in suits. They had contemptuously shoved him and his people aside while they lashed out in all directions. Lear didn't even know how the investigation was going, only that federal agents were swarming all over Clatsop County kicking in doors and waving guns in the air, and that it would only get worse. But the worst thing of all was his certainty that Rabang Miller had been right. The madness was no longer far away on TV, it was here now, in Astoria, in Seaside, in his world. His sense of duty told him irresistibly that he was going to have to do something about it, and he would probably die trying. What in God's name would happen to his wife and children when he was gone?

He sighed and picked up his phone, and began dialing a series of telephone numbers. There was no answer at the first three. He dug out an old address book from his desk drawer and found one last number to try, a cell phone. On the fourth ring Zack Hatfield's voice answered. "We need to talk," Lear said without preamble. "Midnight. You know where."

"We both come alone," said Hatfield. "I see so much as a hint of anyone else around, we both go. I mean it, Ted."

"Don't you trust me?" asked Lear.

"Should I?" asked Hatfield.

"I'll be there at midnight. Alone. Come or don't come, your call." Lear hung up.

The rain had stopped and the night had become clear and starry by the time Lear pulled his personal unmarked car into the parking lot of the athletic field at Astoria High School. He had changed into civilian clothes

in the station locker room, making sure he had his service automatic in a shoulder holster and his smaller holdout in his ankle holster. *I wonder if he'd really kill me?* wondered Lear. *Shit, it's Zack. Of course he would.* The cold had temporarily let up as well due to some warm vagary of the ocean current far off shore, and it was mildly cool, almost spring-like out. Lear got out of the car and walked up to the bleachers. The grass was still marked in lime with yard lines for the previous year's football season, and the goal posts were still up; the custodians hadn't yet gotten around to setting up the field for springtime soccer. He saw a movement in the shadows below the bleachers, which he ignored. He mounted the bleachers and sat down. "You gonna come up here or talk from down there?" he called out.

Hatfield climbed up from below the bleachers and sat down on the same row, to Lear's left, although not within reach. Lear saw that he was wearing a broad-brimmed felt hat that he vaguely associated with the now outlawed Party of the revolution. "Nice hat."

"Thanks. You strapped?" asked Hatfield.

"Of course," answered Lear. "I'm dealing with a killer. You?"

"Of course," said Hatfield. "I was pretty sure this was where you meant. Our first fond memory together."

"I was defending my sister's honor," replied Lear huffily.

"Yeah, you slugged me and then Julia slugged you," said Zack, chuckling reminiscently. "You thought I'd dragged her under the bleachers by force. You ever hear from Julia anymore?"

"Yeah, every couple of months she gives me a call."

"She's still down there in Tinsel Town working with all the movie stars?" asked Hatfield.

"Still in Burbank, yes."

"She ever marry that actor?" inquired Hatfield.

"Almost, but she finally had to give him a flat out choice between her and his cocaine. The cocaine won, and she broke it off," Lear told him.

"She's got good sense," said Hatfield approvingly. "She always did. Hell, she had the good sense not to marry *me.*"

"In view of recent events, thank God for that," said Lear. "Zack, what in the name of God? Have you completely lost your mind? What the *fuck* do you think you're going to accomplish with all this?"

"I'm going to change the world, or die in the attempt," said Hatfield levelly. "Most likely die in the attempt, but that's the way I want it, Ted."

"Yah, and that's the way you'll get it!" snapped Lear.

"From you?"

"Jesus, Zack, what the hell do you think?" cried Lear. "You know damned well that next time we meet, I'm going to have to bring you in."

"Then you know what I'll have to do, Ted. Think you can take me? Never mind, this isn't a pissing contest. Maybe you can. Maybe we'll find out. Fair warning, is all I'm saying. But it doesn't have to be like that."

"You trying to recruit me for your little terrorist club, Zack?" asked Lear wearily. "Come on, now, you know me better than that!"

"No, I'm not," said Hatfield. "Ted, I'm going to tell you how things are going to be around here from now on."

"*You're* going to tell *me?*" returned Lear skeptically.

"Yah, because that's how things are now in the Northwest," replied Hatfield in a calm yet authoritative voice. "The United States government and the Oregon state government and the goddamned county commissioners no longer rule in this land. We do. The Northwest American Republic came into being on October 22nd in Coeur d'Alene, and the Army Council is now the legitimate government under a state of emergency declared by the provisional government of that Republic."

"Bullshit!" spat Lear. "You're a rag-bag gang of marauding psychopaths who are running around shooting and bombing anybody with a dark skin!"

"That's how we'll go down in history if we lose, yes," agreed Hatfield affably. "As far as our running around killing everybody with a dark skin, I wish it were that simple. Just kill off X number of wogs and beaners and then we can all go home and plop down on the sofa in front of the TV again. But it isn't that simple. Our goal is not to kill people, it's to *free* people, our people, white people, from a government and a society that have become absolutely intolerable and morally indefensible, and to build something new and better in its place. What this will turn into, what it's already turning into, will be a civil war between white people, maybe as bad as the one in 1861. But we're going to win. Don't ask me how I know that, Ted, but I do. The way I look at it, God wouldn't have let us get this far if He meant for the white race to disappear from the earth. Anyway, I won't argue the point. In the final analysis all law and right and government is based on organized violence. All the rest is window dressing. I happen to think our side will turn out to be better at organizing it than yours, but we'll see."

"I guess we will," said Lear coldly.

"I won't ask you where you stand, Ted. I already know. But I am here to tell you that you have a choice. You and your people in law enforcement in this county can *stand aside.* You can keep on protecting and serving as best you can while a civil war rages around you, but as much as is humanly

possible, you'll have to *stay out of it.* The NVA will give you every bit of help we can. We'll meet you halfway. It will be a hard choice, terribly hard, and I understand that we're putting you in a position that would be absolutely impossible if only the alternative wasn't infinitely worse."

"And how would you suggest we go about standing aside while you guys are moving through Oregon like a death wind, gunning people down right, left and center?" demanded Lear heatedly. "How do you suggest *I* go about it, since I'm the one who will have to deal with the feds and the political establishment and the so-called community action groups and the Chamber of Commerce and God knows who else? I'm the sheriff, for God's sake!"

"The feds, yah, they'll be a problem, for a while," conceded Hatfield.

"For a *while?*" asked Lear incredulously.

"After a time, Ted, they're going to have so many problems on their plate that this little county in rural Oregon will drop down pretty low on their list of priorities," said Hatfield grimly. "This feebie crew that's running all over town tonight like termites will be pulled back to Portland a lot quicker than you may think, because from now on, every day they're going to have a whole new raft of things to investigate, not to mention more dead FBI agents to bury. A year from now, those two dead suits down the road on Highway 30 will be nothing more than a footnote. As to the local lefties and neocons and general Amurrican assholes who have been yanking your chain ever since you've been in office, don't worry about them either. The Clatsop County Diversity Commission? We're going to diversify their asses right out of here. The Hispanic Coalition? In a fairly short time from now, you won't hear a word of Spanish anyplace in Astoria. The Gay Pride Association? Every bugger boy in the county will either get the hell out, or they'll get a .44-caliber enema. They say that all politics is local. Well, one of the things that will happen during the Northwest revolution is that all these local PC pressure groups and special interest lobbies and whatnot that have been making normal people's lives miserable and poisoning little towns like this with their crap will disappear, because the people involved will disappear. There's nothing like a bullet in the head to make people shut the fuck up."

"And my department is supposed to do what, while you slaughter all your political opponents like this was Israel?" inquired Lear politely.

"Do whatever you have to do to make sure that the real community here survives, the people who were here before we got discovered by the goddamned retiring baby boomers and the hippy-dippy granola crowd and the faggots," said Hatfield. "The real people, the white people, the ones who used to do

all the work before the Mexicans came. Just kick us with the side of the shoe, Ted, not the toe. We'll be able to tell the difference, and we'll reciprocate."

"So, let's see—you're planning to kill off or drive out the Mexicans, the blacks, the homosexuals, anyone to the left of center, the Jews of course, anyone who supports Hillary, anyone with a colored skin, and the Asians as well for good measure—did I leave anybody out?"

"Oh, those will do to be getting on with," said Hatfield with a chuckle.

"My God, you're serious!" breathed Lear in stunned amazement.

"Oh, yeah. They're all going to go, Ted. And if you try to stop us, you'll go. That's not a threat. As God is my witness I don't want to do anything like that, not to you, not to your family, and certainly not to Julia. But I'm simply telling you how things will be, and if you should get lucky and succeed in killing me, then there will be more of us stepping forward to take my place. Always remember: you're not just dealing with me. You're dealing with the thousand men who are standing behind me. After a time, if you fight us, the level of backup you can get from the feds or the state will dwindle away as they're whittled down elsewhere in places they consider a lot more important than an almost empty county on the north coast of Oregon. Any reinforcements going, any troops that can be pulled away from Iraq or Venezuela or Afghanistan, the government will send to Portland or Spokane or Seattle. Not here. In the end it will be just you and your remaining handful, and by that time you'll be facing some very hardened and serious men whom you really, really don't want to meet in a dark alley. That's it, Ted. That's the situation you're confronted with. I'm damned sorry about it, but I can't tell you anything else."

"Beautiful," sighed Lear.

"I won't ask you what your decision is," said Hatfield, rising to go. "I know you're going to have to play it by ear. Let's hope it plays out okay for both of us."

"One last question, Zack," said Lear. "This may sound irrelevant and probably silly, but does this have anything to do what happened with my sister and you? I mean, you know Julie. She's going to ask one day."

Hatfield sighed. "You mean if we'd gotten married and I'd been able to get a real job, and we'd made a home and a family together, would I be doing this? Probably not, but don't you dare tell her that. It's not Julia's fault, and I don't want her blaming herself for a single second. None of it's her fault. It's the fault of my being born white and male and poor, with no hope of college, so there was only the draft. It's the fault of the fucking U.S. Army for extending my unit's tour in Iraq time after time, year after year, not even letting any of

us come home on leave anymore for fear we'd desert. I can understand how she got tired of waiting, Ted. Frankly, by the time I got back I was so fucked up that I wouldn't have made much of a husband for her or a brother-in-law for you. I'd ask you to give her my love next time you see her, but I don't suppose that's appropriate under the circumstances."

"No, it isn't," agreed Lear. "But I'll do it anyway."

VI

The Mami and the Monkey

Listen, fair madam: let it be your glory to see her tears,
But be your heart to them as unrelenting flint to drops of rain.

Titus Andronicus—Act II, Scene 3

"You back on the pipe, Kick?"

"No, I'm not back on the pipe!" Kristin "Kicky" McGee snapped back. "I'm clean as a whistle, and I been clean for six months now!" She glared at Lenny Gillis, the man sitting across from her in the booth. They were in Gillis' place of business, a rundown bar-cum-strip joint on 82nd Avenue in Portland, called Jupiter's Den. The dive wasn't open for business yet. The bartender was diddling with the settings on the stage stereo speakers, and their conversation was punctuated with the rising and falling blare of Indy rock and mindless thumping drum music, while the day manager tested the dancers' poles and adjusted the footlights.

"So why are you coming to me wanting dates again?" demanded Gillis. He was a small and scrawny individual, methamphetamine-lean, with lank dark hair and a football moustache, eleven hairs on each side. He wore a torn dark T-shirt and had a baseball cap stuck backwards onto his prematurely balding head.

"Because I need the damned money! Why do you think?" demanded Kicky. She was a deceptively small and soft-looking girl with hazel eyes and honey-blond hair down to her shoulder blades; it wasn't until someone looked into her face that they saw she was a hard twenty-four years old going on a harder hundred or so, her green eyes devoid of anything soft or

feminine. She was wearing a halter top that showed off several tattoos, the obligatory barbed wire design around her left bicep, a strawberry with a bite taken out of it on the upper curvature of her left breast, a wild-haired Scottish kelpie or water sprite on her right shoulder, and an ancient Irish filigree design from the Book of Kells on her back. Between her right thumb and forefinger was a crude hand-inked tattoo, a circled X that, for those in the know, warned off women's prison lesbians with the promise of a violent reaction if they tried it on. "They cut off my Social Services check because they caught me driving the cab. I don't know who ratted me out, probably that Hindu or whatever the hell he is in that turban, the new dispatcher. He promised me all the airport trips from Lake Oswego and the Pearl if I'd come in early each shift and suck him off in the can. I told him to go fuck himself, and next afternoon I come in and there's that Jew bitch from Social sitting in the damned office."

"He thought you were a whore? Jeez, I wonder where he got that impression?" said Lenny with airy sarcasm. "And why should I give you any dates, after the shitty way you walked out on me last time?" Lenny touched his head; there was still scar tissue beneath the hair where Kicky had cracked a beer bottle over his skull on her last departure from his establishment.

"Because I make you money," said Kicky. "I don't want to work the streets. It's too damned dangerous with all these spuckies out there shooting people."

"Hey, as I recall, you're still white under all those tats," laughed Gillis. "Spuckies only shoot our darker brethren."

"Yeah, and they got every spic and nigger and Laotian gang-banger in Portland so pissed off they want to retaliate on some white working girl they pick up on Sandy Boulevard and take off somewhere nice and private to play Friday the Thirteenth with," replied Kicky in exasperation. "It's happened to some of the street girls. Use your head, Lenny! I don't want to go on the street. I need you to screen my tricks for me, same arrangement as before, no spooks or spics or ching-ling-dings or other women. Just my old regulars to begin with. You know that even when I was on the pipe I was reliable, and I never tried to hold out on your cut. I'm an earner. If you're still sore about my clocking you with that bottle, you shouldn't have sprung that multi-racial threesome on me without asking, because you knew I would have said no."

"Yeah, well, I guess I shouldn't have called the cops on you. That wasn't, like, playing the game," muttered Lenny. "Then again, maybe if I wanted to jam you up I should have turned you in for hatecrime. I know you don't like dark meat, but that's prejudice, even in a whore."

"The term is sex trade worker, thank you," said Kicky primly. "And it's not prejudice, it's a preference. Being a sex trade worker, I am in a politically protected category, sort of anyway, and I'm allowed to have preferences. Remember, no means no. Even for hookers."

"So why come to me?" asked Lenny. "Okay, so they cut your Social Services off. Big deal. You can still drive the cab, can't you? And if you don't mind sex trade working as you call it, you can pick up some extra green by blowing a customer or two in the back seat."

"I'm still driving the cab, yes," said Kicky. "But Singh is gonna be on my case for not polishing his knob, waiting for me to put a foot wrong. He's going to find some reason to fire me. If I started doing my fares he'd find out, and that would be his excuse. I want to keep the two jobs separate."

"Why the need for money, if you're not back on the crack?" asked Lenny suspiciously.

Kicky sighed. "The bastards are trying to take Ellie away from me," she explained wearily. "That's another reason they cut off my Social, to pressure me. They don't give a flying fuck if Ellie starves or goes without shoes. They're trying to make me sell her to It Takes A Village, but I won't do it, so now they're cutting me off and building a file on me as a bad mother so they can take her away from me, kick in the door of my trailer one morning at daylight and drag her away, like they do. I need a lot of money, fast. I need to build up a stake and get the hell out of Oregon where Child Protective can't find us. Maybe up to Seattle, or Montana someplace. I was in Missoula, once. I liked it up there. Big Sky Country."

"Why don't you just sell your superfluous by-product and be done with it?" asked Lenny. "Jesus, a little blonde girl like her? You could get a couple hundred grand for her easy, maybe more, and you don't even have to cut It Takes A Village in on the action. It's called a private adoption bond. I can set you up with this Jew lawyer I know, Fiegenbaum. It's legal as hell, and you'd have enough cash to go anywhere you want, do anything you want."

"And what would be your cut?" demanded Kicky acidly.

Lenny shrugged. "Don't worry about it. I'll take it off Fiegenbaum's end. How about it?"

"No," said Kicky firmly, not for the first time.

"Why not?" asked Lenny, genuinely puzzled that she was turning down a fortune at the same time she was asking him to get back into prostitution.

"I won't try to explain it to you," said Kicky with a sigh.

"Ever consider implants? You could make even more money by dancing here, if you had some more rack on you and you didn't have so many tattoos," remarked Gillis with a leer.

"Yeah, well, I don't and I do. Look, you want to set me up? Yes or not? 50-50 split."

"Thirty you, seventy me," said Gillis flatly. "Don't tell me you can't squeeze an extra cash tip out of a john."

While the two of them were haggling, a nondescript older model Ford Explorer pulled up outside Jupiter's Den. It was a warm summer's day, and the SUV's two occupants had the windows rolled down. The driver was a tall and powerful man with a seamed boxer's face, a shaved head and goatee beard. The pro wrestler look wasn't Big Jim McCann's personal choice, since he was a master electrician by profession, but he needed to alter his appearance because his face was on a few too many wanted posters, web sites, and television screens as of late. McCann was quartermaster of the NVA's First Portland Brigade. His passenger was Jesse "Cat-Eyes" Lockhart, who after much debate amounting to a passionate argument between Tommy Coyle and Zack Hatfield, had been transferred from D Company to First Brigade A Company and put on sniper duty in the big city. As reluctant as Zack had been to let him go, and as reluctant as Lockhart himself had been to leave his old friends and comrades in Clatsop County, the fact was that Cat was running out of major targets in D Company's area of operation, and he was too valuable a resource to waste out in the sticks plinking away at Mexican dock workers and the local Chamber of Commerce. In the short time he had been in Portland, the Jack of Diamonds had already bagged a city councilman, a U.S. Army colonel, the head of the African-American Democratic Club, another FBI agent, and several police officers. His presence in the city was known, and he was driving the local politically correct establishment into hysterics. "You want me to go in with you?" asked Lockhart.

"Naw," said McCann. "Gillis is a nervous little cuss, and he might get spooked if he sees somebody he don't know. I just need to find out from him where he's got the stuff stashed, and set up a pickup so we can get the gear and pay him. Then we need to get you to the Mayflower Hotel." It was time for Cat to change safe houses, and McCann had been the only transport available. McCann's phone beeped. He took it out of his pocket and flipped it open. "Yeah?" He listened for a few moments. "Okay." He closed the phone. "That was our escort vehicle. Van Gelder says there's a patrol coming down Sandy Boulevard, two units and an armored car. Unmarked, probably Portland Rapid Response, but maybe BATFE or FBI. They're cruising slow. The way they're coming, looks like they're gonna turn onto 82nd in about a minute."

"I don't think they're looking for us specifically," said Lockhart. "They've been doing that a lot lately, keeping goon squads on the street as rapid response

teams, moving around, trying to cover the city so they can move in fast with a lot of firepower on any of our naughty shenanigans. Ace and me got chased by one of those crews last time out."

"Yeah, well, I don't want them driving by and looking in here and recognizing you," said McCann. "You'd better come inside after all. Just hang back at the bar while I have my chat with Lenny, and then we'll move on after Van tells us they've passed."

"The truck all clean and righteous?" asked Lockhart.

"Yeah, should be, but if it ain't, then that's another reason we don't need you sitting inside when they spot it." Lockhart was reluctant to leave his cased rifle and gear in the vehicle, but he knew that what McCann said made sense. They got out of the car. Cat checked to make sure his 9-millimeter Beretta was firmly seated in the clip holster in the small of his back, under his denim jacket, and both men walked into the strip club. It was dark enough inside so the opening of the door cast light into the building, and that made Gillis look up from his booth at the far end. "Hang on a minute," he told Kicky. "I got some business to take care of." He got up out of the booth.

Kicky turned around and saw one of the men who looked like a wrestler or a biker walk forward to talk to Gillis. They met at the end of the bar nearest to where Kicky sat in the booth. The other one, a younger man, not unhandsome, stayed at the far end of the bar near the door. He calmly checked out the room in a single glance, moving his eyes over Kicky, categorizing her and moving on, then he turned to the door, watching it. Reading men was a vital survival skill in Kicky's lines of work both legitimate and otherwise, and with these two she immediately read muscle of some kind, heavy muscle. There was just something about the way they carried themselves, not with a criminal swagger or thuggish biker lope, but controlled and fast and efficient, no wasted motion. Both of them were wearing jeans and jackets in the summertime when everyone in Portland stripped down to shorts and tees, and Kicky would have bet a night's fare receipts there were guns beneath the jackets. There was something odd about the younger man at the far end, something teasingly familiar.

She got up and went to the ladies' room, in a small corridor near the bar. After she finished she quietly slipped down to the door of the men's room at the other end of the short hallway and studied the younger man in the long mirror behind the bar. The bartender brought him a diet soda in a can with a plastic cup, and when he turned to pour it Kicky saw his face and profile clearly. *Damn,* she thought, *I know him from somewhere. Who is he?* She ran over her long list of male personal and business acquaintances. No, not one

of them. She rummaged through the past few years of her disorderly life. No, nothing. Was he on TV or something? Recognition suddenly slammed into her. *Jesus H. Christ!* she whistled to herself. *It's him! That sniper every cop and Feebie in the Northwest is looking for! Well, well! Lenny's coming up in the world, looks like. What the fuck kind of business is he doing with the spuckies? Bet it's guns.*

The music from the speakers suddenly fell silent, and before the two men on the nearer end of the bar could lower their voices she heard Lenny say "Seventy-second and Prescott, tomorrow night at nine."

"I'll find it," said the wrestler. They lowered their tones but with a little strain Kicky could still pick up what they were saying. "Why not tonight?"

"I'm entertaining some officers of the law here tonight," said Lenny, "I got to show them I'm living the life of a solid citizen, know what I mean? Seriously, I need to be here and schmooze these cops up, make sure they get properly wined and dined and laid, so they keeps their nose out of my little sidelines, including yours." Kicky knew the place referred to. It was an apartment in a seedy building that Lenny maintained as an office and home away from home for the many sidelines he had going that he didn't want around the club in the public eye. His girls sometimes paid him off there or used the place for tricks. She slipped back down the hall and exited on the ladies' room end, went back to the booth and sat down. It was dark, and after a minute or two she risked turning around. Lenny was on his way back to her. The big man with the goatee was putting his cell phone away. He nodded to his companion and both of them left the building. When Lenny sat back down, Kicky didn't mention anything about his brief meeting. Lack of curiosity was another one of her world's survival skills, and if she made the slightest comment or inquiry she knew that alarm bells would start clanging in what passed for Lenny Gillis' mind. But she wondered how she might use this new information that had fallen into her lap.

After some more haggling, Lenny and Kicky reached a sixty-forty split agreement whereby she would resume her old employment by working out of the club, at least at first. This wasn't quite as extortionate as it sounded, since Lenny paid off the cops, and his sixty percent commission covered a reasonably ironclad immunity from arrest. Kicky would report for duty at ten that night, dressed to undress, and until she could work her old client list back up she would take floor trade, club clients whom she chose herself, and turn the tricks at one of the cheap motels lining 82nd Avenue, in this case the Wayside Inn, where Lenny had a special hourly deal with the Iranian manager for his girls. Kicky sighed and resigned herself to six months of driving a

twelve-hour shift in the cab five days a week, and two, possibly three night shifts a week working out of the club. Her goal was to raise enough money to get out of Oregon by Christmas. She hoped to hell that It Takes A Village would hold off that long doing anything about Ellie. Maybe the spuckies would shoot them before then, she thought hopefully.

Kicky left the club and returned to her battered singlewide mobile home in a rundown trailer park about two miles away. She didn't have a car of her own, the cab company wouldn't allow her to take her cab home, and the buses were full of Mexicans who always dirty-mouthed her in Spanish and pawed all over her, so she walked. She was so sick inside herself at what she was doing that it was all she could do to go home and not go out hunting the streets for some rock, but she knew full well that if she went back to the drugs as well as back to the sex trade, she would be dead or back in prison within a year, and her daughter would be scooped up by It Takes A Village like a barracuda snapping up a minnow.

The prospect of committing sexual acts with drunken and usually unhygienic strange men, even white men, filled her with such disgust that she wanted to vomit even at the thought, but she understood that she had reached the point in her life where her always limited range of choices had virtually disappeared. Kicky knew that America had one rule above all else. *Get money*. It didn't matter how you did it, you *got money,* end of story, or else you ended up like the white-haired bag women Kicky saw pushing their possessions up and down 82nd Avenue and Sandy Boulevard in shopping carts. No welfare or affirmative action or diversity programs for poor white chicks. Poor white chicks either stole or put out, or they got left behind. If you had a white skin, you *got money* or you fell below the point of no return. Never mind all that crap you saw on TV, that lovely diverse, racially mixed society where there was still a middle class and still material things and all was jolly. That was television. It wasn't real. 82nd Avenue was real, poverty was real, drugs were real, guys and sometimes girls coming back dead and mangled from Iraq was real, and life was a concrete hell for a white single mother. Kicky didn't know which was worse, the prospect of losing her looks completely to the pipe and the endless minimum-wage labor, or to time and disappointment, or else staying fairly attractive and sexy for a while. Both had their drawbacks and brought a different set of problems.

Kicky opened the trailer door and found her alcoholic mother sitting on the sofa staring at a soap opera on television, a long-necked beer bottle in her hand and a few empties on the coffee table in front of her. "Hi, Mom," she said. She got a grunt in return. May McGee was a stooped, washed-out

woman in her fifties, wearing a sloppy and shapeless dress, who looked like she was seventy. Kicky knew she was incredibly lucky to have her mother still around to take care of Ellie. She had come to an arrangement with May, a twelve-pack of cheap domestic beer per day of baby-sitting, plus whatever extra beer May could scrounge up herself from her own odd jobs and the scrawny military survivor's pension the U.S. government still paid her, at least intermittently. It was the only income she could ever expect since Social Security had failed a few years before. "Administrative delays" were making those military pension checks further and further between, as with all the remaining federal entitlements, at least where white people were concerned. Kicky hadn't been married to Ellie's father, and the Army had conveniently lost their joint "Statement of Domestic Partnership" form, which anyway was supposed to be for gay couples only, so she'd never gotten a dime from the government.

Aside from being a hopeless drunk, May wasn't a bad sort. She wasn't a mean drunk, inclining more to maudlin self-pity, but not too often. She never hurt or abused Ellie in any way, she let Ellie watch TV with her and listened to her chatter, didn't let her wander outside the trailer into the street, and she always made sure that the child got a mashed-up paper plate of dinner of some kind, at least some macaroni or tuna fish or whatever was in the house. She made sure the toddler had a clean diaper on before putting her in her crib for the night, then sitting down in front of the television and drinking until she passed out. Kicky had been raised the same way, and she had at least survived into adulthood. "Mom, I'm going to need you to stay over for tonight, and then maybe take Ellie back to your place for a while," said Kicky. "I'm going to be working a lot from now on. I'm going out tonight and won't be back until early."

"You goin' back to whoring?" snorted the old lady.

Kicky didn't attempt to evade the question. "I got to get money, Mom," she said simply. "I have to get Ellie out of Oregon, out of Child Protective Services' reach. Otherwise they're going to take her and sell her to some rich bastards. I know she'd be better off with them . . ."

"Better off than with me, you mean," grumbled the old lady.

"Better off than with either of us," said Kicky evenly. "There's no point in denying the truth, Mom. But that's not going to happen. I'm not going to let them have her, as selfish as that is. She is *mine.* Those rich bastards and bitches have taken everything else, and what they haven't taken for themselves they've given to the goddamned niggers and Mexicans, but they're not taking Ellie. That's just the way it's going to be. And for that I have to get money."

"Just don't let it drive you back onto the crack this time, okay, honey?" pleaded the old lady, closing her eyes with a sigh.

"I won't Mom," said Kicky, crossing her fingers and hoping she could keep to that. It would be hard.

"Mommy!" shouted a small golden-haired personage of eighteen months, wearing nothing but a Pamper, who gallumphed into the room from the bedroom and hugged onto Kicky's leg. "Up!" she demanded. "Up me!"

"Hi, baby girl," said Kicky with a smile, picking up the child. "Ooh, pooh, baby made a boo-boo! You need a change! Come on, let's fix that!" She snagged another Pamper from the torn bag on the cracked Formica kitchen table and headed for the bathroom, trying not to think of what she would be doing later on.

* * *

When Kicky came into Jupiter's Den that night, the joint wasn't exactly jumping. That would come a bit later, around one in the morning. But the mindless cacophony of 1990s retro rock was roaring through the huge speakers, and the silicone-enhanced dancers, naked except for a thong, were twirling around their poles. The drunken yay-hoos of all races were shouting their infantile comments and throwing money on the stage, the overpriced beer and the watered liquor was flowing from the bar in a river. *Just like old home week,* reflected Kicky sourly as she walked in the door.

She was wearing short hot pants and gleaming vinyl boots with elevated although not quite high heels, a low-cut halter top with no bra (she knew a lot of her potential customers found her tattoos erotic), a wide leather belt, and carrying a shoulder bag purse containing such items as extra condom packs and sex toys. It also contained a canister of pepper spray in a special holster sleeve sewn unobtrusively but accessibly on the outside of the bag. Lenny had a hard and fast rule: his girls carried no guns or knives, because the legal problems involved in cutting or shooting a john or other bothersome person were beyond the limited range of his police clout to fix. Most of the girls had in any case reached the point where they'd rather be raped or robbed than get involved with the law to that extent, and the possibility of getting slashed up or strangled and dumped in a ditch was simply an occupational hazard. The pepper spray was for warding off non-paying drunks and handling customers who got sufficiently kinky to be dangerous. Inside the purse was Kicky's own specialty weapon, a long sturdy white sock, into the toe of which was inserted a large, heavy closed padlock wrapped in a nylon to keep it from ripping the

sock. The result was a crude but effective slung shot with enough torque to be lethal if used with skill. "Locks and socks" was the standard method for settling differences between inmates in women's prison, and Kicky had become quite proficient at it.

Kicky looked around for Lenny Gillis, but couldn't see him anywhere on the floor. She shoved through a door marked "Employees Only"—well, she was kind of an employee now—and looked in his office, which was also empty. Kicky figured Lenny was probably in the can, and she was about to go back out onto the floor, when she looked down the hall and saw the doorway into the back alley was open. There was noise. Someone was shouting. Kicky normally steered clear of anything remotely sounding like someone else's business, but she remembered the strange visit that afternoon of the two men whom she was certain were with the outlawed NVA, and she was keen to find out something more about them and what they were doing with Lenny Gillis, something she could possibly turn to her advantage, pecuniary or otherwise. She slipped outside into the alley.

The shouting was coming from just on the other side of a dumpster. Kicky crept up and peeked around the side of the receptacle. Lenny Gillis was being held up against the wall by a large, black, uniformed Portland police officer, who sported sergeant's stripes. Lenny was a small man and the cop was big, much bigger and thicker. Lenny's feet were off the ground. Facing him was an even bigger and even blacker man in plain clothes, a sharply tailored suit and tie ensemble with shoes so highly polished they gleamed like patent leather. This man wore a short-cut Afro and a neatly trimmed Lion of Judah-style goatee beard and moustache, and the rings on his fingers glinted beneath the street light with gold and diamonds. *Shit!* thought Kicky to herself in shock. *It's the Monkey!*

Like any street girl, she had immediately recognized Detective Sergeant Jamal Jarvis of the Portland Police Bureau's Hatecrime and Civil Disobedience Squad, the feared police unit that constituted the muscle arm of Portland's ultra-liberal and politically correct establishment. Jarvis had been Vice and Narcotics before he was bumped up to H & CD, and during his years there he had cut a swath of terror and corruption through the local underworld that was legendary even by Portland's notoriously sleazy standards. Every hooker of any color and every street dealer who so much as sold a couple of joints knew Jarvis, and either paid out to him or ended up in jail, with broken bones or worse. Kicky had always avoided Jarvis like the plague, and one additional reason that she had broken with Lenny Gillis six months previously, besides Lenny's little multiracial surprise party, was that she had

spotted Jarvis hanging around Jupiter's Den, and Jarvis had spotted her. The word on the street was clear and unambiguous: black, Mexican, and Asian hookers paid Jarvis off in money or sometimes in drugs, but white girls paid in trade. Kicky was not the only white working girl who still retained some vestige of decency and personal standards, and the fate of those who refused or evaded Jarvis's demands was not encouraging. Such bigoted ladies of the evening tended to end up facing bogus charges and many years in prison, or getting a coffee cup full of acid in the face, or in some cases their dead and violated bodies were found floating in the Columbia River or jammed into a culvert. No one cared much about a few dead white skanks here and there, but there had eventually been such a rash of that kind of thing that even the politically correct Portland Police Bureau realized that they had to do something to avoid embarrassment, and Jarvis had been transferred from his congenial job of keeping prostitutes and drug dealers in line to the even more congenial one of keeping insolent white boys in line.

It would appear that Jarvis had at least kept his hand in on some of his previous sidelines. The ongoing discussion in the alleyway behind the dumpster appeared to have something to do with Lenny's arrears on his protection money or some other kind of split from his petty rackets. "I gots a thousand comin' from you, muthafukka!" snarled the uniformed sergeant.

Jarvis was in the process of assaulting Lenny with a heavy, flat, leather-wrapped implement about a foot long, known in police circles as a slapjack. It was just as heavy and painful, but the flat surface left less telltale bruising than a traditional blackjack. "Whutcha gonna do, Lenny?" Jarvis droned on, slapping Gillis' head back and forth with the cosh, each blow a dull and sickening thud that sprayed blood from Gillis's mutilated and bleeding face, his broken nose and bleeding eyes. "Whutcha gonna do, Lenny? Gib Roscoe his money, fukkin cracka, gib Roscoe his money."

"I haven't got it!" screamed Lenny hysterically. "I can get it Friday! I can get it Friday! Jesus God!"

"Friday ain't today, muthafukka!" rumbled Roscoe. "Gimme my props, muthafukka! Gimme my thousand!"

"Whutcha gonna do, Lenny, whutcha gonna do, cracka muthafukka, you gib Roscoe his money," chanted Jarvis, battering Lenny's head back and forth with the slapjack. "You don't gib Roscoe his money, Roscoe don't gib me my money. I get pissed off when shitty little crackas don't pay dey props. You think you can fuck de brothuhs, Lenny? You cain't fuck no brothuhs. You skinny little cracka ass cain't even fuck you own skank ho's. Whutcha gonna do, Lenny?" The slapjack rose and fell in rhythm, each blow mercilessly hard

on Lenny's face and skull. Kicky realized with horror that Jarvis was high, on drugs and on shedding white blood. He didn't really care about the money. He just liked to beat white boys. She also realized that Lenny had suddenly stopped screaming.

So did Roscoe, who let the limp body of Lenny slip down into a sitting position against the dripping alley wall. Gillis's head lolled, loose and rolling. His face and eyes were bubbling blood, and could not be seen beneath the crimson mask. Roscoe leaned over and felt for Lenny's throat in the mass of goo, then pulled back his hand and wiped it on Gillis' trousers. He spoke in a disgusted voice. "Fuck, Jamal, de muthafukka dead. Dat'll make him pay, won't it?"

"And it seems that death was quite a surprise to his ass!" said Jarvis, throwing back his head and roaring in mindless laughter. "Didn't think you wuz ever gonna die, didja, cracker?"

"Aw, shit, Jamal, you a fool!" yelled Roscoe angrily. "We was takin' a grand a month off this ofay mutthafukka!"

"No problem, dawg. So we take a grand a month off the next muthafukka who takes over the Den," said Jamal.

"Now I gots to call in dis stiff, and we gots to investigate and pretend somebody gives a fuck about what happens to white trash like dis," muttered Roscoe aggrievedly.

"So we finds us another piece of white trash to pin it on," said Jarvis carelessly. In her hiding place behind the piled cardboard boxes of trash, Kicky McGee suddenly realized her own deadly peril. She tried to back away quietly, and needless to say she managed to back into another stack of piled boxes and knock it over, the glass and cans and junk inside cascading into the alley floor with a clatter.

Jarvis and Roscoe were calloused and brutal men, but their animal instincts were sharp and when need arose they could both move fast. They were on her before she could get ten feet down the alley in her sprint for the door. Jarvis tackled her and brought her down to the ground, while Roscoe launched a kick to her ribs that seemed to explode her whole body with fire. She managed to get her loaded sock out of her purse and get in one good thwack at Roscoe's ankle as it sliced in toward her a second time. He screamed in pain. Jarvis pinned Kicky's arms with his knees and raised the slapjack to crush her skull as she lay beneath him. But Roscoe wasn't so out of it that he wasn't able to grab Jarvis's arm. "No, fool, you done enough o' dat shit for one night! Don't you get it? You done nabbed the killer of Mister Leonard Gillis!" Roscoe picked up the sock with the lock in it. "Stupid bitch even

done provided her own murder weapon!" Roscoe hobbled over to Lenny's body and took a couple of good swings at the battered head, making sure the sock got good and bloody. "Congratulations, Sarge!" he called out, laughing. "You just done cleared a homicide in record time!" He pulled the radio out of his belt and spoke into it in urgent, clear English: "Two-four dispatch, this is One Bravo Nine. We have a 187, in the alley behind Jupiter's Den, 4400 block of 82nd Avenue. Suspect in custody."

"Roger One Nine Bravo," came a female voice over the radio. "Units and ME responding. Do you need an RRT?"

"Negative, incident not connected with domestic terrorism," replied Roscoe. "Just a pimp that got his skull beaten in by one of his prossies." Kicky screamed like an animal in its death agony and tried to fight, tried to throw the huge negro off her and run. He balled up his fist and slugged her in the jaw, crashing her head back onto the concrete floor of the alley and knocking her unconscious.

* * *

Kicky was still unconscious when they brought her in. She didn't even know for sure where she was. It might have been some station house, but most likely she was somewhere in the bowels of the downtown Portland Justice Center on Pioneer Courthouse Square.

Originally built as a modish complex of brick, glass, and concrete to adorn a stylish and politically correct power structure, decorated with murals and sculptures by trendy Portland artists, the Justice Center had taken on a much more grim and stark appearance and function since the Coeur d'Alene rebellion had broken out the previous autumn. Other areas had been slow to realize the danger and had accordingly suffered courthouses and police stations burned, bombed, and invaded by the NVA, who sometimes torched big stacks of legal and law enforcement papers and records on rural courthouse lawns. Not Portland. The multi-structured complex of the Justice Center's several buildings containing the courtrooms both state and federal, offices, and the headquarters of the Portland Police Bureau, had immediately been transformed at great taxpayers' expense into a fully fortified and secured Green Zone, based on plans drawn up by consultants from Israel and the United Kingdom who had prior experience in erecting such places in the West Bank and Northern Ireland, respectively. Surrounding buildings and businesses had been seized by special eminent domain acts of the state legislature and city council, then bulldozed and cleared away to allow for the erection of an encircling rampart

of Bremer walls topped with razor wire, and surveilled with closed circuit television cameras. The concrete perimeter had been expanded to take in the federal courthouse as well as the state and local occupants, and the Justice Center now sat like a blistering scar in the middle of downtown. Entrance and exit to the Green Zone were strictly controlled through electronically activated gates at sandbag-reinforced checkpoints, all vehicles were logged in and out and inspected coming and going, and anyone not wearing the correct ID badge inside the complex was liable to immediate arrest or, in some areas, shooting on sight. There had in fact been several unfortunate incidents due to white employees misplacing their badges. The streets approaching the Justice Center were blocked with rolls of razor wire and patrolled by black-jacketed, automatic weapons-toting SWAT teams and dogs, on the alert for car bombers or anyone with a pale skin who didn't seem to belong.

But the Center had become a place of fear and nightmare not just in its outward appearance. Inside were the headquarters not just of the police, but of the FBI and Department of Homeland Security. These agencies had considered their pre-10/22 offices too exposed, and they had taken over a large portion of the administrative floors of the federal courthouse and sealed it off. There were rumors of excavations being done in secret by specially imported construction crews of Asian and Mexican laborers as more offices, soundproofed interrogation cells, and holding cells were dug deep beneath the complex. Then there were the stories of the torture chambers deep beneath the earth or high in windowless rooms, padded to muffle the screams. The Portland Police Bureau occasionally issued pro forma denials that white prisoners suspected of security or terrorist-related offenses were being abused in the Justice Center. The FBI and DHS on the other hand frankly admitted it, and pointed out that torture in federal custody had been legal since the Patriot Act, so long as the Dershowitz Protocols were followed and only Muslims or alleged white racists were abused. It was known that more white prisoners entered the Justice Center than ever emerged. What happened to them no one knew, but it was rumored that there was a covert crematorium in one of the walled-off courtyards of the complex. The Justice Center cast a long shadow over the city of Portland, a warning to any who might dare think of rebelling against the United States, and a source of anger and hatred that glowed secretly in the recesses of men's hearts and minds, burning steadily brighter as time went on and more and more white people's family members disappeared into the Green Zone.

Kicky now sat shackled to a chair in one of the interrogation rooms. They had already taken away her clothes and dressed her in the orange jumpsuit of

American shame and humiliation. She knew she would probably never wear ordinary clothing again. They hadn't allowed her to see a doctor. Her head and her ribs still hurt terribly where she had been kicked and punched, and her ribcage was swollen and tender, but nothing felt broken, and they'd at least given her a wad of paper napkins and let her go into a rest room to wash the dripping wound in the back of her head where Jarvis had knocked it into the concrete. It had finally stopped bleeding, and now her hair was stiff with dried blood while it scabbed over. They had brought her here to this room and chained her to an iron rail running along the floor, her hands manacled together in front of her. The female Mexican guard had simply pointed to a plastic chamber pot in one corner with a roll of toilet paper sitting on the floor beside it, and walked out the door. That had been hours ago. There was no clock, so she didn't know how long she'd been there. There was a long mirror running half the length of the opposite wall and a closed circuit TV camera with a glowing little red light on it hanging from one wall. Kicky had no way of knowing if anyone was behind the two-way mirror, or who was watching her on the TV monitor. She simply sat at the table and stared into space, the physical pain of her beating slowly giving way to utter, black horror as the full weight of her situation bore down into her consciousness.

It was all gone. She was white, she was poor, and everything she knew from her very birth told her that no one on earth would lift a finger to help her. She had always held the bitter belief that she had nothing, but now that it was all gone she understood how much she'd really had before, the trailer where she could at least lay down her head at night alone if she chose, the sad drunken woman who had borne her but at least had not left her, and above all the little golden child she would never see again except maybe through the glass on visiting day. This couldn't be happening. It was surely a nightmare. She had them sometimes. Surely she would wake up soon. She closed her eyes and desperately willed herself to wake up, but when she opened her eyes, she was still in the god-awful puce green room with the cloying and overpowering smell of fresh paint, a smell that was making her sick. She leaned off the chair and suddenly retched again and again, uncontrollably, dry-heaving because she had nothing to bring up, vomiting hysterically in sheer terror and mindless anguish.

Outside, behind the two-way mirror, although Kicky could hear nothing through the soundproofed walls, Jamal Jarvis was having a spirited discussion with his partner, Detective Sergeant Elena Martinez. Lainie Martinez was the Mami half of the Portland detective team commonly known as the Mami and the Monkey. She was a tall, slim, thirty-something woman with clear olive

skin, straight black hair, brown eyes and a figure that looked fine indeed in a bathing suit and turned many heads both male and lesbian in the indoor swimming pool in the police gym where she worked out every couple of days and swam 50 laps afterward. Outside the gym, Lainie was the Bureau's fashion plate, her skirt-and-jacket business suits and her pants suits for field work invariably expensive, coordinated and flawlessly chic. Her shoes were Gucci and her watch one of several Lady Rolexes presented her by a series of highly placed lovers, mostly in the legal system somewhere but none in the PB, some of them married, all of them white. She was unmarried, consummately professional, all business and all career. Unlike her quondam FBI counterpart, the late and rather unlamented Rabang Miller, Lainie was actually respected, if not liked, by her superiors and her fellow officers in the PB for her competence and her occasionally brilliant detective work. No one remembered ever having seen her smile.

She wasn't smiling now. "Oh, for God's sake, Jamal, how many of these messes do you think you can get away with making until Internal Affairs has finally had enough?" she snapped.

"Hey, it ain't my fault a white boy's candy ass is so fucking fragile he cain't take a little beat-down," muttered Jarvis defensively.

"Look, I know how the game is played," said Lainie in irritation. "Until police salaries come up to something commensurate with the work we do, and the risks we take, especially now with a bunch of racist crazies gunning for us every time we step outside the door, then every officer with any initiative is going to have something going on the side. I have my little sidelines like selling information to reporters and PIs and fiddling the odd background check, clearing some palefaced bozo for employment when our records show he went to an Aryan Nations meeting twenty years ago, petty shit like that. You have yours. But this thing with Gillis is way out of line. If it goes bad and IA takes you down, or worse yet the media gets hold of it, I'm going to get some of the splatter. You can fuck up your own career if you want, but now you're putting mine at risk, damn it!"

"It ain't gonna go bad!" protested Jarvis. "I tell you, me and Roscoe between us got dis white ho' locked down already. Hell, bofus saw de bitch whalin' on poor Mister Gillis wif our own eyes."

"Of course you did," said Lainie, rolling her eyes. A Mexican uniformed officer came down the hall toward them, holding a larger manila file folder and handed it to Jarvis.

"Hey, Jamal, here's the file on your *puta blanca* with the tattoos in there," he said. "Lookin' good, my man. Seems Lenny Gillis filed a complaint with

us a few months back when she assaulted him, hit him in the head with a beer bottle. He dropped the charges, but it's on record. She's got priors for solicitation and holding, and she did fourteen months in Coffee Creek on a two to five for larceny and possession of stolen goods."

"Only fourteen months?" asked Lainie curiously.

"She had a baby while she was inside, and she and her mother played the sad violins for the parole board. Poor little trailer trash girl, new baby, baby's Daddy killed in Iraq, brother killed in Iraq, inmate sole support of aged parent, yadda yadda yadda. Overcrowding was even worse than usual that month, so they sprung her," explained the officer carefully. He had once made the mistake of addressing Sergeant Martinez in Spanish with a flippant "Hola, Mami!" and had almost found himself hauled up on sexual harassment charges.

Lainie was thoroughly Americanized, and she spoke Spanish only on these occasions when it was required in the line of work. Her one secret neurosis and obsession, not even admitted to the Bureau shrink during her periodic required evaluations, was that she wanted more than anything else to be white. Not just any white; Elena Martinez dreamed of herself as Nordic white, with creamy skin and golden hair. Like the girl in the interrogation room, only without the tattoos. Her unconscious longing had long ago sublimated itself into an almost insane hatred of white people in general, white racialists in particular, and blonde white women even more particularly. She was intelligent enough to realize she needed to control this inner demon, at least in public, and she almost always succeeded. And yet she would take only white men into her bed; in her entire life, she had never slept with either a black man or a Latino or another woman of any race.

Jamal Jarvis was sharp enough to realize that Lainie was smarter than he was, and he sensed that hers were good coattails for him to ride on, so he generally acted as the brawn of the team while she was the brains. It worked surprisingly well, and their high clearance rate and general rep for getting results in the form of confessions from suspected racists and other thought criminals had done them both good, departmentally speaking. But Jarvis sensed that Lainie was what the Hispanics referred to as a "cocoanut," brown on the outside and white on the inside. The rumor mill had informed him that they both shared the same preference for Caucasian sexual partners of the opposite gender, and he knew that she had heard the same about him. With a crude and vicious sense of humor, he had taken her down a peg very subtly, by refusing at any time in their acquaintance to try hitting on her. This not only deprived her of the pleasure of shooting Jarvis down, but let

Lainie know that he did not consider her white. It was the ultimate insult, and it bugged the hell out of her.

"I needs to get a statement from her, is all," said Jarvis after the Mexican uniformed officer departed. "Just somethin' to put in the file. Also be good to make damn sure she unnerstands just where the hell she is."

Lainie was reading over Kicky's file. "Shouldn't be too hard," she said. "It says here that the daughter, one Mary Ellen McGee, aged eighteen months, is a child deemed to be at risk and therefore of interest to It Takes A Village. We know the kid's going to end up there anyway, but the Illustrated Slut in there doesn't, at least not for sure, so we can use that as leverage. Blonde baby girl, no less."

"Healthy?" asked Jarvis, his interest piqued.

"According to this, yes. Not born with AIDS or fetal alcohol syndrome or any STDs, nothing of the kind you'd expect from a trailer trash mom."

"Hey, little blonde girl, sky's de limit on de adoption bond,' said Jarvis.

"I'll need to get the case number and see if a case worker's been assigned," said Lainie, ruminating. "If there's no case worker, then I'll bet we can cut at least a twenty percent commission, depending on the judge. He or she will be getting a cut too, so he or she will award the child to the highest bidder, and if between the three of us we can't get half a million for her from some rich yuppie couple we'd all better find another line of work."

"Twenty percent of half a mil? Thass a hundred grand, 50 grand each. Not too shabby for beating down a cheap cracka pimp," chuckled Jarvis, pleased. "See, I tole you it would turn out righteous! Now let me go in and get her confession."

"I think we'd both better go in, Jamal," said Martinez. "Just to make sure you restrain your habit of getting frisky with female inmates of the pale-skinned persuasion. I think this is one case where somebody needs to make sure you keep your fly zipped. Besides, I need to protect my investment."

"Fine," said Jarvis with a shrug. He realized that this one could become ticklish if the girl couldn't be persuaded to keep her mouth shut about what she'd seen, play along, and cop a plea.

Kicky looked up as the door opened and the two detectives entered the room. Jarvis had a thick file in his hand that she presumed were her yellow sheets. She looked at Lainie, Levantine sleek and arrogant and dressed to the nines in a blue serge skirt and jacket like some kind of model in the Lady Cop Chic section of Vogue. She knew full well that any faint hope she had of ever getting out of this depended on her crawling and groveling like a whipped dog to these two, and yet something in her that she didn't understand seemed

to take on a perverse life of its own. "I see the Monkey, so I guess you must be the Mami," she snarled at them.

Martinez leaned over the table, and like lightning she lashed out in a vicious slap across Kicky's face, almost knocking her out of the chair. "Inmates in this Justice Center are prohibited from using racial or ethnic slurs, derogatory references to anyone based on race or sexual preference or national origin, or other hateful language, Ms. McGee," she said. "It's not only a violation of JC regulations, it's a violation of the hatespeech section of the penal code. If you do so again you will be charged with felony hatespeech in addition to first-degree murder. I suggest you take heed. You're in trouble enough."

"Watch yo' mouf, bitch," added Jarvis.

Martinez took the file and slammed it onto the desk in front of Kicky. "We've got you cold. Your previous assault on your pimp with a blunt instrument is the icing on the cake. You're gone, girl. I'm offering you one chance for a deal. One only. You will plead guilty to voluntary manslaughter in the death of Leonard Gillis and I can arrange it with the DA so you get twelve to twenty. As an added sweetener, since I'm feeling generous this morning, I can arrange for you to serve your sentence in a medium security facility so you won't have to go back to Coffee Creek. This is as good as it's going to get, Kristin. Take it or leave it."

"They call me Kicky," said the girl sullenly.

"Of course they do," sighed Martinez.

"Don't I get a lawyer?" she demanded.

"Technically speaking, since 9/11 the state no longer has to provide you with one, depending on whether we want to file this as a security case under the Patriot Act, but in Portland the powers that be do like to keep up appearances. So yes, if you want I can get you a legal aid attorney," explained Lainie. "Any such attorney will almost certainly be black, Hispanic, Jewish, gay, female, or some combination of the above, and probably will hold as little brief for white trailer trash crack whores like you as I do, and they will advise you to take the deal I'm offering. But if you put me to that much trouble and delay, I might downgrade the offer to twenty to twenty-five years. The DA doesn't want to be bothered with petty crap like this and she'll follow whatever recommendation I make, and Judge Feinstein will follow whatever recommendation she makes. Kristin, you know as well as I do, you're fucked. Play ball and make it easy on yourself."

"I suppose the fact that I didn't kill Lenny doesn't have a damned thing to do with anything?" Kicky demanded bitterly.

"No, of course it doesn't," responded Lainie with another sigh.

"What about justice?" cried Kicky.

"This is a legal matter. Justice has nothing to do with it," explained Lainie irritably, irked at the girl's stubborn stupidity. "I can't believe you've been on the streets as long as you have, and you still don't know how it works."

"Yeah, I know how it works. Maybe I can give you something," suggested Kicky tentatively. "I mean, I know all kinds of stuff about Lenny's scams and the shit he was doing at the Den."

"So do we. And what are we supposed to do with it?" asked Lainie in exasperation. "Arrest and indict a dead man? Who gives a damn about prostitution and drugs anyway? They're the basis of most urban economies these days. Come on, Kristin. Yes or no? In view of the, ah, special circumstances surrounding this case, I can arrange for a quick arraignment in front of Judge Feinstein tomorrow sometime. Maybe even tonight. Plead guilty like a good girl and take your twelve to twenty, and when you get out you'll still be young enough to have some kind of a life yet."

Kicky's self-control finally snapped. *"No!"* she screamed in uncontrollable rage. "Fuck you! Fuck both of you! I didn't *do* anything, God damn you both to hell! I didn't *do* anything! I didn't kill Lenny, that nigger standing there did! You know it! I didn't *do* anything!"

Martinez stood up and slapped Kicky across the face again, but more or less pro forma, without anger or enthusiasm. "Suit yourself, you stupid little twist," she said in disgust. "Don't you ever say I didn't try and help you. First-degree murder and a life sentence it is. I suggest you watch your language in Judge Feinstein's court. He's not going to believe any wild stories you come up with about a respected and decorated police officer killing your pimp, and if you keep on using racial slurs and try to offer perjured testimony against an African American officer, you need to remember that hatecrime carries life without parole. So go ahead, jump up in court and yell out your stupid lies, and really fuck yourself over forever. Hell, maybe it's for the best. Wealthy and decent couples all over the U.S.A are going to be lining up around the block for that little girl of yours. Maybe you're doing the right thing after all by permanently taking yourself out of the picture." She and Jarvis turned and opened the door to leave.

Kicky stared in horror. She knew that the door wasn't just closing on the interrogation room. It was closing on her, her whole life, on her daughter. They were going to take Ellie now. She had lost. They were going to take Ellie.

As the door closed, Kicky jumped up and screamed at the top of her lungs, *"I can give you the NVA! Fucking spic bitch, you hear me? I can give you*

NVA! I know where they are! I can give you that sniper, that guy they call the Cat! I can give you two the NVA, you bitch, you baboon! Just let me go! Please, God, I didn't do anything, please let me go, please don't take my baby!" She collapsed onto the table top, weeping hysterically.

The door opened.

VII

Someone Who Knows Who They Are

Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels, and expire the term
Of a despisèd life, closed in my breast,
By some vile forfeit of untimely death . . .

Romeo and Juliet—Act I, Scene 4

The door opened, and then almost immediately closed again as Jamal Jarvis dragged Lainie Martinez back out into the corridor. "Oh, come on now, Lainie!" the gigantic negro protested in alarm, seeing his convenient patsy for the Gillis murder about to slither out of his grasp. "Don't *even* tell me you believe dat ho' for one muthafukkin' second! You know she's just lying to save her own skank ass!"

"Most likely, yes," agreed Martinez. "But what if she's *not* lying, Jamal?" Her excitement showed in her voice, and she grabbed Jarvis shoulders and shook him. "What if she's *not?* Christ, man, do you realize what an opportunity we might let slip here? For almost a year now, there has been a full-blown armed insurrection against the United States going on here in the Northwest. Never mind the fact that those morons in Washington and our own bosses are too damned stupid to see it for what it is, or too blind and stubborn to admit the fact if they do! So what the hell have we got by way of information on these people? I mean *real* inside information, proper intelligence? What has the FBI got? The BATFE? What has the Department of Homeland Security got? We're supposed to be the Portland police hatecrime unit, for God's sake,

and what have *we* got by way of bona fide intel on this series of hatecrimes in our own city? Fuck all! Zip! Nada! Zilch!"

"It was a lot easier to ID these ofays when dey dressed up like Natsie Stormtroopers from the 1930s and ran around in public, or had all those big meetings in public parks where we could come in and get all their information and roust 'em," complained Jarvis.

"Yeah, I know," agreed Martinez. "Then that fat old bastard sitting all alone in some flophouse with nothing but a computer somehow was able to persuade them to start using their heads for something besides hat-racks and *think* before they did something. God knows how he pulled that off."

"From what I've read in our intel reports, I don't think *he* ever understood how he pulled it off either," commented Jarvis.

"Yeah. They call it the Awakening. At some point, after almost forty years of banging his head against a wall, all of a sudden they started listening to him. I still don't get what the attraction was there," sighed Lainie. "But the fact is that we don't really know a damned thing about the NVA. Oh, sure, we know in a general way who some of these murdering bastards are, from the Coeur d'Alene uprising, and from old pre-10/22 files and thanks to the arrogance of some of their hitters who so kindly leave us their calling cards, literally so in the case of Lockhart. We even think we know the identities of a couple of Army Council members, like Henry Morehouse. But what do we *really* know about them? Not just who they are and where to find them, but how are they organized? What's their command structure? Who's who and who's where in their pecking order? How do they manage to escape surveillance and capture when we're throwing everything we've got at them? How do they select targets, how do they hunt them down, and who's next on their death list? Where are they getting weapons and supplies and money? Foreign contacts? Sympathizers here in the Northwest? Professional gunrunners and criminals? How do they move people and arms and funds from place to place? Who are their bomb-makers and where are their bomb factories? Where do they lay their heads at night? Where do they take their wounded for medical care? Who are their intelligence sources, their spies and agents, some of whom we both know damned well are in this very building with us as we speak?

"This is the kind of thing we have to know to get a few steps ahead of them and beat them, Jamal, and why don't we know it? Because *not one single law enforcement agency* has ever been able to get anybody on the inside with the NVA! We've tried, the FBI has tried, military intelligence and the CIA have tried. All we have to show for it is a few dead bodies lying in ditches with plastic bags over their heads when somebody got too close, and when we try

to follow up on where those operatives were going and what they were doing when they ran into a bullet, the trail is stone cold and all the evidence and the people concerned have disappeared like Houdini made it all vanish in a puff of smoke! Okay, I'll grant you, this McGee bitch is probably doing just what you say she is, yelling out some lie she thinks we want to hear, trying to talk her way out of her prison stretch. I understand that, and after I hear what she has to say, if I think she's full of shit, then she's yours. But we need to listen first. Don't you get it? This is pure career gold! Suppose *we're* the first law enforcement team to get somebody inside the NVA? Suppose *we* can get into the humintel driver's seat on this and we can manage to stay there? The sky is the limit, man!" Lainie's eyes were shining brightly and her voice animated as visions of Cabinet posts danced in her head.

The visions dancing in Jamal's head were more of the folding green variety, but he got it. "Yeah, yeah, I see whutcha tawkin' about," he admitted reluctantly. "But what about de Gillis homicide? Me and Roscoe gots to be clear on dat."

"Don't worry, even if she pans out as a CI, you and Roscoe are clear for sure," Lainie assured him. "You've got to be, because Lenny Gillis's corpse is our leverage on the bitch, that and her kid. Hey, if it turns out she's yanking our chain, we can go back to the original plan. She goes inside for a nice long vacation and her kid goes to It Takes A Village for half a million and we get our finder's fee. But first, let's hear what she has to say."

"Awright, less do dis thang!" agreed Jarvis, the prospects unfolding before him very pleasing indeed.

Lainie pushed the door back open, literally ran inside the interrogation room, ran around the table, grabbed Kicky by the hair with her left hand and took her by the throat with her right, and slammed Kicky's head back into the wall, making her scream from the pain in her scalp wound. "Listen now and listen good, you slut!" she hissed viciously into Kicky's ear. "Don't you dare make statements like that to me and Sergeant Jarvis unless you can back up every fucking syllable! Don't you so much as dare to think that you are going to bullshit your way out of your just punishment on a murder charge and string us along with some cock and bull story about the NVA! Don't you dare start talking about some deal and trying to take control of this situation. You are not in control of anything, Kicky. You are a turd, and you are floating in our toilet. You will tell me *everything,* right now! No holding back and no bullshit! And afterwards, Sergeant Jarvis and I will make the decision as to whether or not to flush you. You try to spin us a fairy tale or string us along, and I'll make sure you do your time in the worst hole I can

find, with bull dykes who will make sure you spend a lot of your long, long sentence with a broom handle up your twat. Do you get this picture, girl? Do you really get it?"

"Yeah, I get it," sniffled Kicky, for the time being totally overwhelmed and crushed.

"Lemme give you some advice, ho'," said Jarvis, leaning over her menacingly. "You think I'm a bad muthafukka? Lemme tell you, you don't *even* want to get Sergeant Martinez pissed off at you. Compared to her, I am Rebecca of Sunnybrook fuckin' Farm."

"Now you start talking, and you don't stop until you have told it all," commanded Lainie.

Kicky told them what she knew. It wasn't much, and it didn't take long. They left the room with one final warning from Lainie: "If a large lady in orange comes in here carrying a mop and a smile of anticipation on her face, you'll know we didn't buy it, and I suggest you do what she tells you to do and save yourself a beatdown." Outside in the hall they halted, making sure the door was closed. "I think she's telling the truth," said Martinez excitedly.

"Yeah," said Jarvis, nodding slowly in agreement. "Yeah, so do I. She too scared to lie. Okay, so we stake out that crib of Lenny's and wait for de goots to show? Hopefully Lockhart with 'em as well?"

"You still don't get it, Jamal," said Martinez, shaking her head. "I'm not talking about just one good bust. I'm thinking long-term project here. We've got this bitch by the tits with the murder rap and the little girl. We need to squeeze her. We send her in deep undercover, as far in as we can get her, and we make sure she's wired every step of the way. We know they have women members. Okay, we see if we can actually get Kicky enlisted in this terrorist army of theirs. We get as much information as we can on the whole NVA structure in this city and anywhere else, ID as many of the sons of bitches as we can, find out everything we can, every safe house, every car they use, every arms dump, build up a whole picture. Then we take down the whole enchilada at once and make Portland the only city in the Northwest that's a hundred per cent racist free. Once we do that, we can write our own tickets. We can go federal. The Bureau will be on their knees begging for our expertise. Once we've beaten this scum here in the Northwest, we're on our way. Ever want to live in Washington, D.C., Jamal?"

"I gots family in de District," chuckled Jarvis. "But how do we work dis meet tonight?"

"We don't do anything tonight. Tonight we just send in our girl and let her make some new friends," said Martinez.

"We're gonna need backup bodies and techs to handle the wire, and Captain Rawlinson's gonna want to know whut de fuck we doing."

"Screw Rawlinson," said Martinez. "The first rule of Project Kicky has to be absolute secrecy. I know a techno-nerd in the Electronic Surveillance Division who's a whiz at everything we'll need, both location and personal wiring, Andy McCafferty. He will need to be brought on board for all the technical stuff, now and in the future, and he'll have to keep quiet about it all. If it comes to that, I can get him to keep his mouth shut by throwing him an occasional fuck. For tonight it will be just him and us two. And Kicky, of course."

"No other backup? Uh, dat don't sound too smart," asked Jamal nervously. "No offense, Lainie, I mean you one bad-ass tamale and all, but I don't dig the idea of going up against dat Cat-Eyed muthafukka and maybe some more of his crew wid just you and some geek from ESD. Dis nigger ain't getting' shot in de ass fo' *nobody's* career, mine included. Besides, okay, I get de part about not taking 'em down tonight, giving 'em some rope, but wid no backup how we gonna tail 'em after the meet?"

"We don't," said Martinez again. "We let them go. I say again, the purpose of tonight is to get our girl known to them and make them want to recruit her. For that, they need to like what they see, to start trusting her. If they're followed from the scene and they make the tail, that will blow the whole game. They'll never trust her and probably try to play her back on us, if they don't simply whack her."

"And what's to keep her from ratting *us* out to *them?"* asked Jarvis. "Or just plain rabbiting on us when we let her out the door?"

Lainie smiled wickedly. "We'll have her daughter, right here in the Justice Center, and after today we hang onto her. Kicky plays her part tonight and from now on, or else the kid goes straight to It Takes A Village."

"Okay, and after tonight?" asked Jarvis. "We gonna be running a long term undercover like dis, Rawlinson will have to be brought in on it, and a lot of other people as well."

"I know there will have to be others," said Martinez, "We'll need a whole task force. But we need to keep them to a minimum and compartmentalize everything, especially her identity. I don't trust Rawlinson. He's white and male and heterosexual, and by definition that means he's politically unreliable. His definition of hatecrime has always been a little too lenient for my taste, especially when it comes to hatespeech. He doesn't seem to understand that hatespeech is a dead giveaway for thoughts and attitudes that lead to hatecrime, and that once we know that hate is in a white male's mind we

need to nip him in the bud before he can act on those thoughts. It's the only way to protect women and minorities. I don't want him in on this, and I don't want him knowing who Kicky is. And I don't want Roscoe or any of your *compadres* in corruption knowing what's going on, either. You just tell Roscoe it's all taken care of and you leave it at that, got it? I'm going to move Ms. McGee into a conference room upstairs now, and get her paperwork on this murder charge off the computers and out of the system now, before it gets too complicated."

"Uh, how we gonna run a major gig like this without the head of the unit knowing anything about it?" inquired Jamal.

"If this meet tonight goes smooth, then I'm taking it right to the Chief," said Lainie. "She'll want in on this in the worst way and she'll pull us right out from under Rawlinson and give us everything we need."

As incompetent overall as the United States and its enforcement arms were, there were still elements and individuals within the system who were capable of acting with speed and ruthless efficiency when the occasion demanded. Kicky McGee got a living demonstration of this now. Within an hour she had been taken to a police doctor. Her head wound was sterilized and stitched and bandaged, although at Lainie's direction none of her hair was shaved. She was given a series of injections including antibiotics and a mild painkiller, and she was then locked in a plush upstairs conference room with the shackles and cuffs removed along with a stern warning that any attempt at escape would be dealt with mercilessly. While all this was going on, a team of undercover Portland detectives moved in swiftly on her trailer. They dragged a still drunken and comatose May McGee into a wagon, removed baby Mary Ellen from her crib, and took a list of items from the trailer, after which they departed silently, unnoticed. There was in fact a man living in the trailer park, not an actual Volunteer yet but a candidate member, who acted as a spotter for the NVA, but since he had to leave for work at six in the morning, he missed the brief flurry of activity around Kicky's trailer.

Two hours after Detective Sergeant Martinez had slammed Kicky's head into the wall, her daughter was brought to her in the conference room. Someone had changed Ellie's Pamper and dressed her in one of her own cheap cotton pajama suits. Kicky was provided with a Styrofoam plate of fruit salad from the cafeteria, a small box of cereal and a plastic bowl, a carton of milk, and a plastic spoon, and permitted to feed her child. After her breakfast Ellie wanted to play, and she ran around the conference room chattering and yelling, jumping up and down on the chairs and throwing pencils and papers around in perfect glee, her mother drinking in every sound and gesture in

an agony of love and fear. About ten o'clock Lainie Martinez came into the room, accompanied by a woman in civilian clothes whom Kicky assumed was from Child Protective Services or some other state bureaucracy. This woman picked up Ellie and said, "Come on, honey, let's go watch some cartoons, okay? This lady wants to talk to your mommy."

Kicky did not try to resist or make a scene, for fear of traumatizing the little girl. "Go on, honey," she said gently to her daughter. "Go watch cartoons."

"You come too!" demanded the little girl. "Cartoom wif me!"

"I can't, honey. Go on, I'll see you later," said Kicky. Tears were in her eyes as the woman carried the child out of the room.

"You really can see her later, you know," said Lainie conversationally. "It's all up to you from now on, Kristin."

"No, I won't," said Kicky in total resignation. "Not after tonight. I'm not an idiot. I know what you want me to do. I also know what the NVA does to snitches. I see it on TV. They tie you up and put a plastic garbage bag over your head, and then they put a bullet in your brain. The bag is so the brains and the blood don't splatter and make more evidence for the crime scene investigators. They never bury the bodies. They want them to be found, so everyone will know what happens to informers. What's going to happen to my daughter after I'm dead?"

"You know what will happen," Lainie told her bluntly. "She'll go to It Takes A Village, and she will be adopted by a family of proven wealth and substance and loyalty to the United States, probably on the East Coast somewhere, but certainly outside the Northwest just to make sure she doesn't grow up with any bad influences in her life, like you."

"Drunks?" asked Kicky bitterly. "I mean violent bad drunks, not like my mom? Nutjobs the courts have declared unsuitable for normal adoption? Dysfunctional yuppies or glitterati who want her as a toy and who will get tired of her and slough her off onto some Guatemalan maid or nanny all day, so she'll be raised by the TV if she's lucky, or maybe infected with some Third World disease? Or maybe a couple of dykes or faggots? Just anybody with enough money will do, I guess?" said Kicky bitterly.

"Look, I'm telling you for the last time, I don't want to hear any more of that hatespeech!" snapped Lainie. "No more ethnic slurs or derogatory remarks about people's sexual preferences! You're in trouble enough already!"

"Yeah, I'm in trouble!" yelled Kicky. "I've got a couple of bastard cops who are sending me to my death and planning to sell my daughter after the spuckies kill me! I'd call that trouble! And as for hatespeech, you'd better get used to it, because if I'm going to be hanging with Jerry Reb, you're going to

be hearing a lot of it on your wire or whatever you're planning. Let's just say I'm getting into character!"

"Gee, it sure sucks to be you," agreed Lainie equably. She had sense enough to realize that now was the time to ease up a bit on the terrified young woman in front of her. "Look, you've caught a couple of bad breaks in the past twenty-four hours, Kristin. That I'll grant you. But you know, there's an old saying: if you can't get out of it, get into it. When life hands you lemons, make lemonade. If you play your cards right and keep your cool, and give this thing of ours one hundred and ten per cent, then this big cloud could turn out to have a hell of a silver lining. You don't think we'd ask you to undertake a dangerous assignment like this without compensating you, do you? And your compensation will be commensurate with the risk. I can promise you five hundred dollars a week from the discretionary fund. That's two thousand dollars per month tax free, plus we can arrange things for you like clothes and cars and anything you need. If you prove as valuable to us as I think you may, then it will be more."

"Per *month?* Just how long do you plan on this snitch gig of mine going on?" asked Kicky, appalled.

"How long is a piece of string?" replied Lainie rhetorically. "From one end to the other. It goes on as long as it goes on."

"It will go on until they pick up on the fact that I'm a rat, and then one night I get into a car with them and I end up lying in the woods with the bag over my head," said Kicky with finality. "I can't do it, damn you! I'm not a stool pigeon and I can't act like one! They'll be able to read me in their sleep. I probably won't even make it past tonight!"

"Kicky, look, you know as well as I do where you've been and what you've done," said Lainie. "You know how to handle yourself on the streets and in prison. If you didn't have some moves you wouldn't have survived, you wouldn't be here. And you won't have to do anything proactive, no fishing for specific people or things, although needless to say, we're very interested in Mr. Lockhart. You don't have to ask leading questions or act overly curious. Just go with the flow and sound enthusiastic about their great racist revolution. We will be recording you every step of the way, and our intelligence people will be doing all the analysis and figuring out what the hell their scene is from the raw data you bring in. You'll just be a fly on the wall, so to speak, a listening post. Do whatever they tell you to, convince them you're just a bimbo, and of course use your sexual skills, which I'm sure you've picked up in your professional life. These men are brutes, granted, but like all men they're nothing but dumb thugs who think

with their cocks, and they're not going to suspect a foxy bitch with neat tats who gives them good head."

"And you'll be recording that too, I suppose?" asked Kicky, burying her face in her hands. "What are you going to do after I'm dead, sell it on the internet?"

"Oh, come on, don't tell me you're shy?" snapped Lainie in exasperation. "You're a sex trade worker, for God's sake! Surely you've done group bangs and porno and let some of your johns watch, that kind of thing?"

"As a matter of fact, no I haven't," said Kicky dully. "It's something I do sometimes when I have to, because it's the only way I can get money to pay the rent and buy baby stuff, and because it's the only thing America thinks I'm good for. But I don't enjoy it. As if you give a damn about what I feel."

"Actually, I don't," said Lainie. "Look, are you down with this or not, Kicky? I need to know now. It's not rocket science. You play ball, or America throws you away, all of you. We can still take you back downstairs and we can send that little girl right on over to It Takes A Village, and for good measure we can seize that trailer and your drunk-ass mother's trailer as well under the asset forfeiture laws. Did I mention your mother is down in the drunk tank right now? Probably hollering for her first brewski of the day. If you balk on me or if you screw this up tonight, by this time tomorrow you'll be so far into the system no one can pull you out, your daughter will be on her way to her new mommy and daddy, or her new mommies or new daddies as the case may be, and we'll drop your mother off at the Salvation Army homeless shelter."

"Okay, *I get it!*" shouted Kicky. "Just tell me what you want me to do!"

Lainie Martinez pointed to a large and comfortable looking sofa along one wall of the conference room. "Right now I want you to lie down and take a good long sleep," she said. "You've got a heavy date at nine o'clock tonight, and I want you alert and rested and on your toes. You do *not* want to fuck this up because you're exhausted." She got up and went to the door. "This door stays locked, and remember, even if you can get out of this room, we've got your little girl, and you don't know where in this building she is. Wise up, Kristin. You're our bitch now and when we tell you to sit, you sit. We tell you to fetch, you fetch. When one of those racist murderers tells you to roll over, you roll over. Deal with it."

In fact, Kicky was indeed exhausted, and even as stressed as she was, she fell asleep almost immediately when she lay down on the soft sofa. A woman police officer woke her up at four o'clock, gave her another painkiller, and let her go to the bathroom and take a shower in the staff locker room, keeping

her under close watch the whole time. Then Kicky was taken back to the conference room where she was served a cafeteria lunch which she devoured whole. She hadn't eaten for 24 hours, and she was hungry. After she was through, Lainie Martinez brought in a large cardboard box of stuff from Kicky's trailer. A selection of her clothes was inside. "Pick out something to wear tonight," she ordered Kicky. "Casual wear, not that streetwalking outfit you were arrested in." Kicky chose jeans, a pair of old running shoes, a bra and a short-sleeved maroon knit pullover blouse.

"You gonna tape a box or something to my navel?" she asked.

"Oh, it's a lot more sophisticated than that now," said Lainie with a laugh. She went to the door of the conference room and beckoned. A tall, thin white man in civilian clothes with a receding hairline and a badge and gun on his belt entered, carrying a metal briefcase, which he set down on the conference room table and opened up. "This is Detective McCafferty, from our Electronic Surveillance Division," said Martinez. "You'll be seeing a lot of him."

McCafferty stepped up to Kicky and looked her over. "Pierced ears? Good," he said. "I've got the very thing." He went to the case and picked out a couple of small earrings, pearls set into a green leafy blossom design. He put them on Kicky's ears; then he went to the case and pulled out a set of headphones, which he put on his ears. "Say something so I can check the levels," he ordered.

"Itsy bitsy spider crawled up the fucking spout," said Kicky. McCafferty diddled with some dials in the small console in the case. "Again, please," he said.

"What if they run a metal detector over me?" demanded Kicky.

"No metal in those, all plastic fiber circuitry," said McCafferty.

"Fiber optic? Are there tiny cameras in there so you can see as well as hear?" asked Kicky curiously.

"No, just audio, although we do have some video-capable pieces like that," replied the bug man. "Now you, Sergeant. Step away from her a bit, say six feet, and say something."

Lainie did so and said, "Fiber optics will come later. We want to get these SOBs on video as well as on digital sound. How's that, Andy?"

"Good. Now me. I'm what? Maybe twelve feet away? Testing, one, two, yeah, I'm fine. Turn on the TV, please, for background noise filter."

Lainie turned on the television, which was sitting in one corner of the room. CNN was on. The woman newscaster was reading off her teleprompter, "Rush hour traffic in Seattle is being disrupted and backed up for several miles from the Governor Rosselini Bridge, due to a burning police vehicle at the

23rd Avenue on-ramp to Highway 520. The police command car, believed to be carrying a senior field supervisor, was destroyed by an improvised explosive device concealed on the side of the entrance ramp. The supervisor and his driver were killed. Their names are being withheld pending notification of their families. A telephone call to CNN's Seattle bureau using a confirmed code word claimed credit for the attack in the name of the outlawed white supremacist Northwest Volunteer Army. There were more terrorist attacks throughout the Pacific Northwest today as two Hispanic men were shot and killed in Yakima, Washington; bombs exploded in a Hispanic bar in Boise, Idaho and a Jewish community center in Eugene, Oregon; and the Korean owner of a convenience store in Chehalis, Washington, was shot dead. Also, in Portland, Oregon, a well-known gay and anti-fascist community activist, Geoffrey Weller, aged 32, was shot and killed in a deadly daylight sniper attack in the city's fashionable Pearl District. Portland police have confirmed that a Jack of Diamonds playing card was found near the sniper's presumed hiding place, indicating that the shooting was carried out by the notorious Jesse 'Cat-Eyes' Lockhart of the NVA. A one million dollar reward has been offered for Lockhart's capture, but with no results so far."

"Background filter's fine," said McCafferty with a nod. "We'll have our ears on." Lainie snapped off the television.

"One million dollars reward, Kicky," she simpered suggestively. "I'm sure you could use some of that, couldn't you? Don't worry, you come through for us and Jamal and me will give you an even split. You've got my word."

"And do I have your word I'll be alive to spend it?" asked Kicky.

"You want a GPI on her?" McCafferty asked Lainie.

"Oh, yes, always," said Lainie.

"A what?" asked Kicky.

"Global positioning indicator," said McCafferty, rummaging around in his case. "That way we know exactly where you are, at all times."

"Just what I always wanted," said Kicky dryly.

"This is for your protection as well as ours, you know," said Lainie. "If these guys tonight want you to go somewhere with them, you go with them. This way we can track you."

"And are these earrings sensitive enough to understand me when I'm talking with a plastic bag over my head?" demanded Kicky. "Look, I'm doing this because I haven't got any choice. Don't worry, I'll come through for you or literally die trying. Most likely die trying. But don't insult my intelligence by pretending you give a damn about me or my safety, okay? You don't care if they kill me, all you care about is getting the credit and the little gold star

on your forehead for whatever information about the NVA I get for you and the Monkey. Don't tell me you want to put a tracking device on me for my own protection. You just want to tag me like a fish or an animal, turn me loose in the wild, and see how long I survive before the bears and the wolves eat me, like this was some kind of sick reality nature show."

"Mmm, close, but not quite," said Lainie calmly. "What you have to understand, Kristin, is that you henceforth will represent a growing investment of time, effort, and money on behalf of the Portland Police Bureau. When we start laying out the shekels for an operation like this, our bosses expect to see results, and one cracker whore lying dead on a logging trail with that plastic bag you mentioned over her head doesn't count as a result. Okay, so the milk of human kindness doesn't come into play much in all of this. But we do want to protect you as an investment. The more valuable an investment you make yourself, the more motivation we will have to exert ourselves to protect you, got it? Full cooperation and participation on your part is advisable. Call it enlightened self-interest."

"Try this," said McCafferty, slipping a sapphire ring onto her right hand.

"You start building our mutual investment portfolio tonight, Kristin," said Martinez. "You make all the right moves, you don't fuck it up, and from now on that ring stays on your finger at all times. Sure, once you're back on the street, you can take off the ring and ditch us. But be very sure about things before you do that, girl. Because once you take off that ring our divorce is final, and we not only get custody of Mary Ellen, but Jamal and I will hunt you down, and after Jamal takes a recreational break with you, I will personally put a bullet in your empty blonde head that will kill you just as dead as any NVA slug would. Once we start this, Kicky, you do not ever, *ever* forget whose side you're on and who you're working for. One day it will all be over; but we will decide when that day comes, not you."

"Now I know why I fell in love with you," sighed McCafferty, looking at Lainie with soulful eyes. Kicky had a horrible suspicion that he meant it.

* * *

They dropped Kicky off a block from Lenny's pad at exactly nine that night, on a corner they knew could not be seen from the apartment windows. There had been some discussion between Lainie and Jamal as to whether or not they should insert her into the apartment earlier and have her waiting for whomever showed from the NVA, but Lainie vetoed it. "They show up and

find someone they're not expecting already there, that will sound a warning bell in their minds right away," she explained. "They'll wonder who else has been there before them and what they've been doing in there." As Kicky got out of the nondescript Pacific Power van, Lainie said, "You have your bus pass? Remember, if they ask you how you got here, you took the 42."

"I've got it," said Kicky, fighting not to tremble in terror.

"Go now. Don't fuck this up," said Lainie, closing the door to the van.

"A 'good luck' might have been nice, bitch," muttered Kicky as she hoisted her handbag to her shoulder. At her insistence she had been at least able to get them to give her another padlock, and she had made another slung shot from one of her socks. "Look, they'll think it's out of character if I'm not packing something!" she had argued. Now she entered the building and mounted the creaking stairs to the second floor. She knew from past experience here that the elevator in this tenement wasn't reliable. She stopped and checked under the mat at the top of the stairs. The key Lenny kept there for his girls, when he used the place as a drop, was gone. They were probably in there. She stood before Apartment 24 and took a deep breath. Then she knocked on the door.

After a moment the door was opened by the man she had seen the day before in Jupiter's Den, the one with the shaved head and beard who looked like a wrestler. Kicky saw he kept his right hand behind the door, and she was sure there was a gun in it. She didn't give him a chance to say anything. "Lenny Gillis ain't coming," she said to him.

"Yeah?" said the man, looking her over from head to toe. "Why not?"

"He's dead," she told him. "A couple of nigger cops beat him to death last night. The cops are probably looking for you now."

"They always are." Big Jim McCann stepped aside and jerked his head for Kicky to enter, and then he closed the door. There was indeed a black plastic-looking automatic in his right hand, probably a 9-mm of some kind, she thought. "Who are you?" he demanded, his voice deep, not rough. Kicky sensed that the next sixty seconds would probably determine her immediate survival or otherwise.

"I'm Kicky McGee," she said. "I work, well, worked for Lenny." She awaited the inevitable next question as to the nature of employment with resignation, but it didn't come. Instead, a second man spoke from behind her.

"Nice tats," he said. She turned around, expecting to see Cat-Eyes Lockhart, but instead she saw a man with a dark red full beard and blue bandana on his head. The second Volunteer was just as tall as McCann but not

quite so massive, well muscled, wearing a sleeveless denim jacket that might once have been biker colors over a tank-top T-shirt. His arms and shoulders were covered with a variety of Confederate flags, Klansmen on rearing horses holding fiery crosses, Swastika motifs and Viking warrior maidens in armored bikinis. His arms were crossed and he was holding a stainless steel .357 Magnum in one hairy hand.

"Yours are pretty gnarly too," she conceded.

"You know who we are?" asked McCann in his deceptively low and gentle voice. "Lenny told you?"

Lainie had instructed her to keep to the truth as much as possible and try to avoid any lies that might trip her up later. "Yeah, I know who you are, and no, Lenny didn't tell me," said Kicky. "Lenny never tells me shit. Never told me shit, I should say. I saw you when you came in the Den yesterday and I recognized that guy who was with you, the Cat. Jesus, man, everybody in Portland must know his face by now. That guy's hot as bubbling cheese. I don't know who's got more balls, him or you for being seen with him in public."

"We tried putting a bag over his head, but that attracted even more attention," said the man behind her. His accent was noticeably Southern or possibly cowboy.

McCann had a disconcerting habit of concentrating on the most essential points first. "So if Lenny didn't tell you anything about us, how comes it that we see you here at the very time and place we should be seeing Mr. G.?"

"I was in the can and when I came out I heard him set up the meet with you here," she said. "I figured you'd want to know he was dead."

"You figured right," agreed McCann. "And how did that come about?"

"Last night he got a visit from those two nigger cops I mentioned," said Kicky. "I was there when they came in. One was a uniformed sergeant, Roscoe something. The other was Jarvis from the Hatecrime and Civil Disobedience Squad. They call him the Monkey."

"We're familiar with the Monkey, yes," said McCann. "Go on."

Two blocks away, the Pacific Power van was discreetly parked in an alleyway, and the three detectives were hunched over McCafferty's metal case getting an earful, clear as a bell. "Yeah, you bet yo' ass you familiar wid me, cracka muthafukka!" growled Jarvis.

"I can't believe it! We're *finally* getting these guys on digital!" crowed Detective McCafferty in elation.

"Quiet!" snapped Lainie, straining to hear.

In the apartment Kicky launched into the crucial part of her cover story. "They came in and they talked with Lenny for a while in one of the booths,"

she said. "Then all of a sudden they took him back in the back. Didn't look like he was too happy about going with them. I took care of some business about that time, and when I got back the Den had hit the bubble gum machine, flashing blue lights everywhere." There was an electronic beep. "What the fuck!" She turned and saw the second Volunteer right behind her with a hand-held metal detector in his hand; he had been quietly running it over her while she spoke.

"What's in the handbag, Kicky?" asked McCann. Kicky scowled and handed it to him. McCann holstered his pistol and dug around in the bag, then pulled out the sock with the padlock inside it. "You must get some rough customers," he remarked, hefting it and returning it to the handbag, which he handed back to her.

"Yeah, where the hell you think I got this?" she said, pointing to the still visible bruise on her face where Jarvis had hit her the night before, heading off one obvious coming question. "Anyway, I heard later that Lenny was found dead in the alley with his head beaten in. It must have been those cops. I remembered seeing you guys earlier that day, Jarvis is with Hatecrimes, and so I put two and two together. I figure they were trying to squeeze him for information on you guys, and so I came here instead to give you the 411."

"Why?" demanded McCann.

"Because I want to help you out," she said.

"And why is that?" he asked.

Kicky gestured toward herself. "You know what I am," she said. "Any fool with two eyes can see. America's fucked me over and I figure it's time I returned the favor."

"What, no big long speech about how the world Jewish conspiracy done turned her into a ho'?" chortled Jarvis two blocks away in the van.

"No, no, she's playing it just right!" insisted Lainie. "Quiet!"

"You a junkie?" asked McCann.

"Not anymore. I been clean six months and I'm staying clean," said Kicky.

"You think Lenny gave us up?" asked the second man.

Kicky gestured around her. "You hear any sirens?" she asked. "Guess not."

"And we should believe this story of yours and trust you exactly why, now?" asked McCann politely.

She repeated the gesture. "I say again, you hear any sirens? Look, I don't expect you to let me in on all your deep dark secrets or nothing like that. I wouldn't want to know those anyway. But I'm willing to help you any way I

can." She took a Jupiter's Den card out of her back pocket, one of a number she carried for customers. "My cell's on the back. I've done what I came here to do. Now I'm going to leave, and you can call me any time and I'll go anywhere you tell me and do whatever you tell me. Or if you don't trust me, then go ahead and shoot me."

"How do you know we *won't* just shoot you?" asked McCann.

"I don't," she said. "Sure, I thought about it, and I just don't care anymore. If all I have to look forward to in America is 50 more years of this shit, I'd rather die now and get it over with before I end up a washed up sick old drunk like my mom, 55 going on 75. I figured it was worth the risk."

McCann looked at the second man. "She's right," the second man said. "We ain't hearing sirens and there's no RRT kicking in the door, and she's not wired so far as that handset tells us."

McCann smiled coldly. "Well, regardless of what you've heard, miss, we don't just kill people without a reason, so I guess we'll give you the benefit of the doubt. I'm Comrade Smith. Winston Smith."

"I don't remember no Smith in our NVA files," said Jarvis two blocks away in the surveillance van, furrowing his brow.

"I'll explain it to you later," said Lainie, rolling her eyes. "But this smart-ass should remember that in *1984,* Big Brother got Winston Smith in the end."

"1984? Naw, he don't sound old enough to have a record that far back," said Jarvis decisively.

"Quiet!" snapped Lainie again.

Back in the apartment, Jim McCann continued his introductions. "This is Thumper," he said, indicating the red-bearded man.

"Obviously your street name," said Kicky.

"Actually, it's my job description," said Thumper with a boyish and only slightly maniacal grin.

McCann went on, "Now, since you want to do your patriotic duty to the Northwest Republic by helping us out, I don't suppose the late Mr. Gillis told you anything about a consignment of goods he had for us?"

"Uh, like what, guns or explosives?" she asked. "I guess that's what you guys would be interested in, but I always figured Lenny was too lame to deal in heavy shit like that. But then I never would have figured him for one of you guys anyway," she concluded.

"He wasn't one of us guys," said McCann. "Lenny Gillis was just what he seemed to be, a petty criminal, and not too good at it. But unfortunately, revolutionaries can't be too picky about who we deal with sometimes. And

no, it wasn't weapons or ordnance. I'm sure it won't come as a surprise to you to learn that Gillis also did a heavy trade in stolen goods?"

"I did fourteen months in Coffee Creek off one of his little fencing deals gone bad, so no, it wouldn't surprise me at all," replied Kicky in a dry tone.

"We learned through various channels that Lenny ended up with some of the loot from a high-end rip-off at a defense plant in Seattle," said McCann. "We came here tonight to buy some stuff from him, but now we've got no Lenny and no merchandise, and an envelope full of cash burning a hole in our pockets. When you were around that strip joint of his, did you see anything like a package or maybe a box, a manila envelope, anything like that? Smaller than a breadbox, able to fit into a briefcase?" Kicky noticed there was a briefcase on the back of one of the musty and decayed armchairs in the apartment.

"No," she said, shaking her head. "But I know sometimes he used to stash his hot stuff in here. This thing you're looking for, you say it's something small, like drugs? That size? Try under the TV." She pointed to the home entertainment center. Under the set was a drawer with slots for DVDs. The second man pulled it out. "Nothing but porno," he said in disgust.

"No, it goes further back," she said. "Pull the drawer all the way out." Thumper did so. "Now reach way back inside and see if anything's there." Thumper made a long arm inside the cabinet and pulled out a large, heavy padded mailing envelope. He tore it open and spilled the contents out onto the coffee table. Kicky saw a number of small, square and rectangular black objects. "That what you're looking for?" she asked.

"That's it," said McCann, holding up one of the Lego-like components.

"Uh, you gonna shoot me if I ask what those are?" Kicky couldn't resist asking, even as her heart quailed at the risk she was running.

"Computer chips and micro-circuit boards," said McCann, admiring them. "Very special ones. All plastic. No metal filaments, no metal in their composition at all. I won't tell you what we want them for, but suffice it to say that these babies can pass through a metal detector without tripping it."

"Wow, I didn't know they could make things like that," said Kicky with a wide-eyed and impressed expression on her face.

"Shit!" said McCafferty in the surveillance van. "Dollars to donuts it's those SMC-Fives and Sixteens from the Boeing heist up in Seattle last month! Silicon microconductors, chips and boards, the matched set, state of the art! And you're going to let these fascist sociopaths *walk* with them, Lainie? If the Chief doesn't crucify you, the FBI will!"

"It's a risk we have to take, Andy," said Martinez in a level tone, knowing he was right and if she couldn't make her case to higher-ups on the point,

she'd be walking a beat as a meter maid. "Don't you see? Already this little tattooed twist has told us something we didn't know. She's a gold mine and we have to keep drilling her in deeper and deeper!"

In the apartment, McCann opened his briefcase, put the envelope inside, and took out another, smaller envelope. From it he pulled several packets of hundred dollar bills and handed them to her. "I'll just assume you're Lenny's heir apparent," he said to Kicky. "The deal was twenty grand. Make sure it's all there."

Kicky gave a wry smile and gently shoved the money back at him. "I suppose that was a test," she said. "Keep it. I mean it, uh, Comrade Smith. I really do want to help you and maybe someday have a country of my own where I can be something besides white trash."

"Perfect!" breathed Lainie in the van, headphone to her ear.

"Look, I'll go now," said Kicky. "I got a bus to catch. If I make it out of the building without a bullet in my back, I'll assume I'm good with you guys. Call me, and have whoever calls me use the name Mr. Smith so I'll know he's from you."

"I can't guarantee that," said McCann. "It's not up to me. You know we're going to have to check you out?"

"Yeah, well, when you do you'll see I'm no prize," she said seriously. "I'm not going to try to hide or conceal anything. My past is pretty shitty."

"You check out, maybe your future will be better, sister," said Thumper.

Kicky slipped up then. She forgot herself and snapped at him, "I'm not your sister!"

"Yes, ma'am, actually, you are," said Thumper seriously. "You just don't know it yet."

"Well, I guess I'm a racist," admitted Kicky. "My God, how could anyone grow up where I did and not be?"

"And what do you think a racist is, ma'am?" asked McCann.

"Uh, a white person who hates niggers?" guessed Kicky.

"No, that's a common misconception. Hate has got nothing to do with it," McCann said seriously. "One of our old leaders, Pastor Bob Miles, put it best many years ago. A racist is someone who knows who they are."

"I can't honestly say that I know who I am," admitted Kicky.

"Then we'll show you," said Thumper. "Now split. Out the front. We'll go out the back way. Wait for a call. It may be a while, but wait for it."

Kicky turned and left the apartment. She left the building and walked to the bus stop, under a streetlight so the two men would be sure to see her there. A minute or so later, a dark Ford sedan slid by the stop; she did not

see if the two men were in it or not, but they were. She continued standing there for almost five minutes, letting one bus pass, before the Pacific Power van pulled up beside her and the side door slid open. Then she got in and collapsed into a fit of hysterics, vomiting in sheer terror at her close encounter with death. Lainie Martinez actually tried to comfort Kicky and wiped her mouth with a paper towel. She was now a valued asset.

In the dark Ford, Volunteer Jimmy Wingo, alias Thumper, was driving, and McCann was dialing his wireless phone. A voice answered. "Mac's Auto and Body Shop," said the man, who was one of the Volunteers several blocks back in the two men's escort car.

"Hey, Joey, those Toyota brake pads came in, finally," said McCann. Volunteer Van Gelder, whose first name was not Joey, understood that they had the microchips in their possession.

"Finally!" he said. "Can you get them over here first thing in the morning?"

"Mmmm, not sure, slight problem in the schedule tomorrow," said McCann. "I'll do what I can. You keep a sharp eye out tomorrow morning and they'll be there when they get there, is all I can tell you."

"Okay," said Van Gelder. "Have a good evening."

"You too." McCann had just told Van Gelder that something wasn't quite right and he needed to keep an extra sharp eye out, while the two NVA teams met at an alternate safe house to the one originally planned. It took them two hours of circuitous driving to reach the place, another apartment complex on a semi-rural road in Clackamas County.

Awaiting them was Lieutenant Wayne Hill of the Third Section, the NVA's intelligence arm. He had chosen the code name "Oscar" in a sardonic reference to the Zionist book and movie *Schindler's List.* Hill too had a list. He was a slender and handsome man of about thirty with ash blond hair, blue eyes and a classic aquiline Nordic countenance. He was the scion of one of the wealthiest old money families in Virginia, the possessor of a Phi Beta Kappa key from Georgetown University, an absolutely dedicated and ascetic National Socialist and already enjoying a budding reputation as one of the Army's most skilled assassins. He floated between brigades, training brigade intelligence officers and troubleshooting difficult cases, or sometimes trouble-stabbing and trouble-strangling them. Anything to do with the super-microchips came within his high-priority purview.

McCann walked into the living room of the apartment and held the envelope. "I checked them out on a laptop with a special USB adaptor while we were on our way here," he told Hill. "They're the real McCoy, alright.

No defectives. We got what we paid for, and we didn't even have to pay for them." He threw the envelope of cash down on the table. "But there was something of a problem at the delivery point." Jimmy Wingo walked into the room with two mugs of coffee and handed one to McCann.

"One problem I can see right off the bat is the fact that Lenny Gillis has been dead for the past twenty-four hours," said Hill. "I got the word tonight. The case has been sealed already and somebody did a full cleanup in the PB's computers. None of our people can get near the files, they're behind too many cyberwalls. So how did you get the goods?"

"One of Lenny's prossies, white girl named Kicky McGee, with a lot of tattoos and a lot of miles on her, shows up and gives us a line about how she wants to join the Army, then she leads us right to the merchandise. We could have found it ourselves, but it would have taken us a while." McCann then went through a detailed account of the entire meeting with Kicky.

"It sounds pat, but sometimes real life works out pat," said Hill. "Does she read right?"

"It could have happened exactly as she said, yes," said McCann. "I didn't detect a single thing about her, anything she said or did, that indicated she was lying. She sounded like a pissed-off white girl who is tired of being fucked by Amurrica, in every sense of the word. The metal detector said she was clean, although as we know from these chips we just got, that doesn't mean much anymore. I'll say this much: I know ZOG does *not* want us to have these chips. They know that with these we can get anything electronic we make past 90 percent of all the security scanning devices in the country. I can't see them letting us walk out the door with these if they had any way of knowing we had them in our hands."

"Did you see any sign at all that you were tailed here from the meeting site tonight? Anything even remotely suspicious?"

"Zip," said McCann. "We kept an eye out for copters, and we stopped in Gresham and I ran the detector over both vehicles looking for any bugs or GPIs they might have slipped on us somehow. Nothing."

"Jimmy?" asked Hill.

"Hey, don't ask me for an opinion on a woman," snorted Wingo. "Last time I trusted a woman I ended up in Angola Farm. But I'm like Jim. I didn't pick up on anything that sounded like she was lying. And if it was two cops that killed Gillis, that could explain the PB burying it so deep."

"Lenny did tell me at our last meeting that he was expecting a visit from the heat last night," said McCann. "Jarvis used to be Vice and my guess would be it wasn't about us, it was over some shakedown he was running on his old

turf. That would play. If I had to decide, I'd say the girl is straight up and she needs to be contacted by a recruiter."

"We need every Volunteer we can get," decided Hill. "As Freud said, sometimes a cigar really is just a cigar. I'll run this chick's history through the wringer and see if I can get anything that feels wrong. If not, we'll give her a buzz, but with a little more than the usual caution. You know the rule: no one joins the NVA, the NVA joins *you.* This serendipitous introduction sounds just a little off-key to me, but you're right, weird shit happens in the fog of war. I don't want her to meet or be able to ID any more Volunteers than she needs to at first. You're too high up, Jim. She doesn't see you again. As far as she is concerned, Comrade Smith no longer exists. You know we always try to preserve first contacts, so we'll start her out as an A Company wannabe. Jimmy, I'll let you handle her. Your misogyny may come in handy. You first, and if she still rings true then we'll get Ma Wingfield down from Dundee to have a chat with her. That sharp old lady can spot a lying female a mile away. One thing, Jimmy, I want you to be extra specially vigilant for any sign that she is still using drugs, despite her denial. The feds are great ones for using junkies as CIs in exchange for keeping their habits stoked. Secondly, let me know if she tries to put the moves on you right off."

"A detailed report," said McCann with a grin.

"Piss off, sir," said Wingo.

VIII

Running The Game

Whither should I fly? I have done no harm.
But I remember now I am in this earthly world
Where to do harm is often laudable,
To do good sometimes accounted dangerous folly.
Why then, alas, do I put up that womanly defence
To say that I have done no harm?

Macbeth—Act IV, Scene 2

The next morning found Detective Sergeants Lainie Martinez and Jamal Jarvis sitting in the plush, carpeted office of Portland Police Bureau Chief Linda Hirsch. Jarvis had sense enough to keep his mouth shut and let Lainie make the pitch, which she did with cool efficiency.

The police chief was a coveted affirmative action three-fer, being simultaneously female, Jewish, and lesbian. Linda Hirsch was a huge, square middle-aged woman, massive without appearing obese, who seemed to squat in her chair behind her expansive mahogany desk like some stone idol. She had been brought into the job by a high-powered cabal of liberals, leftists, feminists, gays, and other assorted "community activists," a procedure which was by now the norm in the City of Roses; no one could remember the last time Portland had a white male heterosexual as chief of police. Her previous post had been as police chief in Sacramento, California, where she had clawed her way up to the top of the department through an awe-inspiring mastery of the weaponry of interoffice politics, blackmail, coercion, schmoozing and bribery. When Hirsch left Sacramento, the California Attorney General was

investigating her office for providing generously paid no-show jobs to assorted "community activists" including a number of illegal aliens who were listed as Spanish and Tagalog interpreters but who spoke no English, and a black transvestite prostitute who was drawing $75,000 per year as "police liaison to the transgender community."

Linda Hirsch had a deep and nuanced knowledge of both ends of the litigious aspect of sexual discrimination and sexual harassment; she herself had filed half a dozen such lawsuits against her superiors in the Sacramento force on her way up, and she had accumulated three lawsuits against her in Sacramento and one so far here in Portland from female police officers from whom she allegedly demanded sex in exchange for promotion, choice assignments, and other departmental favors. Her predatory habits in this regard were so well known that her administrative assistants would come in some mornings and find on their desk a gift-wrapped box containing a set of novelty foam rubber kneepads inscribed "Property of Monica Lewinsky." The chief had assigned a detective to the task of ferreting out the politically incorrect humorist in the Bureau. Sergeant Elena Martinez herself had occasion to fend off the police chief's unsubtle hints, which had been hard sometimes because Hirsch took a special interest in the Hatecrime and Civil Disobedience Squad's activities. She liked to question suspected racists personally, often showing up at an interrogation room with her black doctor's bag full of Dershowitz Protocol-approved needles and other equipment.

Linda Hirsch always wore her uniform, complete with a row of mostly bogus decorations, at work and even off duty. Her jet-black hair was curly to the point of being kinky, and her broad face was that of a dyspeptic camel, with dangling dewlaps and fleshy nose and small piggy eyes. Right now it was the face of a skeptical and hostile camel, but that meant nothing, since Linda Hirsch's face had been skeptical and hostile since she was a toddler.

Lainie went over the entire official version of the Kicky McGee incident, with the major deletion of Jarvis and Roscoe from the Lenny Gillis homicide, replacing them with Kicky herself as Lenny's killer. She understood that the chief was no fool, and that Hirsch had probably already picked up from the interoffice grapevine what had actually occurred in the alley behind Jupiter's Den, but neither of them made reference to it. White trash pimps didn't matter any more than white trash hookers. Lainie played the surveillance recording from the previous night, and she could tell that her boss was impressed. "Ma'am, I'm sure I don't have to point out the significance of this," she concluded. "Call it serendipitous. We have been handed a key that can unlock the whole NVA for us in Portland."

"Or maybe beyond that," grunted Hirsch. "First question. You let two dangerous racist terrorists walk away with a package of stolen electronic components that will certainly be used to kill a lot of people, women and racial and sexual minorities, government personnel, law enforcement officers, possibly some of our brother officers. Possibly even you two yourselves one day if you turn the ignition to your car or walk in the wrong door where these animals have been there before you. Why did you do that, Sergeant Martinez?"

Lainie was ready for the question. "Because in the larger scheme of things, ma'am, putting an end to this whole racist insurrection against the United States of America is more important than taking out two individual terrorists and recovering that one consignment of microchips. The math is simple. We don't need to prevent specific acts of terrorist murder; we need to put a stop terrorist murder, period. As cynical as this will sound, the old saying that you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs is true and applicable in these circumstances. If you want to discipline me or charge me with dereliction, that's your prerogative, but as hokey as this sounds, if freedom and justice and the American way are going to prevail, somebody has to look at the big picture, and last night I chose to do so. It was my call, and I should point out that I made that call over the protests of Detective Sergeant Jarvis and Detective McCafferty both."

"Very noble of you to offer to carry the can, Sergeant. I hope you're willing to carry it all the way if it comes to that. All right," said Hirsch. "I'll overlook your action for the time being, so long as you understand that if that call ever comes back to bite this department in any way, you take the bite right in that fine brown *tuchas* of yours, not me."

"Understood, ma'am," said Lainie, calmly absorbing an insult that would have brought a white male police officer, however senior, up on racism and hatespeech charges so fast it would have made his head spin.

"Where's the *shiksa* whore now?" asked the chief.

"Downstairs. Will you give us the task force to pursue this operation, ma'am? With all due respect, I need a decision quickly, because if it's a go she needs to report to her day job with the taxicab company at four o'clock this afternoon as if nothing had happened. We could intervene and square it with her employer if she's late or absent, of course, but that widens the circle of knowledge that something unusual is going on with her, and we need to keep that circle of knowledge as restricted as possible, for obvious reasons. That is why I have taken the liberty of coming to you with this directly and bypassing Captain Rawlinson."

"Rawlinson stays out of it. Leave him to me, I'll square that," said Hirsch with a dismissive wave. "What's your immediate plan, Sergeant Martinez? I see where you're going in the long term, of course, but how about the next few days and weeks?"

"We need to keep her in her old orbit, so to speak, and wait for the racists to make contact with her," replied Lainie. "We'll be monitoring her cell phone and keeping her on GPI at all times, of course. I am sure that the NVA has ways of checking her out, and we have to make sure that they don't pick up on anything unusual or out of character. They're pathological killers, but they're not stupid, and their intelligence has always been highly accurate. You know they've detected undercover insertion attempts from other agencies before, and we've found the results lying dead out on logging roads in the woods. This girl needs to show them nothing suspicious, no sudden sign of having money to spend, nothing like that. She goes back into her trailer, which we will wire, of course. We keep the child and the mother, set them up in a secure location where we can arrange supervised visits, the carrot as opposed to the stick of her legal problems. The official story will be that the child and the grandmother are staying with relatives out of town. In the meantime, Ms. McGee needs to keep on driving her cab."

"And keep on whoring?" asked Hirsch.

"That would cause a lot of problems with surveillance, and also put her needlessly at risk, not just from the NVA but from some of her more kinky and dangerous customers," said Lainie. "Not to mention straining her already tenuous emotional and mental equilibrium, knowing she was turning tricks while being recorded electronically. There might even be a civil rights issue there, since technically speaking, sex trade workers are recognized as a politically protected sexual minority."

"How is she holding up?" asked Hirsch.

"Not well," admitted Lainie. "The girl is angry and paranoid and frightened to death of what might happen to her, as well she should be. She is going to require careful handling if she's going to be useful long term, and I don't think asking or forcing her back into prostitution would be helpful. The NVA might have reasons of their own to do so, of course."

"Mmmm, you think she might be able to build a sort of special in-house clientele among the goots, so to speak?" mused Hirsch.

"The thought did occur to me, yes," admitted Lainie. "That in turn could open up all kinds of avenues of information and possibly help us flip some more of these bastards, especially if some of them are cheating on their wives, that kind of thing. The possibilities here are endless, Chief. Once we

get her on the inside, I just want to let her sort of go with the flow, with us following everywhere she leads, hearing everything she hears, seeing as much as we can manage to get on digital of what she sees. She will be kind of like one of those robot probes archaeologists send down into Egyptian pyramids, flashing lights into all the dark corners and passageways. That way we can at long last start to build up a picture of who these people are, where they are, how they operate, how they recruit and indoctrinate new members . . ."

"Yes, Sergeant, I get it," said the chief, waving a hand again irritably. "All building up to the big takedown. An intriguing and exciting prospect, I admit."

"But first we've got to get her inside," continued Lainie. "That's why there can't be any obvious breaks in her lifestyle, why she needs to show up to do her shift with the cab company tonight, and every night, until they contact her again."

"What if they smell something hinky and don't contact her?" asked Hirsch.

"They will," said Lainie, with a confidence she somehow genuinely felt.

"What kind of manpower and resources are you looking for?" asked Hirsch.

Lainie ticked her shopping list off on her fingers. "First, I want to select my own team, with full command of the operation from start to finish. I'll want Sergeant Jarvis and myself, and three two-officer backup and surveillance teams with unmarked vehicles, all experienced undercovers. I want Detective McCafferty full time, with one backup ESD tech, both of whom will have unlimited call on all the resources and equipment they need, and your help in obtaining anything the PB doesn't have by way of technology from other departments, including the FBI and DHS if necessary."

"That will take some finessing, but it can be done," said Hirsch. "They're going to get curious if we ask for the loan of their special surveillance toys, and I do not want *any* federal knowledge of this operation. A snitch inside the NVA is the gold standard of American law enforcement, detectives. Nobody else has one, and if the feds find out we do, then they're going to take her away from us and keep her for themselves. I don't want our people doing all the work and taking all the risk just so some fucking FBI assholes can get a gold star and a corner office and a GS-grade bump or two. Is that understood?"

"Abso-fukkin-lutely!" growled Jarvis in assent.

"I second my partner on that, ma'am," said Lainie. "We will also need a suite of rooms to use as an operations center and command post, in the most

secure area of the Justice Center you can arrange for us. Mark it 'janitorial supplies' or something and lock it down tight as a drum. Task force members only will have the necessary de-lock codes on their swipe cards. And yourself, of course. Our own separate, completely secure computer system, no interface with any other system, so it can't be hacked."

"You've got it," said Hirsch decisively. "Okay, Sergeant Martinez, it's your show. Pull it off and give Portland that one big bust that will make this city racist and terrorist-free, then the sky's the limit. Fuck it up and you burn. But there is one proviso," she added.

"And that is?" asked Lainie in some concern. Provisos were not good.

"If and when you get a chance to nail that murdering son of a bitch sniper Lockhart, the so-called Jack of Diamonds, I don't care what else you do, you *take him down!"* Hirsch snarled. "That motherfucker killed a friend of mine yesterday. I don't care if you blow the whole operation in the process. I want all nine of that Cat's lives. Now be back here this time tomorrow morning with your task force picks and all the details, and we'll get this show on the road."

* * *

It took a while for the NVA to check Kicky out with the resources they had at their disposal and contact her, which was a good thing, because it gave her a chance to pull herself together. If they'd come to her in the first couple of days after their initial encounter at Lenny Gillis' apartment, she probably would have gotten flustered and blown her cover. As it was, the knowledge that she was under constant surveillance forced her to get her act together, stay off the crack, and fall into a normal blue-collar work routine driving for the hack line. At four o'clock every afternoon she went in to the garage and checked out a cab, took whatever fares the surly and still horny dispatcher Singh felt like giving her plus any street hails or airport runs that offered, dealt with the usual run of obnoxious passengers and drunks, closed out her shift, and took the bus home to the trailer park where she found she could definitely get used to having a good night's sleep. The stress died down to manageable levels, but it still exhausted her.

She was allowed to spend two hours every other day with her mother and her daughter, who were staying in a suite of rooms in an upscale Oregon City motel that had been seized as a criminal asset from a Brazilian drug trafficker, and was now used solely as a safe house for what had been code-named Operation Searchlight. A team of heavily armed, plainclothes private security

contractors from the infamous Blackwater group, four men and two women brought in especially for this assignment from North Carolina, guarded both May and Ellie around the clock, although they were not part of the task force proper and did not know precisely who Kicky was or what she was doing. "We know the Portland Police Bureau has been infiltrated by the NVA," Lainie Martinez admitted to Kicky candidly. "These Blackwater people report directly to me or to Sergeant Jarvis, and no one besides us two and the chief of police know they exist. They are paid, very handsomely I might add, out of several slush funds so that the money would be impossible for a spy in the department to trace, and if they did spot any of the cash flow they wouldn't know what they were looking at. The contractors will do *exactly* as they are told by either Jamal or me. All it takes is one phone call, and within the hour Mary Ellen will be transferred by private jet to a child protective facility in another state far from here, pending her adoption into a new family, the records of which adoption will be destroyed so that there will never be any paper trail to follow. Even Jamal and I will never know where she ended up. You screw up just once, or if there is any interruption in your electronics, and in the twinkling of an eye, your little girl is gone forever."

Ellie of course understood nothing, except that now she had good things to eat and could watch endless cartoons and Sesame Street on DVD. She had her own playroom in another part of the hotel filled with dolls and stuffed animals and every kind of plastic wheeled toy for toddlers, where she spent a large part of her day. She missed her mother, but Grandma May was with her often, or else one of the female contractors, and her guards were kind enough to see that she didn't get bored, at least. May herself understood in a general way what was going on, and she was sufficiently terrified for her daughter to stay reasonably sober most days. In any case, her beer ration was kept strictly to a twelve-pack per day. May had been told by the head of the security team that if she tried any funny business, such as trying to remove Ellie or going off to bars and getting drunk and talkative on her own or anything of the kind, the consequences would be negative for all three of them. She and Kicky were never left alone during the supervised visits, nor was she allowed any phone calls, so they had no opportunity to speak privately. All May could do was ask her daughter in a strained voice to take care of herself and be very cautious. Every time Kicky had to leave the motel for the long ride back into the city in an unmarked police car driven by one of the task force detectives, so she could get to work at the cab company on time, her heart sank in despair. She desperately tried to find some way out, some way she could get together with May and Ellie and flee, but she could think of nothing.

Detective McCafferty had given Kicky several pairs of bugged earrings to wear so she didn't attract attention from the NVA by wearing the same ones every time, and every so often she was required to stop at a pay phone and call a number in the Operation Searchlight headquarters and give a report of where she was and what she was doing. She was also given a hip holster for her cell phone and told to make sure she always wore it on her belt; whenever it vibrated, she was to find a pay phone and call in, unless she was actually in the presence of the NVA. "Why the hell do I have to do that, when you're already tracking me and listening to me twenty-four seven?" she demanded.

"For one thing, your electronic monitoring devices are only one-way," said Lainie. "We may have instructions for you. Your cell phone isn't secure. We can monitor wireless phone calls and we have to assume that the goots can as well. You can buy the equipment needed in any Radio Shack. But mostly, Kicky, you and the team need to interact, to stay close. I want you to hear my voice at least two or three times a day."

"What do I do if they do contact me?" asked Kicky.

"You mean *when* they contact you," replied Lainie with a frown. "You should think positive, Kristin! When they contact you, do whatever they say to do. We're on your phone and we're listening in on you at all times. The minute something happens, we hit the record button."

Kicky didn't even bother to ask if there were any plans to rescue her if the NVA decided to take her off somewhere nice and quiet for execution. She had already noted that she had been given no code words or procedures to use if she felt threatened. But then one night three Mexican gang-bangers came swaggering up to her bus stop where she was standing after she got off work and started in on the dirty word routine. They were just getting into the pawing part, preparatory to the blouse-ripping and dragging off into a dark corner, and Kicky was reaching into her purse for her lock and sock when two Portland PB patrol cars pulled up to the curb. The driver of the lead squad car flashed his blue bubble light and bleeped his siren, and the Mexicans turned and fled. The patrol cars pulled away without anyone speaking to her, so there was no telling whether their presence was by order from her monitors, or just a lucky chance.

Kicky noted that the vehicles rolled heavily and unevenly, and looked oddly thick under the streetlights. The PB was experimenting with armor-reinforcing their squad cars, in addition to doubling up on them on the street. It didn't seem to do much good. Three Portland cops, all black or Mexican, were killed by the Volunteers in the week following Kicky's release from the Justice Center, and to top it off the Jack of Diamonds killed none other than

Captain Jason Rawlinson of the Hatecrime and Civil Disobedience Squad. A single bullet to the head, as Rawlinson was violating Bureau security procedures by grilling burgers on the rear patio of his house. The shot was estimated at over four hundred yards, at night, and a Jack of Diamonds was found on the roof of a nearby Seventh Day Adventist church.

Ten days after the death of Lenny Gillis, Kicky had almost decided that nothing was going to happen, and she turned her mind toward finding some way to convince Martinez and Jarvis to give up and fold the operation and let her go. She was cogitating on this subject one night at about eight o'clock, as she dropped a fare off in front of the Vintage Plaza hotel on Broadway SW. She marked off the trip on her sheet, pocketed the ten dollar tip, and was about to pull over into the cab rank and wait for a possible pickup when the door opened behind her and someone got in. "Where to?" she asked her new passenger, her eyes still on her clipboard.

"To freedom, comrade, in a new nation under a new flag," said a familiar voice. Kicky whirled around and saw the man she had been introduced to as Thumper sitting in the rear seat. He looked less biker-ish tonight, wearing a long-sleeved canvas jacket and slacks. *"Shit!"* she exclaimed. "Oh, uh, Comrade Thumper. I guess you've been following me around, huh? Sorry, sorry, I know, no questions. Uh, where *do* you want to go? I'll need to call something in to my dispatcher." She sounded flustered, but presumably the man would accept that as natural with him popping up in her cab like a jack-in-the-box.

Jimmy Wingo gave her an address in rural Clackamas County. "Call that in. It's a restaurant and roadhouse, but we're not actually going there. Tell your dispatcher I'll want you to wait for a while. It will be a long trip, so the mileage will more or less match. This ought to cover it." He leaned forward and gave her a hundred dollars in twenties. "That way your sheet will balance out, plus tip."

Kicky called the bogus trip in and pulled out into Broadway. "Okay, where are we really going?" she asked.

"Just head toward Gresham," he said. Kicky felt the phone at her side vibrate. She knew that the cops back in the operations center had heard and understood what was happening, and were recording. "Uh, okay, what happens now?" she asked.

"You're going to meet someone and have a talk with them," said Wingo genially. "And with me."

"Get to tell my life story, huh?" remarked Kicky, navigating through the traffic. It was still light out, so she had no need for headlights.

"We already pretty much know that," said Wingo. "We actually think you can be of some use to us. This cab, for instance. Cabbies are people we like to recruit. Taxis can go anywhere, be seen on the streets at any time of day or night, and no one thinks they're out of place or questions their presence. For the time being, a lot of your work for the NVA will be doing just what you're doing now, driving people and sometimes packages here, there, and everywhere. Of course you'll have to get creative about your trip sheet. We've wanted to get someone with access to an Excelsior Cab for quite some time now. Most of the more upmarket fleets have GPIs installed in their cars to keep track of where their vehicles are going, make sure the driver's not cooking his sheet or running off the meter or fucking off, that kind of thing. But Excelsior is owned by a couple of Bangladeshis who are too cheap to spring for the system. You might say you're uniquely positioned. How bad was it down in Coffee Creek?" he asked, abruptly changing the subject.

"It wasn't one of my more edifying experiences in life, thank you," said Kicky sourly.

"I've been there myself. Angola, in Louisiana," he told her.

Kicky was tempted to ask him if that's where he was from, and what he had gone to prison for, but the old convict code immediately kicked in. You never asked. "That's worse," she admitted. "Even out here we've heard of Angola."

"Any society that permits a place like that to be, has to be destroyed," said Wingo, not angry or bitter, simply stating a self-evident fact.

"Is that possible?" asked Kicky, genuinely interested. "I mean, I meant what I said, I want in, but it seems to me we're either going to have to have some kind of secret weapon to bring these bastards down with, or else just get really lucky."

"There's an old Norse saying: 'Luck often enough will save a man, if his courage hold,'" Wingo replied. "McGee. That's Irish, right?"

"Yeah, way back," she said. "Both sides. My mom was a Harrigan. I remember my dad used to get drunker than usual every St. Patrick's Day, before he split. I guess that's about all of Ireland we kept with us. Some of my tats are Irish. The Book of Kells thing, and also I have a Celtic Cross on my ankle."

"Well, the Irish never gave up for eight hundred years," said Wingo.

"I hope we can win a bit sooner than that," said Kicky with a small laugh.

"The Army Council is basing all its strategic thinking on an assumed thirty-year conflict," said Wingo seriously.

Back in the operations center Lainie Martinez had her headphones on. She was listening intently and taking notes. "Ex con check record Louisiana DOC Angola", "Use of taxis by t'sts", and *"30 year terror campaign (???!!!!)"* Jamal Jarvis was off tonight, no doubt out doing the rounds collecting his graft and raping white prostitutes, for which Lainie was thankful. Now she could concentrate on what she was hearing.

Back in the cab, Kicky glanced into her side mirror. "Cops coming up in the left lane," she said. "Two cars. They always move in pairs now."

"I see them," said Wingo. He shifted slightly and Kicky was sure he'd pulled out a pistol. "Just watch your speed and wave at them if they look at you when they go by. Don't look away."

"That would be One Charlie Nine and Ten," said Andy McCafferty, quickly checking a computer monitor to identify the units. "You want me to get on the horn and warn them to back off?" he asked Lainie.

"No," she said. "Let's see how they both handle this." The two police cars slowly pulled up alongside the cab in the left lane; the cops in the passenger side looked into the cab. Kicky waved casually; Wingo looked them right in the face but did nothing. The two units pulled on ahead, and after a few minutes made a left turn onto a freeway entrance ramp.

"No problem," Wingo remarked.

"How did you know they wouldn't try to pull us over?" asked Kicky.

"That was just a regular patrol," said Wingo. "They might have tried to pull you if you'd been speeding, or they had a warrant on you, or something else routine, but they're under orders not to tangle with any Volunteers they detect. They're supposed to hang back, keep us in sight, then get on the horn and yell for an RRT, a rapid response team. Those are the ones you have to watch out for, small convoys with multiple squad cars and one or two armored trucks or vans with them. The armored personnel carriers have a squad of muscle men in body armor and all kinds of heavy weapons inside. Some of them have concealed .50-caliber machine guns in a kind of retractable turret. Remember, ordinary police will never engage any suspect or enemy whom they even suspect might have equal or greater firepower. They *always* maintain distance and call for backup. Preserving their own lives is a very serious priority with them, and they are trained to operate in those parameters."

"How the *hell* do those bastards know about the fifties?" demanded McCafferty in a stunned voice back in the ops center. "Not to mention our terror contact SOP?"

"How do you think?" snorted Lainie. "The whole PB has been compromised from Day One. If we hadn't had our heads up our asses we

would have phased out and banned all white male police officers and about half the white females, years ago. No offense, Andy, of course, but the only way we're ever going to excise the virus of racism and sexism from this society is by a complete removal of power from the hands of those who carry it." McCafferty either didn't hear her response, or else chose the politic route of pretending not to hear it. He hunkered down over the receiver and diddled with the dials.

"GPI shows they're entering Gresham," he said.

In the cab Wingo said, "Hang a right here."

"They're turning onto Arbor Lane," said McCafferty, checking his GPI.

The taxi was now driving down a residential street of ranch-type houses that would have been called middle class, back in the days when America still had a middle class. Dusk was falling now, and the street seemed desolate and deserted; there were no lights shining from about half the houses on the street. At the far end of the street Wingo told her to pull into the driveway of one of the apparently darkened homes. He got out, and she followed suit. "Some day you may have to pick yourself a location for a meet like this," he said conversationally. "Let's see how sharp you are. Why do you think we chose this house?"

"Uh, I see a front and side door, and I assume there's a back, so a lot of exits," said Kicky. "That looks like a big open field in the rear, vacant lots or something like that, and this street is a straight shot down to the end here, so you can pretty much see who's coming a good ways off. It would be hard for anyone to sneak up on us. All kinds of side streets around here you could slide around in and most of them feed onto main arteries, so once you got loose either in a car or on foot, you'd have a pretty good chance to get away, especially in the dark.

"Very good!" he said approvingly. The lights flashed on a car parked down the street; it started and moved slowly toward them, then into the driveway. The door opened and a small, birdlike woman with gray hair got out. She was wearing a simple dress and carrying a large battered handbag. "Hey!" she called cheerily as she walked up to them and the car pulled away. "Y'all eaten supper yet?" Her accent was more distinctly Southern than the man's.

"We're fine, Ma," he said. "She'll cook at the drop of a hat," he said in an aside to Kicky. "Ma, this is Kicky McGee. Kicky, this is Ma. She kind of does the hiring for female Volunteers. She's the one who decides tonight whether we bring you into the NVA, or whether we kill you and bury you in the basement."

"Now you just hush!" scolded Ma. "Who are you tonight, anyway?"

"Thumper," Wingo told her.

"Don't mind Thumper, dear," said the old woman. "He's got a bug up his ass about women in general. He's just trying to see if you scare easy."

"Of course I'm scared!" snapped Kicky. "But I'm here, aren't I?"

"Come on inside," she said. She took the house keys out of her handbag and opened the door. She took them right into the kitchen and turned on the lights. Kicky didn't see too much else of the home other than a darkened living room. Then she put the kettle on the stove and rooted around in the cupboard for cups. "Have a seat, both of you, and I'll make us some tea. Tell me, dear, are you a Christian?" she asked Kicky suddenly, taking her by surprise.

"Uh . . . I don't know how I'm supposed to answer that, ma'am," Kicky said. "I think you already know what I am."

"Yes, dear, I know," said the old lady kindly, "But the two have never been as mutually exclusive as people tend to think."

"Judge not lest ye be judged in turn and all that?" asked Kicky.

"Oh, poppycock!" said Ma. "This idea that no human being is supposed to ever make a moral judgment on anyone else is horse hockey. The Bible is full of people who did nothing but that. They were called prophets. There are all kinds of people running around today who are in urgent need of being judged. People make moral judgments all the time. The hog-jawed doo-doo birds who run this country have judged our entire race and condemned us all to death, and by God we need to start returning the favor!"

"Hog-jawed doo-doo birds?" laughed Wingo in amusement. "I never heard that one before. I'll have to remember that."

"You do that, young man. No, honey, the reason I asked was that I need to know what your moral universe is like. Everybody has one."

"Uh, I don't think I do," said Kicky carefully. "I mean, where would I get a moral universe and what good would it do me if I had one? I just want in with the NVA to try and make some kind of better life for me and my baby, and well, I told myself I'd be honest with you, so I'll say it. I want revenge! Revenge against some specific people who have hurt me, yes, but mostly just revenge on this whole damned filthy world that has never done anything except shit on me! I am just so tired of bad people winning all the time, so sick of nothing ever being right or good anymore. Why should it always be the bad people who win, and me who hurts? Goddamned niggers and Mexicans taking everything, goddamned cops beating me and shaking me down and locking me in a cage with animals, fucking Jews and rich bastards looking down their noses at me and treating me like dirt, I just want to hear them

scream, and watch everything they have burn . . .” She put her hand to her mouth, and realized with sudden astonishment that she had begun to cry. “Jesus, where did all that come from?” she asked in a shaky voice.

“I’d say from the heart,” commented Wingo. “And ma’am, there ain’t a damned thing wrong with anything you just said.”

Ma took her hand. “Honey, if you’d given me some long speech that sounded like you’d been reading our books, and I thought you were telling me what you think I want to hear or something you’d been coached to say, I would have been suspicious, but you would be plain astonished to learn how many of us come into this thing running on nothing but pure rage. It is a righteous rage, the true Wrath of God, and it is a thing to be gloried in, not ashamed of. You have been done a terrible wrong, from the very moment of your birth, as has every man and woman with a white skin born in the past century. You have been denied your birthright, which is this world and everything in it, and you have every right to desire revenge and to seek it though our Army. Later on we’ll educate you, give you things to read and teach you how and why this terrible wrong has been done to you and to all of us, and by whom, and why, but pure righteous rage in your heart is a good starting point.”

“It’s just that—damn it all, things shouldn’t *be* like this!” Kicky sniffled, tears streaming down her face.

“And that tells me that you do indeed have a moral universe in you somewhere, in spite of the bad things you’ve done and in spite of the way you’ve lived your life,” said Ma. “That’s one of the things that make us different from these dark-skinned animals around us, Kristin. They glory in the filth of this world. They wallow in it like hogs in a trough. They love it, because like animals they don’t know it’s wrong. The muds have no knowledge of good or evil. They have only appetites to be sated. We know, and the Jews know as well, only the Jews worship that evil as their god. I think that was the secret of the forbidden fruit that Eve partook of in the Garden so long ago, that knowledge of right and wrong and the instinctive choice of right. For better or for worse, we ended up with that knowledge in our souls, and a hundred years of Jew lies and political correctness can’t eradicate it. In spite of everything, it’s still there in you, girl. You’re still good inside. The rest we can work on. The rest you can change.”

For the next hour, they simply sat around the kitchen table and talked. Kicky calmly went over her whole life, such as it was, from her childhood to the present, and with the exception of the events of the past couple of weeks, every bit of it was true. However deeply they had investigated her background,

she knew it would all check out. "I was going back to the life to try and make money so I could get out of Oregon, and take Ellie," she admitted. "But I knew it was only a temporary fix. It Takes A Village is everywhere, and whatever file they have on me and Ellie would catch up with us, eventually. Then I recognized your guy Lockhart in Jupiter's Den that day. I thought about it all day, and that night I was going to ask Lenny to introduce me, but he ended up dead. The rest you know. I don't know what else to tell you guys," she concluded. "If I'm going in that hole in the basement tonight, you'd better go get the shovel."

"I didn't think to bring one," said Wingo.

"So what happens now? What do you want me to do?" asked Kicky.

"The next step is that we will arrange for you to receive a copy of the old Party Handbook and the new NVA General Orders," said Ma. "The General Orders you need to memorize, and I do mean memorize, and then destroy the sheet of paper that they're printed on, because if you're caught with them in your possession it's a federal felony carrying a death sentence. No kidding. These tyrants are killing people now simply for having a single sheet of paper. You need to have the General Orders committed to memory not just for your own security, but because you will be expected to obey them. Always. Without fail."

"And not obeying the sheet of paper carries a death penalty from our side," concluded Kicky, careful to use the word *our.* "Okay, I get it."

"I hope you do, honey," said Ma with a sigh. "The Handbook you need to read because it explains a lot of other things you need to know, deeper and more complicated things. It explains the nature of the corrupt and satanic society in which we live, why it must be brought to an end, and how we will accomplish that. The big picture, so to speak. Copies of the Handbook are too large to be destroyed except at necessity, although if you think you or your premises are about to be searched, for God's sake hide it or destroy it. The Handbook is just as deadly dangerous to be caught with as the General Orders. Once we get a copy to you, you need to read it right away, because we can only let you have it for a few days and then we'll need to get it back from you to pass on to the next person."

"So when do I get to be a Northwest Volunteer?" asked Kicky.

"You don't, not at first. We need to take a good long look at you and see how you perform, like any job," said Wingo. "To begin with, you'll be what some crews call an asset, what others call a candidate member. If we were niggers we'd use the term wannabe, if we were the Mob we'd call you connected but not yet made. That taxicab of yours still intrigues us," he continued. "We

have people and materials that need to do a lot of moving around. We start you out simple. We arrange a lot of business for you, posing as street hails because calling your dispatcher and asking for you specifically would raise suspicion. You drive people and stuff from point A to point B, you dummy up your records to make sure it all looks copacetic on paper, and we'll pay you the meter and a good tip so you can actually make a nice legal income. If everything works out and you're looking good to us in a few months, we start giving you some more stuff to do."

"Okay, there is one thing I need to tell you guys right up front," said Kicky hesitantly. "I know this may make you suspicious of me, but I can't lie about it." She took up a deep breath. "I don't know if I can kill anybody. I know what I said about wanting revenge and all, and it's true, but I just don't know if I could point a gun at anybody and pull the trigger myself. I'm not saying I couldn't, you understand. Hell, maybe I can. But I just don't *know,* and if that's the kind of test you want to give me to become a member, I'm not sure I can pass it."

"You won't be asked to make your bones for a good while," said Wingo, "And even then, it will be voluntary on your part. This is not a regular war. Our people have to carry an immensely personal and crushing burden on their shoulders, and that goes far more so for the shooters and the bombers. Only a small number of people have the right combination of steady hand and nerves of steel, along with—oh, hell, I suppose you'd call it a lack of introspection, the ability to just do the job and then not worry about it afterwards. If they're not right for it, their conscience gets to eating at them, they start losing their nerve and going to pieces and muttering about finding Jesus and getting forgiveness. No offense, Ma."

"None taken," said Ma. "It does happen, and then there are problems all across the board. White people are the greatest killers the world has ever known, but we have in fact been subjected to that century of social engineering and behavior modification through propaganda that I mentioned earlier, and in a lot of our people, that predator gene does seem to have been bred out. The NVA understands that as badly as we need combat soldiers, it's just not a good idea to force somebody into that position. Kicky, we have got some women in this outfit that will shoot a man just as soon as look at him, if he is an enemy of our race. I know because I'm one of 'em. Maybe you'll be one of 'em one day, maybe you won't. You will never be asked to do anything that is beyond your strength. But you will find that as time goes on, and you come to understand who you are, that your strength is greater than you think. Now I reckon you and Thumper better be getting on back into town so you can finish your shift."

Kicky went back out to the cab. Wingo hung back. "What's the verdict?" he asked Ma.

She sighed. "That girl's got something eating at her, but from what we know of her, it could be any one of a dozen things. If we excluded everybody with secret sorrows and secret sins in their hearts, there wouldn't be too many Northwest Volunteers. I can't down-check her."

"Hardly a ringing endorsement," commented Wingo.

"We can't get so paranoid that we can't function," said Ma. "I'll tell Oscar I think you should try her out, just keep her at arm's length, which is what we do with new recruits anyway."

"Got it. Say hello to Carter and Rooney and Shane for me when you get back to Dundee," said Wingo as he headed out the door.

On the cab ride back, Wingo ran down for Kicky the procedures that would be used for providing her with her "special" fares, simple pickup codes via text message and cell phone for her rendezvous points with Volunteers needing transport, etc. As they neared the center of town, Kicky asked him, "What did Ma mean when she said you had a bug up your ass about women?"

Wingo sighed. "Same thing you probably feel about men. I've just been betrayed once too often. Nothing personal. I think that's the worst thing that the Jews have done to us, in a way. Made white men and women hate and fear and mistrust one another. I know it's wrong. I know all white women aren't like the one who sent me to prison, and I figure you're smart enough to know that all white men aren't like Lenny Gillis."

"Yeah, I know it in my mind," said Kicky. "It's just common sense that there have to be some good men left out there *somewhere.* But why the hell don't I ever meet any?"

"The mutual consensus seems to be that white women are all neurotic and treacherous bitches teetering on the edge of outright insanity, who view men as enemies to be overcome and humiliated and scored off, while white men are all overgrown adolescents who are still playing with toys at age forty, and who don't ever intend to grow up and take on any responsibility in life," said Wingo. "And you know, there is a hell of a lot of truth in both those assessments. That's what the Jews have done to us, may God damn them all to hell."

"Does the NVA have a lot of women members?" asked Kicky.

"Mmm, some. Look, I'm afraid I still presume most white women are write-offs, but I will say this: the few remaining exceptions have more *range* than men do. The good ones are better, the smart ones are smarter, the brave

ones are braver, and the vile ones are viler. Okay, tell you what, let's just leave that subject. I know it's rude, and there's no call to be rude."

"Well, I will say, you have yet to make any snide cracks about my lurid past," admitted Kicky. "That's encouraging."

"You've already said that you know where you've been," said Wingo with a shrug. "No call for me to remind you. Here, pull over on this corner. You'll probably start getting some of our special trips tomorrow night. One of the people you drive will give you a copy of the Handbook and the General Orders. I'll repeat what Ma told you, because this is important. Memorize the General Orders and then live by them. There's only ten of them, just like the Commandments, and like the Commandments they're just what they say they are: *orders,* not suggestions. You'll have a couple of days to read the Handbook, and then you need to give it back to the next comrade who will ask for its return. Do *not* show it to anybody else or allow yourself to be caught with it, Kicky. Possession of a copy of the Party Handbook or the Army General Orders is considered by the ZOG court system to be *prima facie* evidence of NVA membership or association, and gets you a short ride strapped to a gurney into a little room with a needle in it. We're not joking about that."

"I know you're not," She pulled over and he opened the door. She did not look back at him. "Hey, Thumper, do I get some way to contact you if I need to?"

"Not yet," he said. "No offense."

"None taken," she replied. "One more thing: if Ma had given you a thumbs down tonight, would you really have killed me?"

"Yes," he said. "Does that bother you?"

"It would have bothered me more if you'd lied about it," she said, looking back at him. "Have a good one."

"You too." Then he was gone. The car door hadn't been closed for twenty seconds before her phone vibrated. Kicky picked up another fare and didn't call in until twenty minutes and several vibrations later.

"Why the fuck didn't you call when I vibed?" yelled Lainie Martinez.

"They were obviously following me for some time without my knowing," said Kicky calmly. "Suppose they still are, and someone saw me open my cell phone as soon as the guy got out of my cab?"

Lainie sighed, but got a grip. "Yeah, okay, I can buy that. As soon as you get off work and check your cab in, we're picking you up at the bus stop and bringing you in here for a full debriefing. I want to know all about this Thumper character."

I hope you meet him some day, bitch, thought Kicky. *I hope he kills you before he kills me, so at least I get to watch you die.*

* * *

Kicky received the documents she had been promised from the NVA a week after her trip to Gresham to meet with Ma. In the interim she had picked up a dozen "special" passengers after she received code words as text messages on her phone, telling her to go to a specific airport terminal or one of the major downtown hotels. Apparently transportation was at a premium in the Portland NVA. The fare would then give Kicky the real place they wanted to go, and Kicky would make up a false destination for her trip sheet of approximately the same mileage and call it in to dispatch. In most cases she took them to a street corner somewhere in the greater Portland area, but sometimes it was an office building, a restaurant or a park or other public place. Also, these fares would sometimes appear out of nowhere at any time of the day or night and flag her down on the street, which she found unnerving. So far they were all men, youngish to middle-aged, and twice there had been two men. They engaged her in no conversation during the ride, paid their meter plus a generous tip, and exited the cab. They always identified themselves by giving her the code signal of first asking her to drive them to the St. Anthony's Fire Hot Sauce Company. "One of those bastards must think he has a sense of humor," snorted Lainie contemptuously when she and Kicky went over this part.

"How do they know where to find me?" asked Kicky in apprehension. "I don't even know I'm going to some of these pickup points, then I get there and drop off and all of a sudden there's a Hot Sauce trip. Are they following me or watching me, testing me to see if I'm being tailed by the cops?"

"Maybe. Then again, we've got a GPI on you, maybe they do as well," said Lainie. "They could have planted one on you somehow while you were in that house in Gresham talking to those two." This did wonders for Kicky's paranoia.

The police had done a quick surreptitious entry into the Gresham house the same night and dusted it for prints, but otherwise found absolutely nothing. "It's a vacant rental house," Jamal Jarvis reported back. "Looks like it's just a once-off drop. We can go rattle the agency handling it, Keystone Properties, but there's all kinds of ways the goots could have got hold of the keys, and if they have somebody on the inside at Keystone it might tip our hand if we show too much interest in that house."

"I agree," said Lainie. "Put Keystone in the raw file. At least we'll find out who Thumper and Ma are from their prints, if they've got records. Slowly but surely we're picking up little bits and pieces of the puzzle. Eventually they'll all come together." Immediately after the Gresham trip, of course, Martinez and Jarvis had talked to McCafferty about putting some kind of concealed fiber-optic camera and recording device in the taxi itself, to get pictures of the people Kicky picked up, but the problem was that Kicky was given a different vehicle every afternoon when she came in to the garage. Getting her assigned the same car to drive every night so it could be properly bugged would have entailed bringing her lustful dispatcher Achmed Singh in on the operation, and Martinez surprised Kicky by agreeing that a sexual harasser probably constituted a security risk. "He might try to take advantage of the situation even if he didn't know the whole story about what's going on," Lainie said. "Men only think with their cocks."

McCafferty looked through some technical manuals and came up with a field expedient, a fiber-optic wireless camera on a wafer-thin silicon circuit board designed to be inserted into cigarette packs, which could be slid in behind the cab license ID card with Kicky's photo on it that hung on the back seat so the passenger could see to whom he or she was entrusting their life in Portland traffic. There were several problems with this device, though, the first being that it was incredibly expensive, and the second that the Portland PB didn't have one. It could be acquired through Operation Searchlight's almost unlimited budget, of course, but that would take time and also draw the unwelcome attention of the federal law enforcement authorities, whose sources of information on what was going on in local police departments were just as thorough as its knowledge of the NVA was almost non-existent. A second problem with the little camera card was that its effective range was only a couple of miles. "Can't it be set to transmit to us through normal wireless phone channels, so as she moves around it will move as well from tower to tower?" asked Lainie.

"We can relay through cell sites or via satellite, yes," McCafferty told her. "But that blows the element of security. Cellular traffic is pretty much open transmission, and not only could anyone who knows what they're looking for track our surveillance cam down and monitor it, but there's always the chance it might bleed over into somebody's video conference or private videophone. You have to remember that while our applied technology improves every year, the infrastructure it has to work within hasn't been updated since the early 2000s. Far be it from me to suggest that we abandon our gallant little ally Israel, but the fact is that fighting four overseas wars at once at any

given time over the past generation has left the cupboard bare for all kinds of things here in America, like upgrading cell switching sites and opening new frequencies, not to mention the power grid and the highway system. The airwaves are as crowded as a termite colony, and just about anyone who's curious or malicious and who has the necessary skills and minimum gear can hack into any wireless transmission he wants. The only solution to that would be to encrypt on both ends, and even that doesn't work sometimes. We know the NVA has some pretty good techie geeks who have already hacked and cracked some pretty serious government traffic. Just how secure do you want this operation to be?"

"Tight as a drum and no careless loose ends," said Lainie. "Alright, I'll talk to the Chief and see if she can finesse this gizmo for us without alerting the FBI that we're running a major undercover, and when we get it we won't worry about it transmitting. We'll just set it to record and look at the footage at the end of our girl's shift every morning. We'll have the live transmission from her body mics so we'll know who to look for. But getting hold of the device will probably take some time."

It did, and it was in the interim between the ordering of the fiber optic card and its delivery that Kicky got a delivery of her own. She was parked at a cab rank outside the downtown Nordstrom on Broadway, when a shabby wino came up to her cab, and without being asked began to squeegee her windows with soapy water from a plastic bucket he carried. She rolled down the window and said "Piss off!" in irritation. The man set down his bucket, held his finger to his lips, and from underneath his coat he pulled a bulky manila envelope, which he thrust at her through the window. Without a word, he picked up the bucket and shambled off down the street. Kicky was by now becoming hardened to surprises during her shift. She said "Fucking homeless squeegee street person!" clearly out loud, speaking to the listeners in the operations center whose ears she carried over her shoulders. She slid the envelope into her handbag and with immense self-discipline, she waited until she got home at the end of her shift to take it out.

She knew that her trailer had been wired for sound. ("For your protection as much as for our information," Lainie had assured her in an oily voice.) She did not know if they had wired it with mini-cameras of any kind for video, and she did not know whether they had complied with her insistence that they not bug her bathroom. She piled a load of dirty clothes into a plastic laundry basket, put her handbag on top, then left the trailer and walked about 50 yards down the street to the trailer park's self-serve laundromat, which was open twenty-four hours a day to those residents who had keys.

It was now almost two in the morning, and the cinderblock building was deserted. There was a security camera in the laundromat, but Kicky had no idea if it was part of the police surveillance on her, or whether it even worked. There was a small alcove behind the row of dryers with a small table and a fluorescent light overhead. Kicky put her load of clothes into the washer and turned on the machine. Then she went to this alcove, sat on the table, and opened the envelope the wino had given her. She knew that if she were caught reading the forbidden material without turning it in to her handlers, her daughter was gone and she herself was off to prison, possibly to Death Row if the police decided to play it by the book and charge her with possession of terrorist literature. But already, Kicky was getting deeply fed up, and she was beginning to rebel. Anything she could withhold from her captors and handlers was a small personal victory.

Inside the envelope she found a blue plastic-bound document of about sixty single-sided photocopied pages, and as she opened it a single folded sheet of paper fell out. She picked it up and studied it. There were ten short paragraphs on the page. Kicky tried to wrap her mind around the fact that the mightiest empire the world had ever known would use all of its power and resources to put her to death if they knew she had this sheet of paper in her hand, and if they knew she had read these ten paragraphs.

NORTHWEST VOLUNTEER ARMY
GENERAL ORDERS

General Order Number One: The Army Council of the Northwest Volunteer Army is hereby constituted as the governing body of the Northwest American Republic. The Army Council declares a state of martial law, which shall continue until such time as the sovereignty and independence of the Republic is established, and authority can be transferred to the government thereof, and a State President pro tem and National Convention can be securely established under the provisions of the draft constitutional document published in the Second Edition of the Party Handbook dated January 2007.

General Order Number Two: All officers and other ranks of the Northwest Volunteer Army, and all persons acting under the orders of the NVA, or acting in any way in assistance to or in furtherance of the strategic and tactical objectives of the NVA, or of the provisional government of the Northwest American Republic, are

herewith fully and permanently immunized from any and all legal prosecution or procedure for any and all actions undertaken in good faith toward the establishment of the Northwest American Republic as a sovereign nation.

General Order Number Three: No officer or other rank of the Northwest Volunteer Army shall voluntarily surrender himself or any other personnel, weapons, or equipment under his command to the forces of the Occupation while he or she still has the means and capability to resist and to continue operations.

General Order Number Four: No Jew or other non-white person, no homosexual, and no white person engaged in interracial sexual activity shall reside within the boundaries of the Northwest American Republic, or within any area of NVA operations. NVA field commanders shall deal with violators of this General Order at their discretion.

General Order Number Five: No officer or other rank of the Northwest Volunteer Army shall expropriate, confiscate, or seize any money, goods, materials, supplies, weapons, ammunition, vehicles, or other items of value, except that such goods or materials shall either be immediately paid for in cash or through presentation of an official receipt, such receipts where possible estimating the value of the goods taken, which receipts shall be honored for payment at a later date by the authorities of the Northwest American Republic.

General Order Number Six: No officer or other rank of the Northwest Volunteer Army shall expropriate, confiscate, or seize any money, goods, materials, etc. for his or her own personal use or profit.

General Order Number Seven: The provisional government of the Northwest American Republic demands the complete and unambiguous loyalty and cooperation of all white residents of the NAR, and of all areas of operation of the NVA, and will accept nothing less. Any and all collaboration, cooperation, informing, public incitement against the Republic or its armed forces, or giving

of aid and comfort to the Occupation authorities is prohibited, and will be dealt with by NVA field commanders at their discretion.

General Order Number Eight: All NVA field commanders and personnel will exercise every reasonable precaution to preserve the lives, liberty, and freedom of action of all NVA officers and Volunteers, including their own. They will use every possible procedure and stratagem to maintain their commands intact, keep them in the field, and keep them fighting, consistent with the achievement of the Army's military objectives.

General Order Number Nine: No officer or other rank of the Northwest Volunteer Army shall conduct any negotiations, correspondence, or other contact with the Occupation authorities, civil or military, with a view toward ending hostilities, laying down arms, or surrendering any NVA command without the approval and participation of the Army Council.

General Order Number Ten: For the duration of hostilities and until this General Order is rescinded by authority of the Army Council, no officer or other rank of the Northwest Volunteer Army shall consume any alcoholic beverage or consciousness-altering drug, with the exception of medical pharmaceuticals administered on the order of a doctor or medical officer, or in a medical emergency situation.

Well, that's one way to keep me off the damned crack pipe, thought Kicky. Oddly enough in view of her family history of drunkenness, Kicky had never experienced any real problem with booze, possibly because she dreaded turning out like May, and so the no-alcohol part of General Order Number Ten didn't bother her at all. She read the General Orders again, and again, and then again a fourth time. Kicky had always been a quick study in school any time she knew that she would be tested on something, or on those rare occasions when she was actually interested in something that was being taught. She closed her eyes and went over the ten General Orders in her mind. She was sure she had them right, and she then read them through a fifth time just to confirm she had them down pat. She did. She tore the paper up into the tiniest pieces she could, went into the small bathroom, and flushed them down the toilet. Then she went back and picked up the Party Handbook.

There was no table of contents or title page, and the text simply started at Chapter One: Race. She read:

> Race is *the* North American issue. It always has been, ever since one of Columbus' sailors shot the first Indian with a crude matchlock musket back in 1492. Every problem that America faces today, every crisis of the economy or of the spirit, is in some form or another eventually traceable back to the problem of race.
>
> Every civilization, every culture, every major historical achievement of mankind is the product of the racial personality of those who created that civilization. Destroy a race and not only living beings are destroyed, but an immense hole is ripped in the entire fabric of this planet's existence. Destroy the most intelligent and creative and dynamic race of all mankind, the Aryan, and damage has been inflicted on the human species that can never be recovered or repaired.
>
> The racial issue can be boiled down to one very simple question: Who does the world belong to? More immediately, who does the continent of North America belong to? Does it belong to the Aryan peoples of Europe who settled this land after braving a perilous ocean voyage to reach it, tilled its soil and grew crops, built homes and communities here, created its legal and social and political institutions, created everything we recognize today as America? Or does it belong to the various black and brown races of the Third World, who have contributed nothing except sporadic physical labor? Whose sole claim to the land is the mere fact that they happen to be here, and who have caused immense damage through their anti-social behavior?
>
> The idea that we are supposed to share this land in some kind of grotesque, squalid multi-racial Babylon is simply stupid. The mud races have done nothing to earn citizenship or rights of residence here that is in any way compensatory for the immense damage they have caused. The black man in particular has contributed very little to America except physical labor. His contribution is on a level with that of the horse—valuable in a limited way, but like the horse, the black man is now obsolete and has been since the development of agricultural machinery and the internal combustion engine. There is no moral or economic or social justification for keeping the black man around any longer, and many pressing reasons for his removal.

The same goes for the masses of Third World immigrants. They are contributing nothing at all that we really need, except cheap labor for multinational corporations, which keeps white wages low.

History demonstrates quite clearly that multi-racial empires do not prosper, and in the long run do not survive. Every society that has ever attempted the multi-racial or even multi-ethnic experiment has failed miserably, from ancient Rome down through the Hapsburg monarchy of Austria-Hungary, to the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia of the last century. America will not survive the curse of multi-racialism any more than those other societies did. There is no magical law of the universe exempting North America from the basic principles of human biopolitics. One of those basic principles is that racial purity strengthens a society; whereas diversity weakens and eventually destroys it. Look at the few remaining stable and prosperous countries that exist today: Japan, Switzerland, Singapore, Taiwan, and Korea. All of them are racially homogenous, not "diverse."

No nation is born diverse. Diversity is indeed the antithesis of nationhood. Nations arise in large part from their very racial, religious, and cultural unity and uniqueness. Diversity is an unnatural as well as an unhealthy condition that can only afflict states in national decline. The multicultural, and especially the multiracial state, carries in its makeup the seeds of certain national destruction. All multicultural nations must by definition be in a state of political, moral, economic and social decay. Greed and corruption invariably characterize the government of the multiracial state, coupled with oppressive measures directed against its citizens to keep them in harness with unnatural partners. Lies and deceit are the stock in trade of multicultural media, politicians and educational institutions. Democracy, a flawed system to begin with, is perverted into an instrument of disastrous cultural and biological leveling. From democracy steps forth the cruelest of tyrants.

In modern times diversity is instituted from the top down as an élitist ruling-class tool used to play one or more racial or ethnic groups against one another. The ensuing cultural melée serves the political designs, economic goals and power needs of the élitist rulers and their sponsors while destroying everything worthwhile in the affected society. In the twenty-first century, multiculturalism is being used as a hammer to forge an artificially created, unintelligent,

compliant brown-skinned people who will compose the obedient state of the New World Order. As a weapon of post-modern political warfare, multiculturalism has few equals, which explains its use currently against all of Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Deliberate fragmentation of these nations into racially diverse, politically disharmonious elements and special interest groups, and the resultant loss of national identity and purpose, are requirements of the New World Order.

Who will compose that New World Order? An Anglo-Zionist ruling class, extensively Jewish and discreetly homosexual, consisting of an economic hierarchy of wealth and conformity that replaces the natural hierarchy of talent, courage, and virtue. A force that views countries and the people who live in them first as economic targets to be exploited, and second as military targets to be destroyed and gutted of assets if they resist.

The mere fact that the black and brown races happen to be in North America, through whatever accident of history or violation of immigration law that came about, does not give them the right to a free ride on the white man's back for their entire lives. Yet this is, essentially, the demand of the multicultural idea, that people with dark skins be given goods, services, benefits, and advantages that they have not only done nothing to earn, but that they do not know how to use properly and will only destroy and contaminate. The leveling in a multicultural, diverse society is *never* upward, always *downward*. Racial integration is like mixing horse manure and ice cream: it does improve the manure somewhat, but it doesn't do much for the ice cream.

We have been taught by our lords and masters to view "racism" as evil and wrong. It is not. Racism is in fact the purest expression of patriotism. We live today in a world where old ideas of geopolitics are being replaced by biopolitics. Racism is right because racism is the will of Nature. Racists are doing the work of Nature. They are aiding Nature by helping to protect the most important of Nature's creations: the different races that Nature has evolved over many millennia. Racism is Nature's way of trying to protect her own creations. Thus racism aids and encourages further evolution—that is, it aids the development of the separate races that exist. The truth about so-called antiracism is that it is unnatural, unhealthy and dangerous. Antiracism actively encourages the destruction of

> Nature. It is retrogressive and anti-evolutionary. The society that is based upon such stupid ideas is an unnatural, unhealthy society doomed sooner or later to be destroyed, because such a society will destroy Nature itself. We human beings are Nature made manifest, and we are subject to its laws just as much as are other forms of life. If we forget this truth and continue with our race-mixing, we shall perish.

My God! thought Kicky in wonder, trying to understand and assimilate the wild heresy before her, which contradicted everything she had ever been taught in her life. *These NVA people actually expect me to THINK!* It was a strange sensation. For the first time in her adult life, someone was trying to reach her, to teach her something they thought she needed to know for her own good instead of something that would serve the interest of the rich people and empowered minorities. For the very first time in her adult life, someone was acknowledging that race even existed, telling her it was all right to think and feel in terms of race. The very idea that anyone seriously expected her to sit down and think about something instead of buy something, stunned her. Suddenly a thought arose in her mind unbidden. *These are the only people I've ever met who don't want to fuck me, in one way or another.*

She liked it.

IX

Driving For The Boys

My voice shall sound as you do prompt mine ear,
And I will stoop and humble my intents
To your well-practis'd wise directions . . .

Henry the Fourth, Part Two—Act V, Scene 2

The seemingly senseless taxi runs for the NVA continued. On two occasions Kicky carried packages, one a taped-up cardboard box that had once held a case of Heineken long-necks, and the other a small suitcase, both of which she placed in the trunk of her cab on orders from the unknown man who met her. She took the suitcase to the bus station, where another man a little older than herself, casually dressed, came up to her, held out his hand for the keys, opened the trunk, removed the suitcase, and handed her back the keys wrapped in a $100 bill. "You have something else for me, comrade?" he asked her.

Kicky didn't dare leave the Handbook lying around in her trailer, and she had been carrying it in her shoulder bag, awaiting a request to return it. She pulled it out and handed it to him without a word, still in the original envelope. He silently took it and disappeared into the station. She had hoped that no one listening to her on the other end would pick up on the casual remark, but she underestimated Lainie Martinez's acuity. She was picked up at the end of her shift by an unmarked detective car and taken in to the Justice Center, taken to an interrogation room, and seated behind a metal table bolted to the floor. Martinez came in with a digital recorder, and without a word she walked over and swiftly handcuffed one of Kicky's wrists to a u-bolt set into

the table just below the edge. Ignoring her protests, Lainie sat down, took out a small digital recorder, and played back the brief conversation outside the bus station. "What was that about, Kicky?" she demanded coldly.

"I gave him back the Party Handbook they gave me," replied Kicky, looking her in the eye. "They gave me the General Orders too, and I tore them up and flushed them. You people have enough on me already. I'm not giving you an excuse to frame me even more than you have already by letting you catch me with illegal documents on me."

"I see," said Lainie. "I'm saddened that you somehow still seem to feel that you are in control of this situation Kristin, but not surprised." She got up, walked to the door, and gestured. Two people entered wearing unmarked blue serge coveralls; one a large man with varnish-colored skin who seemed to be some kind of Polynesian and the second a thin, middle-aged white woman. The man was carrying a metal suitcase and the woman a black bag like a doctor's kit. "Kristin, these are special technicians who work for us. They explain things. Right now, they're going to explain to you, in terms that you cannot fail to understand, what happens to white crack whores who try to play games with the Portland Police Bureau. Are you familiar with what is known as the Dershowitz Protocols?" She looked at the two blank-faced creatures in coveralls. "Don't leave any visible marks," she said, and then she left the room.

The metal suitcase turned out to contain a large battery and some electrical apparatus. The black bag contained, among other things, several hypodermic syringes. For some time afterwards Kicky screamed, and screamed, and screamed, but no one came to help her. The final syringe contained some kind of substance that made her feel hideously, gut-wrenchingly sick, like the worst withdrawal she had ever experienced multiplied by ten. They left her lying on the floor behind the table naked, jerking spasmodically and dry-heaving wildly, her body still arching from the electrical burns and the acid injections in several places that would leave no visible marks when she had her clothes on. She thought she was having a heart attack, that she was going to die, and in her agony she even tried to pray to God to receive her soul, but she passed out instead. A few hours later, Lainie Martinez came back, leaned over and gave her another injection that woke her from her semi-comatose state and seemed to ease the pain a little, and said to her, "Get dressed. As a further punishment, you will not see your child again, not for one month. Fuck with me ever again, over the slightest thing, and that's the end." For the time being at least, Kicky was completely broken and cowed. There were no more acts of defiance.

McCafferty was able to get his fiber optic camera card. It was duly installed snugly behind Kicky's license, and for a couple of weeks she simply continued her intermittent taxi runs for unknown persons. She said little to her special passengers, nor did they ever initiate any conversation. One day Kicky got off her shift a little after midnight. She went to her usual bus stop, and as she stood there waiting under the streetlight Jimmy Wingo suddenly appeared at her side out of nowhere. He was wearing blue trousers, a baseball cap, and a gray mechanic's service tunic with the name "Bob" embroidered in red over the left shirt pocket. "We've got something for you," he said. A nondescript older model Buick pulled up at the stop. "Get in," he said with a gesture toward the car.

Kicky briefly considered turning and running, but she fought down her panic and got into the back seat. Wingo got in beside her and the car pulled away from the curb, heading south. She recognized the man who was driving as one of her previous Hot Sauce trips, but she hadn't gotten too good a look at him before, nor did she really do so now. In the passing glow from streetlights and oncoming headlights she saw that he was tall and broad-shouldered, with a baseball cap similar to Thumper's on his head. "What's up?" she asked Wingo in a voice she had to battle to keep casual.

"The company commander wants to see you," said Wingo. Kicky felt the vibration in her cell phone, and she knew the police in the task force room were listening in.

She didn't ask what the company commander wanted to see her for; she was learning quickly. "So you're Bob today?" she asked casually.

"If today's Tuesday, I must be Bob," he agreed.

"Today's Thursday," she said.

"Then I'm Rumpelstiltskin. What did you think of the Handbook?"

"It said everything I have always thought, but was afraid to say," she answered truthfully. "Hell, afraid even to think. When I read some of it I knew that I had always felt the same way, but I never actually sat down and thought it all out. I was scared to, as silly as that sounds."

"ZOG doesn't want us thinking," said Wingo. "They know that the most effective censorship and thought control is what they can get people to impose on themselves. It's the most effective form of control. George Orwell once wrote that orthodoxy is unconsciousness. That's been the goal of a century of careful social and psychological conditioning, to render white people unconscious of who they are, to make them so blind they can't see what's right in front of them. Orwell also said it requires intense concentration every day to see what's right in front of your nose. Or words to that effect. I forget."

"You must have done a lot of reading in Angola," she said.

"Not really. Actually, believe it or not, I was an English lit major in college," he told her.

"Pretty rad tattoos for a college boy," remarked Kicky curiously.

"Some of those are from prison, some later," said Wingo. "I had to register as a hate offender when I got out, so college and any kind of so-called normal life were no longer an option. I had no choice but to live the life ZOG chose for me, so I figured in for a penny, in for a pound and I decided to get some body art to look the part. Stupid decision, actually. Tattoos are identifying marks." Kicky fell silent, looking out the window as the car got onto Interstate 5 and headed south. She knew she should try to encourage conversation for the benefit of her listeners, and she was terrified of another session with the needles and the electrodes if she displeased them by showing what they deemed insufficient enthusiasm for her work. But she was beginning to feel stirrings of deep guilt about betraying this man and the others. Other than occasional casual references to murdering her, they had treated her with courtesy and respect. It was the law of the United States that had tortured her with electric shock and acid.

They pulled off the interstate and onto one of the many four lane highway strip mall sections of Portland, and then into the parking lot of an all-night Burger Barn. Only the drive-through window was open. Wingo got out of the car and motioned for the girl to follow; the driver remained behind the wheel. They went to the employees' entrance in the rear. Wingo knocked twice, then knocked twice again. Someone inside somewhere buzzed the door and Wingo pulled it open. They went down a short corridor past a room on the left full of rolling stainless steel racks on castors heaped high with buns in plastic bags, while on the right was a walk-in freezer with a thick steel door. Wingo opened the door to a small manager's office. A middle-aged, round-figured white woman looked up at them from the desk, then silently got up and left the room, carrying a sheaf of papers that looked like invoices with her. "Have a seat," said Wingo. "Not behind the desk." They both sat down in plastic chairs. Kicky found herself studying a flyer taped to the wall, detailing how healthy and nutritious all Burger Barn's menu items allegedly were, and how many calories and grams of fat were in each product.

The door opened, and a slim young man dressed in jeans and a tan polo shirt walked in and sat down behind the desk. He looked even younger than Kicky, almost like a high school kid. His auburn hair was clipped short and neat, not exactly a military style buzz cut, but close. His face was slim and angular, his nose sharp, his lips thin, and his green eyes glittered like ice

crystals. He wore a Browning High Power automatic on his hip in a clip-on holster. "I'm Lieutenant Billy Jackson," he said without preamble. He did not offer to shake hands. "I'm the officer commanding A Company, First Portland Brigade. I am telling you my real name instead of using a code name because I'm a wanted man by the Zionist authorities and my picture has been all over the media, not to mention every post office wall in the Northwest, so it would be pointless to try to conceal my identity from you. Miss McGee, I have spoken to many of the comrades you have been assisting with transport over the past few weeks, and they have nothing negative to report about your performance. You have been interviewed by this comrade here, uh, Comrade Bob, and also by a lady from up north. You have now read the NVA's General Orders and the Party Handbook. I'm asking you now if you are prepared to proceed to further training and also assist in active service operations on a higher level."

"Yes," said Kicky with a nod. "I mean, yes sir."

"Pay dirt!" hissed Lainie back in the Operation Searchlight task force room, headphone to her ear. "Our first major terror suspect!" She gave a thumbs up to McCafferty and Jarvis.

"Jackson's wanted for what? Twenty murders?" asked McCafferty grimly.

"And as many bombings," replied Lainie with a nod. "Not to mention treason due to his part in the Coeur d'Alene insurrection against the United States."

"Muthafukka!" was Jamal Jarvis' contribution to the conversation.

"I understand that at your last conference with us you expressed reservations about killing people," Jackson went on, his voice quiet and polite. "We will respect those reservations, but you understand that this will rather limit your usefulness to the cause. I'd like to ask if you've thought any more about it, and if you are prepared to overcome these reservations for the greater good of our people and for a future in freedom for yourself and your daughter."

"I think so," said Kicky with a nod. "I've realized that if I am a part of the NVA I bear moral responsibility for everything the Army does, and I can't escape that. I also know if the feds catch me they'll kill me or torture me, and it won't make any difference what I did or didn't do. I think some cops just get off on torturing people." (This last sentence was directed at Lainie Martinez.) "If I'm going to do the time, I might as well do the crime."

"You're sure?" asked Wingo.

"You mean will I freeze up when the time comes for me to pull the trigger? I'm pretty sure I won't," Kicky told them. "Now I am, anyway."

"We won't start you with a hit," said Jackson. "However, we will need you to take a bit more involved role. There have been some tactical developments, which demand we move newbies up a little bit faster than we would normally like. There have been some arrests and E&Es and other losses recently, and we find ourselves in need of more people for certain assignments—more dangerous assignments. This is a bit rushed, and I would have liked to use you on more support-related jobs first to bring you up gradually, but we're a tad short of button men now, and that means we need them all shooting, not driving. Accordingly, we need new wheelmen, or in your case wheelpersons, to drive selected comrades on terminations, corporal punishment missions, expropriations, and possibly some EOD attacks."

"EOD?" asked Kicky.

"Explosive ordnance delivery," said Jackson. "We need you to drive for other Volunteers who will be shooting people, beating people, pulling off armed robberies and planting bombs."

Kicky gulped. "Yes, sir, I'm willing, but won't my cab be kind of conspicuous for that purpose? I mean, what if some eyewitness gets the number?"

"We'll provide the vehicles. Actually, we'll provide other cabs in some cases," said Jackson. "Brigade will be boosting some from Excelsior and Yellow and Checker as well, take them to one of our chop shops and have them re-detailed every time someone goes out, change the number and the ads on the back bumper rack, that kind of thing. Vans are still best for most jobs, of course, but the cops are getting wise to vans and pickup trucks. Also, we need more boy-girl couples. They're starting to profile and pull over any car or truck they see with two or three white men in it. We need to start varying our transport on active service missions with everything from cabs to motorcycles to fake ambulances, you name it. We may decide to move you completely underground, if we feel you may have been recognized or compromised in some way. I trust you're not overly attached to your career with Excelsior Cab?"

"Oh, no," said Kicky with a rueful chuckle. The dispatcher Singh had been getting unpleasantly importunate of late. Someone had informed him that Kicky was a pro, or at least an ex-pro, and he was becoming surlier over her refusal of his offers of cash for sex.

"What about your daughter?" asked Wingo.

"My Mom will keep her," said Kicky.

"Indefinitely?" asked Jackson.

"Actually, I think she kind of wants to," Kicky told them with a sigh. "She thinks I'm a bad mother, and I guess I am. Mom doesn't know I'm with

the NVA, she'd probably have hysterics if she did, but she senses something's going on with me and she thinks I'm back on the streets or on the crack pipe again. As horrible as it sounds, that will explain to her why I keep strange hours and only show up every so often to see Ellie."

"You'll be able to make it up to them both later, in a free land, when they understand," said Jackson, not unkindly. "You'll still be doing a lot of routine driving around town on our kind of taxi service, but we'll need you constantly on call, and as I said, the very instant we suspect you may have been compromised, we pull you under. You may have to abandon your trailer at a moment's notice. Anything keeping you there?"

"In that shithole? Nothing at all," said Kicky, shaking her head. *Maybe I can get the hell out from under some of their bugs and surveillance,* she thought.

"Okay. For the time being we need you to keep your job at Excelsior, but you must keep us apprised of your work schedule so we only call on you when you're off duty." He took out a cheap pre-paid cell phone from the desk drawer. "I am going to give you this, so you can contact us in the event of any kind of change in your schedule or anything else you think we need to know. Make sure you keep the battery charged. There are three numbers pre-programmed into this phone's memory. Use any one of the three, never the same one twice in a row. You will probably get a different person every time. When someone answers, you will identify yourself as Jodie. If a man answers, it will be your friend Bob here, even if it isn't him. If a woman answers it will be your friend Melissa. You will make a few casual comments about the weather or about the new shoes you bought or something innocuous of the kind, and then you will mention that you won't be able to make it for some unspecified date or social function because your schedule has changed and you have to work such and such a time on such and such a day. Do not stay on this phone more than three minutes, max. Got all this so far?"

"Got it," said Kicky.

"Bingo!" cried Lainie jubilantly back in the task force operations room. "At last, we've got our first uplink!"

"Keep this phone with you at all times, somewhere you can hear the ring," Jackson continued. "If we text you with the words *Burger Barn* we want to set up a meet with you and probably give you an assignment that will take some hours, so come prepared to go into action. You will have several meeting places, each one of which will be linked to a number. Burger Barn One means to go to a certain place, Burger Barn Two means a second place, etc. When you get such text messages you will drop whatever you're doing and get to the meeting place as soon as you can. These meeting points will

change regularly, and you're going to have to remember a lot. Bob, on your way back, go over all of this with her again, and then again. Make sure she has all this by heart."

"She will," Wingo assured him.

"I don't have a car of my own," said Kicky. "I'll have to get to the meeting point by bus."

"That has to change," said Jackson. "You'll need transport. Stand by that phone and we'll get you a car in a couple of days, a clean one, legitimate pink slip and license plate. When we call you, you will come to the meeting point in your own car and switch to one that we have assigned to the mission, which you will drive. There will be one to three other comrades going with you. One of them will be in charge. You drive wherever the team leader tells you to drive and do exactly what he or possibly she tells you to do, nothing more and nothing less. You may also have to escape and evade a police pursuit if anything goes wrong, which is one reason I'm a little reluctant to use someone as relatively untried as yourself. But needs must be met, and everyone has to start somewhere. It won't be anything too heavy at first. Bluntly put, we don't want to give you too much to fuck up, if you do fuck up. We need to see how you handle yourself under pressure." *Brother, if only you knew!* thought Kicky to herself. "Do you understand all this, comrade?"

"I understand," said Kicky.

"Any questions?" asked Jackson.

"Do I get a gun to carry?" asked Kicky.

"Do you have a personal firearm?" asked Jackson.

"No, I'm not legally allowed to own one," she told him. "Convicted felon."

Jackson rubbed his chin. "Mmmm, right now you're not an actual Volunteer, you're an asset, and if everyone has done their jobs properly the police shouldn't know about you. If you get caught at a checkpoint or some other casual street search and you're strapped, that could simply land you back in prison with no benefit to the Army. Don't pack, for now. On assignment you will be issued a handgun in case you need to use one, which you will then return at the conclusion of the mission."

"Okay," said Kicky. "Look, at the risk of sounding too curious, just when do I cease being an asset and become a Northwest Volunteer? Is it like the Mafia? Do I have to make my bones and swear a blood oath or something?"

Jackson allowed himself a wintry smile. "Actually, we do call a first kill making our bones. But it's pretty simple. No blood oath or mysticism. When I say you're in, you're in. Anything else?"

"Guess that about covers it," said Kicky with a nod. "Covers it, sir."

Jackson stood up. "Wait for our call and we'll get that car for you." Without another word he walked out of the room.

Back in the task force room Lainie shook her head in wonder and concern. "Methodical. Organized. Efficient. That whole meeting lasted what? Ten minutes? Do you know any of our own people who can conduct a briefing and get as much done in that time?"

"We're getting an idea of what we're up against," said McCafferty. "I thought that was the point of the whole operation."

"It is," said Martinez. "And the answers we're getting are shaping up pretty scary."

Kicky found Lainie Martinez and McCafferty waiting for her at her trailer when she got in at about two thirty in the morning. Lainie simply held out her hand and Kicky handed over the wireless phone the NVA had given her. McCafferty pulled an electronic meter of some kind out of his briefcase and ran it over the phone. "That looks like something out of Star Trek," commented Kicky.

"I don't want to risk taking this cheap thing apart and maybe breaking it," said McCafferty. "First thing we need to do is to see if this model came with a GPI either installed already, or if the goots installed one to keep track of you. Nope, no satellite signal. Looks like your new racist buddies actually trust you, Ms. McGee." *Unlike you,* thought Kicky.

"Then the more fools they," said Lainie. "Punch up those numbers, Andy." He did so.

"They're masked. Hang on." He diddled with the meter and ran the rod over it again. She pulled out her notebook. "Can you read the numbers?"

"Yes. Here they are." He called out three telephone numbers that Lainie jotted down. "Damn! I recognize the series. They're all throwaways like this, three different models."

"Not unexpected. Can they be monitored?"

"With what we've got? Maybe," said McCafferty. "Portland PB can access local cell sites, of course, but there's so much traffic that in order to pick these three phones out of a city this size every time they activate, it will require a fairly complex program. I can set that up, and we can do it automatically and have the data fed into our computer system whenever they use the phones, but that would mean outside access for our system, which you said you don't want. Or I can just have the data recorded on CD, and that will help us track them, but we won't have any real-time tracking capability and by the time we get the info it might be hours old. The other alternative would be to have

full time manual monitoring, which will mean more people, three shifts of them for 24/7 coverage."

"Dammit!" muttered Martinez. "There's too many cooks in this soup already."

"Should I even bother to suggest bringing in the FBI and using their much more advanced satellite monitoring systems, which can provide real-time coverage on any wireless phone anywhere in the world?" asked McCafferty.

"You should not!" said Lainie sharply.

"Okay, so we stay downmarket," replied McCafferty with a shrug.

"I'll have to think about this," said Lainie. "We need to get something set up by the time they call to give Kristin her new car. When you get that vehicle, Kristin, we will tell you where to bring it so we can fully examine it, track the paperwork, and of course get it fully wired for sound and video. Don't let the thought of screwing with us on that even cross your mind."

"I got one question," said Kicky. "These guys are asking me now to go out and participate with them in committing crimes. I thought you people were supposed to be into preventing that sort of thing?"

"Don't be a smart-ass!" snapped Lainie.

"No, I mean it. Suppose I'm driving them around one day or night, and I see they're about to kill somebody? What the hell am I supposed to do?" demanded Kicky heatedly.

"We can't make an omelette without breaking eggs," replied Lainie. She simply hoped Chief Linda Hirsch would agree with that assessment.

* * *

"It's a matter of prioritizing," said Linda Hirsch later that afternoon, after Lainie and Jarvis had played the recording of the Burger Barn meeting for her and explained the increased stakes in Operation Searchlight. "I agree with your views on the matter, Sergeant Martinez. There is precedent. Undercover operatives have always been required to participate in a certain amount of crime in order to maintain their cover and credibility with the criminals they were infiltrating. However, most departments have always drawn the line at homicide. Most state and local departments, anyway. Federal is a different matter."

"The question here, Chief, is do we prevent one homicide and most likely lose the opportunity to prevent hundreds and maybe even thousands of homicides down the line?" asked Lainie. "So far as I am aware, we have achieved the only successful penetration of the NVA by any law enforcement agency in the country. I don't need to spell out the implications for you, but

surely we have to understand that given the terrorist nature of the organization we are targeting, sooner or later they're going to commit acts of terrorism with our operative present. It's inevitable. It's what they do. A drug undercover has to be present when drugs are sold and consumed, and sometimes use drugs themselves. A hate group undercover has to be present and participate when hateful speech is uttered, and do so convincingly themselves."

"How long do you figure before this woman is called upon to participate in an actual murder?" asked Hirsch.

"Judging from what Jackson said last night, it could be any time, and the way they've got it set up, we won't have much advance warning," Lainie told her. "So what do we do? We can track her through the GPI we have on her, and maybe move in fast enough to wherever the scene is to stop the homicide and take out the NVA hit team. But that would be all. Right now, with what we have, it would stop there. We don't know where Wingo or Jackson or Lockhart go to earth, or where any of these other people we've overheard and monitored are. That may change, if we can just keep this girl under long enough to get a more complete read on them, but right now we couldn't even pick any of them up."

"Wingo?" asked Chief Hirsch.

Jarvis spoke up. "James Reynard Wingo, age 30, born in Thibodeaux, Louisiana. We've identified him as the man called Thumper and also Bob. His reference to Angola tipped us off, plus we found his prints in the house in Gresham. He did a four-year stretch for committing an act motivated by racial and ethnic or homophobic hatred." Jamal could speak correct legalese English when required to do so in court, or in the presence of his superiors or white women he wanted to impress in bars.

"What act?" asked Hirsch.

"He assaulted a gay man who made sexual advances to him in a bar in Baton Rouge," said Martinez. "His domestic partner, a young woman, turned him in and claimed the $20,000 state reward for hatecrime information from the Louisiana Human Rights Commission."

"Bet he really enjoyed showering with all the fellas in Angola prison," laughed Hirsch in coarse merriment.

"Actually, he became a member of the Aryan Brotherhood prison gang, and he is believed to have committed his first murder in Angola, the stabbing of a black inmate," said Jarvis. "He skated on that one because the prison authorities couldn't get any witnesses to testify against him."

"Ugh! Another one of the NVA's charming revolutionary heroes," growled Hirsch. "Sergeant, there is a whole gang of that kind of man operating in

our city, and they're killing people every day. We have to roll up their whole organization, and it looks like there's not going to be any pretty way to do it. But we must prioritize. The first thing you have to clearly understand is that I know nothing about any impending homicides."

"Of course not, ma'am," said Martinez neutrally.

"I mean that, Sergeant. Neither of you is to tell me anything about any such impending event, now or ever. As important as this operation is, I'm not letting you get my *tuchas* in a sling over this. You guys will be reaping a good many of the rewards, so you get the privilege of taking the risk. This is political dynamite. I don't have to tell you what will happen if it should get out that we are turning a blind eye to NVA killings and bombings to protect an informant. The public won't get it. Our control of the news media is still by no means as complete as we would wish, and there is always the chance of a leak to some reporter who cares more about a Pulitzer than about duty to his or her country. I will rely on your ingenuity and your no doubt acute political sense to prevent any violent acts against, er, the more socially significant and influential members of the community."

"You mean it's okay if these racist muthafukkas gun down a few brothuhs on the street, but if they go after any rich white folks we gots to stop them?" demanded Jarvis heatedly.

"That's exactly what I mean, Sergeant," said Hirsch calmly. "Don't tell me you've gotten as far as you have and yet you don't know how America works, Jarvis. Under our wonderful liberal democratic system, all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

"Oddly enough, the NVA seem to have a penchant for quoting George Orwell as well, ma'am," said Lainie, bemused.

"George who?" asked Jarvis in confusion.

"I believe what the Chief is trying to say, Jamal, is that the NVA sees America as based on race, when in fact it is and always has been based on class and wealth," said Lainie.

"And that means exactly what?" asked Jarvis suspiciously.

"It's actually good news. It means anyone can buy their way in. But for us, it means we let Kicky and her friend kill a few brothers and a few muchachos, but not any rich white people," explained Lainie. Before Jarvis could protest she went on, "But Chief, I think it has to be a bit more nuanced than that. Where, exactly, do we draw the line? What if we overhear imminent assault and murder directed against a gay person? Or an interracial couple? Or a Jewish person?"

"If they're about to harm a Jew, you drop the hammer and you stop it," said Hirsch, immediately and without hesitation. "No matter what the cost.

The same goes for a gay man or woman. Beyond that, all I can tell you is to use your discretion." Neither of the detectives needed reminding that Hirsch was both Jewish and lesbian, that they were black and Hispanic respectively, and that their boss' personal minorities were to be given police protection while their own were not. Lainie glanced at Jarvis.

"I think I understand, ma'am," said Lainie. "After all, one can't make an omelette without breaking eggs," she repeated.

"This better be one hell of a muthafukkin' tasty omelette," groused Jarvis.

"One final thing," said Hirsch. "I want to repeat what I told you when this whole operation started. I want Jesse Lockhart, dead or sitting in a cell where I can go to work with my Dershowitz needles on his *goyische* ass. The very minute you get a whiff of him, you drop every other line of inquiry and you concentrate on getting Lockhart. This isn't just personal with me anymore. I don't have to tell you I'm under a lot of pressure, not just from city hall and the mayor's office, but from the Elliott Weinstein at the FBI and all the other feds we've got crawling up our ass. They don't like this constant racial violence in Portland that we don't seem to be able to do anything about. I am going to need some kind of results, and the way it looks now, it will have to be sooner rather than later."

* * *

A few days later, Kicky McGee found herself the proud owner of a dark blue, fairly late model Toyota Camry. She was awakened one morning by her NVA cell phone. She had never heard it ring before, and at first she opened her regular cell, which she kept beside her bed as well, before she realized the chime was from the cheapie Jackson had given her. She got that open and said "Yes?"

She recognized the voice on the other end as Thumper's. "This is your favorite sugar daddy. Happy birthday, darling," he told her. "Look outside. The keys are under your doormat. The title and registration are in the glove box, the emission inspection sticker is new, and it's all street legal and righteous." Then he hung up. Kicky went outside and saw the Camry parked in front of her trailer. The keys were where Wingo had said they would be. It turned out they'd even given her a full tank of gas. She couldn't resist pulling on some clothes and taking the Toyota out for a test drive, and she wildly tried to think of some way that she could get away with not telling Martinez and Jarvis about the car so they wouldn't wire it. Then she remembered the strange

woman's blank face like a wax mask as she had inserted the acid-filled needle, and any thought of resistance collapsed. She duly called in to her handlers and at their direction brought the Camry to a garage attached to a Portland police station where McCafferty carefully installed fiber optic microphones, cameras, and a separate global positioning indicator.

Kicky had explained her work schedule to Wingo on the drive back from the Burger Barn, under which she had Monday and Tuesday nights off, and the next Monday at about three o'clock she was just coming out of the Safeway when she got a text message. She sighed and called Lainie Martinez on her regular phone. When she answered, Kicky said, "I just got texted. They want me at Burger Barn Two. That's the corner of Magnolia Street and 31st Avenue. This looks like it."

"All right, we'll go on alert," said Lainie. "You know the drill. Do what you're told to do like a good little terrorist."

"Including killing somebody, maybe?" asked Kicky. "You never did give me a straight answer about that."

"Do whatever you have to do to maintain the integrity of this operation and let us worry about when to intervene," said Lainie authoritatively.

"In other words, you don't give a damn about anybody else but yourselves? Don't worry, I got that a long time ago. One more thing. If this goes off okay, I want to see Ellie and my mom. You want to treat me like a naughty child, okay, you spanked me and you sent me to my room without supper. But I've been a good little girl, and I want to come out of my room now."

"Let's see how this plays out, and then I'll think about it," said Lainie. "Now go play with your dirty little friends." Lainie hung up.

Kicky put her groceries in the trunk and drove to the meeting point. It wasn't rush hour yet, so the traffic wasn't too bad. She found a spot on Magnolia Street and parked, then walked to the corner. A powder blue Nissan pulled up beside her. She looked over and saw Thumper/Bob was driving. "Hop in," he said, opening the driver's side door and sliding over to let Kicky take the wheel. Sitting in the back seat was a third person, a middle-aged man wearing a cardigan sweater whom Kicky had never seen before. "Hang a right on 31st," directed Wingo. "Watch your speed and make all your signals, keep an eye out for cops, and don't do anything to attract attention. The plate on this car should run clean, but we're packing and you don't want to get pulled over. You know the Mighty Mart down the road here?"

"Yeah," said Kicky.

"Pull into the parking lot and park as close as you can get to the C-1 column. We're meeting the second car there."

"Second car?" she asked.

"We always take two cars on a tickle, sometimes more," explained Wingo. "Tonight will be one lead car with the assault team in it, and one backup to scout and run interference if necessary. This is the backup car. The action itself will be carried out by the guys in the lead car, two of whom are first-time-outers like yourself, if that encourages you. I'm the team leader for the mission. Normally I'd be in the lead car, but since this is kind of a training run, tonight I'm here more to observe, to see how you all do." Kicky pulled into the parking lot of the giant store and was able to find a space almost exactly under the C-1 sign on a lamppost. "Okay, back-in park," directed Wingo. "Any time you can, always back-in park so that if you have to beat feet quickly you can see where you're going and floor it." Kicky complied, and turned off the engine. "The gentleman in the back seat is Mister Rogers. Mr. Rogers, this is Comrade Jodie."

"Hey," said Kicky.

"Hey, Jodie," said Mr. Rogers. "It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood."

"So who are you tonight?" she asked Wingo.

He gave her a boyish grin. "Hell, everybody in Alpha Company knows my real name by now, and I'm sure the cops must have figured out that I'm around. You can call me Jimmy. But you stick with Jodie. You're not a U-Boat yet."

"A what?"

"A U-Boat. A submarine. You're still floating on the sea of the people, as Chairman Mao would have put it. The cops don't know you as a Volunteer, or you'd better hope they don't, so you can operate on the surface. You have a legitimate job, and your aboveground identity is still intact. Later on you might have to submerge, become a U-Boat, but we try to keep as many of our people operating in the open for as long as we can. Saves a lot of hassle with false ID and covert movement, so forth and so on." A mellow beige Crown Victoria passed behind them and the driver deftly backed in to a space two cars down. "Be right back." Wingo got out and went over to the other car, and spoke with the driver through the window.

"I have something for you, Jodie," said Mr. Rogers from the back seat. He handed her a pistol. "You know how to use one of these?"

"Uh, yeah, mostly from watching movies, though," said Kicky, hefting the piece. "I used to carry a .25 when I was working this one job I used to do. Never used it, though, and since I got out of the can I carry a lock in a sock."

"It's a 9-millimeter Beretta," said Rogers. "No, don't fuck with the slide. You have one round up the spout. You see the safety? Yeah, there, that little

lever. It's on. That's the best way to carry when you're packing, because you might not have time to jack in a round if things break bad, or you might get a jam, although that shouldn't happen if you've taken proper care of the weapon. Plus somebody might hear you lock and load if it's a surreptitious kind of situation. You shouldn't have to use it tonight, but if you do, make sure you click off the safety and then just cock back the hammer and fire. If some guy is coming at you, aim at his belly button, since you're not used to the recoil. The gun will throw up and to the right, and you should hit him dead center. Even if he's wearing Kevlar, that round is heavy enough to knock his ass flying, and at close range do some internal damage through the kinetic force of the impact. You don't have a holster, so carry it on the seat under your leg, so all you have to do is reach down and pull it up."

Wingo got back into the car. "You give her the piece?" he asked Rogers.

"Yeah."

"Later on you'll be given intensive one-on-one training in every weapon we have access to," said Wingo. "For tonight, don't take that out unless I tell you to and try not to shoot yourself. Now start her up and follow the Crown Vic." She did so and followed the lead car back onto 31st Avenue, turning right. "He'll be turning off for Lake Oswego," Wingo told her.

"Am I allowed to ask what we're going to do when we get there?" said Kicky. "If so, can I ask who and why? Or is this a shut up and obey orders kind of thing? I'm kind of curious."

"It's not a hit," said Wingo with a laugh. "Like the CO said, we're starting you off light. This is a punishment beating, and it's part of our procedure to make sure that every Volunteer on an action knows what we're doing, who we're doing it to, and why. It's important for morale for everyone to understand that we're not just gangsters mindlessly obeying Don Vito. There is a purpose to everything the Army does. The target is a man named Gregory Booth. White, aged 35, married with two children, degree in psychology, a churchgoing type, no bad habits we know of, not a bad guy, really. He's just doing something we have to put a stop to. Booth is a guidance counselor at a local high school, and probably because of his 700 Club and other evangelical affiliations, he's pretty neocon in his outlook. Supports the endless wars in the Middle East because we have to have Armageddon over there to make Jesus come back, really into the whole red-white-and-blue moo, you get the idea. The saddest kind of enemy we've got, a white man who has bought into the whole Amurrican bill of goods and really believes it. You remember what I said about George Orwell's comment, that seeing what is right under one's nose requires a constant effort? Booth either cannot or will not make that

effort. His eyes and his ears and his mind should have told him long ago that Amurrica is a disease that needs to be eradicated for the good of humanity, but he either cannot or will not allow himself to re-think his position. Anyway, Booth has been running the Teaching Tolerance program at his high school, and that would have put him on our list in itself, but lately he's started a kind of informal club or secret society among some of his students of all races, mostly of the evangelical persuasion. He calls it 'Jesus Loves The Little Children,' if you can believe that."

"Oh, yuck, a damned Christian preppy type," said Kicky in disgust. "I had a guidance counselor like that in high school, too. He wanted to save me from my life of sin, and then one night he decided he wanted to do some sinning with me himself. Bastard."

"Actually, this guy seems to be fairly straight up. We haven't picked up on anything like that," conceded Wingo. "But this little club of his has another kind of sinister undertone to it. It involves the kids in his circle listening in on the other students, doing some snooping in lockers and notebooks and bathrooms and so on, and reporting back to Booth on anyone, student or teacher, who says or does anything politically incorrect or that might indicate racial tendencies or even sympathy with the Nationalist cause. The Party has ears in all the high schools, going back to before the 10/22 revolt, and we got wind of it pretty quick. He's not collecting that kind of information for nothing. He's either passed it on to ZOG already, or else he's about to do so. This doesn't sound like an actual law enforcement operation. Too amateurish. We think he's just a self-appointed guardian of public morals like so many Christians are, running a game on a bunch of dumb kids who think it's cool to play Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys for truth, justice, and the Amurrican way. Betray a bigot for Jesus, that kind of shit. So tonight, some of the Boys are going to have a quiet word of prayer with Mr. Booth, using some blunt instruments."

"So why not just kill him? I thought General Order Number Seven gave the death penalty for informing?" asked Kicky.

"Not exactly," corrected Wingo. "It says field commanders have authority to deal with it at their discretion. True, usually informing means a bullet in the head, especially if it's for money, but sometimes it needs a lighter touch to send the right message. The message we're going to send tonight works on multiple levels. First, it tells Booth and anyone who may be tempted to emulate him that if you fuck with the NVA, we *will* find out about it, and very quickly. Secondly, it lets whites know that we really don't want to kill our own people unless it's absolutely necessary, and of course we don't. Like

the Old Man said, this will inevitably turn into a civil war between whites, and once all this is over, the survivors of both sides are going to have to live together in the Northwest Republic. We're looking ahead to that time, and we want to create as little bad blood as possible. Finally, there's the religion thing. Killing Christians only encourages them. They thrive on martyrdom, and persecution is largely the secret of the faith's survival for all these centuries. We don't want to make Booth a dead martyr, we want him to be a visible wreck in a wheelchair eating through a straw for some months, in clear and evident pain. Everyone will know that we could have killed him if we'd wanted to. We can only hope that most folks will understand this and draw the proper conclusion. Okay, here's the turn."

Kicky followed the Crown Victoria down a broad, tree-lined residential street. The afternoon was overcast but not raining, and visibility was good. "This street will be our action zone. Drive down it slow but not too slow. We always do one preliminary pass through a target zone, but only one, so as not to attract attention. You have to check the whole area out in one sweep. As you go by, check every parked car on your left, since you're driving. Your partner will always check on the right, in this case Mr. Rogers. Look for anyone sitting in parked cars or any vehicle with tinted windows, which will be a cop car. Also any parked vans or trucks on the street or in driveways that might contain enemy troops in ambush. Look for linemen and cable guys up telephone polls, gardeners in yards who don't seem to be gardening, anything that looks out of place or might indicate that something isn't right. Look for anything that might block your escape route. Now, glance over on your right. The redwood Brady Bunch split-level ranch special? That's Booth's house. The SUV in the driveway is his, so he should be in." Wingo checked his watch. "Probably within about five minutes of starting out on his daily jog. We've been clocking him for some days now. Okay, up here is where we split up. The Crown Vic will go right. You go left." Kicky complied. "Okay, right turn here and go up about two blocks. Watch out for kids on bikes and all that crap. Okay, now another right. Down one block, now right again, and now we're back on our street. Both of you keep your eyes peeled. Okay, there's his house again on the left. Go past it. Now pull over and park here, on the right side of the street." Kicky did so. "The lead car will be here in a minute. They're checking the parallel streets and the rear of the house. Adjust your mirrors so you can see the front door and the street in front of the house." While Kicky was doing so, Mr. Rogers wordlessly handed Jimmy an Uzi submachine gun over the back seat and several extra magazines. She glanced back and saw Rogers jacking a shell into a sawed-off pump shotgun.

"I thought you were just going to beat the guy up? So why all the heavy artillery?"

"Normally a punishment beating is an eight man, two car job," said Wingo. "I know that sounds like a lot to beat the crap out of a single guy, but it's a principle of street fighting. A guerrilla force needs to compensate for the enemy's overall superiority in numbers by applying superior force at selected weak points and pressure points. They outgun us here in the city of Portland, but we always try to make sure that wherever we strike, at that one small point *we* outgun *them.* We're a bit short handed tonight. There are three men in the lead car. Two of them will administer the actual punishment, while the driver will stand by his vehicle armed with an AK-47, and Mr. Rogers and I will cover the attack from here with these weapons. The object is to prevent any interference by good Samaritans and also to resist, escape, and evade if the cops show or if this turns out to be an ambush. Any time we have enough Volunteers, an actual assault team or hit man is covered on at least two sides against interference and flanking attacks."

"Do I get out and cover them as well?" asked Kicky.

"Sure, why not?" Wingo reached into the glove box and pulled out two lumps of blue wool. "This is your mask. Don't put it on until I tell you to. If somebody looks out their window or walks by taking their pooch for a dump and sees three people sitting in a car with ski masks on, that kind of gives the game away. There's the lead car." The Crown Victoria pulled up a hundred feet or so behind them and parked on the far side of the street, just past the edge of Booth's lawn. Wingo's phone beeped. He listened briefly. "Sorry, man, Fred just left for work. Want me to take a message? Okay, fine."

"You guys have some cool rides," remarked Kicky. "By the by, thanks for the Camry."

"Don't mention it. When we're doing a tickle in Lake Oswego like this, we need to use vehicles that fit in with the neighborhood. If we were down on 82nd Avenue we'd be in pickup trucks or panel vans or 15-year-old beater cars. Right, our boy seems to be a creature of habit, so he should be out the door any moment now. As soon as we see him, we mask. He always jogs the same way, turning right toward the park, but if he doesn't go that way this time, we may have to run him down, which Mr. Rogers and I will do. If that happens you stay with the car. If he sticks to pattern, as he passes the lead car, the two designated Volunteers will jump out, do the old Lizzie Borden trick and give him forty whacks. There's a certain science to a good thumping. You go for the kneecaps, the elbows, the kidneys, the groin, and the mouth. Never the head, unless you intend to kill the target. When he throws up his

arms you hit them hard enough to break them. This normally wouldn't take more than twenty seconds, but like I said, these two biff boys are first-timers themselves, so they may take a little longer. While this is going on, Mr. Rogers and I will be out of the car and covering the street. You get out of the car and cover the sidewalk to your right, to make sure we don't get any nasty surprises from that side. Level your pistol two-handed like you know what you're doing. If by any chance you see anyone coming toward us who looks like some idiot civilian with a John Wayne complex, fire a shot over his head to get his attention. If he keeps on coming, Rog or I will deal with him." In the rear view mirror, Kicky saw the front door to Greg Booth's house open and a man in a running suit with iPod headphones in his ears stepped out the door. "That's him," said Wingo. "Masks on." Kicky pulled the mask over her face and adjusted the eye slits. "Out of the car."

Kicky opened the door of the Nissan and pointed her weapon to her right, but she couldn't resist turning to watch what was going on behind her. The doors of the Crown Vic were open and the two masked attackers were on the man in the jogging suit, one swinging a baseball bat and the other an axe handle in a high arc, while the driver stood with his back to them, his Kalashnikov leveled down the empty street. Kicky could hear the soft thwack of blow after blow, and she heard Gregory Booth screaming in a high-pitched squeal, like a pig being slaughtered.

Unbidden the memory of the little room in the Justice Center arose in her, the needles and the electrodes, the abduction of her child, her own humiliation and rage and suffering at the hands of men like Gregory Booth. Any twinge of pity she might have felt was drowned in rage and hate and exultation at the pain of the man being beaten. This American loved and supported the evil people and the evil society that had dragged her brother and her lover to be butchered in Iraq, that had turned her into a whore, that had sent her to prison, that had stolen her baby. He and his kind had never shown her or her loved ones the slightest bit of mercy, and he deserved none himself. *Do unto others as others do unto you,* she thought bitterly.

The three masked men got back into the Crown Victoria, and the engine started. They left a twitching, moaning pile of dirty laundry lying on the sidewalk, soaking the concrete red. "Back in the car," ordered Wingo. "Start her up and take her out of this street, slow. Keep your mask on until we've got a few blocks behind us. Okay, now turn right." Behind her the Crown Victoria turned left. "They'll go a separate route. Now head for I-5 North, and go on back into town. Normally after every mission there's a debriefing and critique at a safe house or other rendezvous point, but this one seems to

have gone so perfectly that I really don't see much need." Wingo opened his phone, dialed, and spoke. "How's it going. Yeah, same here. Good job, guys." He closed his phone. "The same to you two. Well, Comrade Jodie, looks like you've done your first tickle. How do you feel?"

"Fine!" chirped Kicky, and she did.

X

Sharkbait

And let me speak to the yet unknowing world
How these things came about; so shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts;
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters;
Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause . . .

Hamlet—Act V, Scene 5

Over the next few months, Kicky went out on over a dozen missions for the NVA, always acting as a driver, in addition to continuing her role as a chauffeur for mysterious text-message hails who wanted to visit the hot sauce factory. Later on the hot sauce factory became Bill's Bowlerama as the code changed, and finally it became the Chestnut Tree Café. ("Who the hell is the George Orwell freak among these sociopaths?" muttered Lainie when she heard the last designation.) The active service missions occurred on her days off, or else after she got off her Excelsior Cab shift at midnight, and they followed a similar pattern. She was never asked to use her cab on a tickle. Always she would drive her own car to a designated meeting place, park it, and then take over the driver's seat in one of a multiple-vehicle NVA team. On two occasions, there was only one vehicle. These single-car missions turned out to be surveillance jobs wherein her passenger acted as observer, scouting out not people, but locations where an action might possibly be arranged to go down, driving from point to point and timing it, checking cross streets for entry and escape points, so forth and so on. During these runs Kicky drove everything from a Crown Victoria town car, possibly the same one she had

seen on the Lake Oswego tickle, to a mini-bus, to a battered pick-up truck, and once a BMW X Series with full leather seats.

Sometimes Jimmy Wingo would ride with her in her vehicle, and sometimes not. She began to meet some of her NVA comrades on a repeating basis. There was the blandly psychotic Mr. Rogers in his trademark cardigan, who always yelled "It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood!" just before he kneecapped somebody or threw a pipe bomb. ("Dammit, I grew up on Mr. Rogers! I learned to speak English watching his show!" snapped Lainie angrily.) There was a tall and slender young man with an Elvis hairdo called Ace, not bad looking, but who was all business and whom Kicky never saw smile. There was a small and innocuous-looking man of about 50 with graying hair, who used the name Fred, and who said even less than most of them. He seemed to be some kind of bomb specialist, as he always carried a satchel or a backpack full of Molotov cocktails or other hand-hurled explosives that he distributed to the others. There was a stocky, cheerful brown-haired girl named Lavonne who would have been pretty except for a broken nose. Lavonne was about Kicky's age. She sometimes drove the second car with a pale and intense youth named Kevin, whom Kicky in her mind took to be Lavonne's boyfriend. This was incorrect, as she later learned. She and these other Volunteers occasionally exchanged a few words at a rendezvous point, but Kicky had no chance to get to know any of them better.

Then there were two big, bearded biker types, possibly brothers, with bulging muscles and prison tattoos. They who laughed a lot, and they specialized in punishment beatings. They called themselves Thing One and Thing Two. *("God damn them!"* howled Lainie when she heard their handles. "Now these sons of bitches are defiling Doctor Seuss! Who's next? Barney the dinosaur?" Kicky couldn't resist answering, "I think he's B Company," which got her a dirty look from Lainie in return.) Kicky learned they were the ones who had beaten the guidance counselor down to the sidewalk on their first time out. Kicky got the definite impression that although new to the NVA, they had prior experience in the field. Thing One offered a few appreciative comments in the car on Kicky's body art and the body beneath it, making it clear that he wouldn't object to furthering their acquaintance off-duty. Since she had no desire to complicate things any worse than they were, and since she wasn't sure how she was expected either as a Volunteer in training or as a police informant to comport herself along those lines, Kicky lightly and deftly fended him off. Thing One impressed her immensely by getting the message quickly, and dropping it. Ironically, in view of some of the romantic misconceptions about the urban guerrilla lifestyle she had

picked up from TV and the movies, it occurred to Kicky that her time with Jerry Reb was the longest she had gone without sex of some kind or other since she was fifteen.

Kicky never knew ahead of time what she would be doing on a mission. The first few times out, there were no actual homicides committed. There were more punishment beatings of white liberals or people who had otherwise contrived to annoy the NVA, similar to the Lake Oswego job, all of them as swift and deadly as her first and all of which ran as seamlessly. Kicky marveled at the amount of time and effort put into the advance preparation of such relatively minor operations. "You know the old carpenter's saying about measuring twice, so you only have to cut once," said Wingo. "Floats can be a bitch, though. Most of the times when our Volunteers get into trouble, it's during a float, when there's no time to properly set it all up. But we have to take targets of opportunity wherever and whenever they offer, keep them off balance, make sure we keep on hitting them and hitting them, never letting them rest, never letting the cops and feds finish cleaning up one crime scene before they have to move on to another. Everything we do, Comrade Jodie, is just a pinprick. But thousands of little pinpricks put together can slowly bleed the Beast to death."

There were other missions besides punishment beatings. The actions of the rural NVA units such as Zack Hatfield's D Company, whose flamboyant attacks had generated for them the media nickname "the Wild Bunch," had successfully driven most of the Mexicans and the few blacks out of large portions of the Northwest hinterland in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and British Columbia. Many of the mestizos didn't stop running until they got to California, but some only ran as far as the big cities, and so temporarily at least there was actually a slight increase in the number of non-whites in Portland suburbs such as Hillsboro, McMinnville, and North Portland. The urban teams of the Portland brigades then took over the task of persuading them to *vamanos* from the Northwest as a whole, permanently. At least half of Kicky's tickles involved burning out or blowing up various Mexican hangouts, with or without the Mexicans inside, or else businesses known to employ illegals, including a construction site, a warehouse on the river front, and a commercial laundry owned by Jews and run by a Chinese straw boss with illegal coolie labor. These missions involved the approach to the target, one scouting tour through the area looking for potential problems, and then covering down and preventing interference while Fred and other volunteers hurled incendiaries through windows. In one case they broke in the front door, set charges, and lifted the whole building off its foundations

via a remote detonator as the NVA drove away. On another occasion a mob of yelling Mexicans emerged drunk, cursing and threatening in Spanish from a firebombed cantina, waving knives, while a couple of them fired wildly into the street with handguns. Wingo and the two Things got out of their cars, masked, and calmly dispersed them with short, controlled bursts of automatic weapons fire. Kicky saw on the news the next day that two of the Hispanics were killed, although she didn't see any actually fall to the ground and die. She wasn't sure whether or not this counted as making her bones. Probably not, she decided, since she never fired her pistol. At no time did she ever see any signs of any police presence or any attempt by the cops to interfere. She wondered if somehow Lainie Martinez was ordering them to back off from her vicinity.

The most complicated run Kicky went on was as back-up in a three-car convoy; the mission was to abduct the Portland bureau chief of CNN and discuss the Army's concerns about balance in his network's reporting with him. Kicky watched three of her comrades, unknown to her, walk casually and calmly unmasked into a tavern across the street from the downtown headquarters of CNN where reporters hung out, and then emerge a minute later dragging the stunned executive by the arms, throw him into the lead vehicle, a van, and the drive off. On Wingo's direction, she followed the van for about a mile, heading west toward Highway 30, and then after a short conversation on his cell phone Wingo said, "Okay, that's all for us. Wrap it up and head back to your car."

"Uh, they gonna kill him or what?" asked Kicky.

"We wouldn't have bothered to snatch him if we were going to kill him," explained Wingo with a laugh. "Reporters require some delicate handling. Sometimes we just whack 'em, of course, if they're non-white or Jewish, but this is another one of those cases where we don't want the guy dead, we just want him to change his behavior. It's far more to the benefit of all concerned if he does. They'll have a quiet word of prayer and then cut him loose somewhere with his instructions forcibly imprinted on his memory. Maybe a little the worse for wear, but nothing permanent. You may well notice a change in the coverage we get from CNN here in Portland after this, like dropping that nasty term 'terrorist' when they refer to us. Betcha from now on we're 'white Nationalist insurgents' or something of the kind, and from now on our media releases will get a lot longer sound bytes and be read out in full."

Once Kicky was doing a Bob's Bowlerama run for Ace, at night. He had gotten into her cab at a corner—Kicky never did figure out how the NVA seemed able to track her all over the city almost at will, and it made her

nervous. He simply told her "Drive around town for a while. I'm waiting on a call. Don't get on any freeways, because you'll have to stop somewhere in a bit." After about five minutes of silent cruising he got a call on his wireless phone, spoke briefly to someone on the other end, and said "Okay." He hung up, punched in a number, and told Kicky, "Pull over and turn on the overhead light." She pulled into a parking lot and turned on the light. Ace reached over the seat and handed her the phone and half a sheet of folded typing paper on which were printed some words in large type. "Hit send and call this number," he directed her. "If a man answers, or if it kicks over to voice mail, don't say anything. Just hang up, because we don't want them to get your voice just yet. It should be a woman who picks up. When she does, just read this out to her, and then hang up. Don't get creative and don't let her keep you on the phone."

Kicky took the phone and glanced over the paper. "Hey, neat!" she said. "I always wondered who did these things. Who am I calling?"

"A reporter from the *Oregonian,*" replied Ace. "The CO likes to use her for call-ins. He likes messing with her head."

Kicky hit send. The phone rang and a woman's voice answered. "Hello?"

"Hello, Caroline, this is Captain O'Neill," read Kicky. "The confirmation code is Let Freedom Ring. Stand by for a communication."

The woman on the other end squawked in sudden fear and consternation. *"What!* This is a new cell and nobody has this number yet! I got it so you maniacs would stop calling me!"

Kicky read the words from the sheet in a steady voice. "At 2035 hours tonight, elements of C Company, First Portland Brigade, Northwest Volunteer Army carried out a General Order Number Four enforcement action directed against the Blue Lagoon Lounge on 82nd Avenue in Portland, a known resort of drug dealers, transvestites, and non-whites posing a clear and present danger to the white community. A vehicle containing two hundred pounds of explosives was parked in front of the main entrance and detonated, destroying the building and everyone inside it completely. All sexual deviates, Jews and other non-whites are reminded that Army General Order Number Four prohibits their presence anywhere in the Homeland, and if found within any NVA command's area of operation they are liable to immediate termination as military targets. End communication."

"Wait!" squealed the woman. "Let me get a pen. What did you . . . ?" Kicky closed the phone and handed it back to Ace. "Uh, comrade, looks like this script was printed earlier today, before the bomb could have even gone

off," she inquired, handing it back to him as well. "How could you know beforehand that everything I just said would happen according to plan?"

"It did. That was the confirmation call I got just now," said Ace. "As to how we knew beforehand, the Red Baron never misses."

"Red Baron?" asked Kicky.

"Best car bomb maker in the NVA," said Ace proudly. "He not only makes 'em, he drives his own work. Maybe you'll meet him one day." A moment later, Kicky felt her own cell phone at her side vibrate. She guessed that Lainie Martinez was having an orgasm at the thought of getting close to a major NVA explosives expert, and was sending her a hint that she was to pursue the subject, which she ignored. The memory of the electrodes and the needles hadn't faded by a long shot, but Kicky's conscience and rebellious streak was starting to stir again, both fueled by the sense of freedom and near happiness she was beginning to feel when she was out with the NVA, striking back.

After every outing with the Volunteers, Kicky was carefully extracted from her routine as soon thereafter as it could possibly be accomplished, and brought into the Justice Center for a thorough debriefing in a variety of unmarked vehicles as diverse as the NVA's motor pool, unmarked cars with tinted windows, utility repair trucks and vans, taxis driven by undercovers, and once in an eighteen-wheeler delivering supplies to the Green Zone. She was usually taken up the back elevators to the same interview room where she had been tortured, just on the inside of the locked task force door marked "Maintenance Personnel Only."

But on one of her trips into the Justice Center to confer with Lainie Martinez and the hovering Jamal Jarvis, who seemed to have less and less to contribute to the proceedings, some questions arose about some mug shots she was looking at in an effort to put names to NVA faces, and in the end Kicky was finally admitted into the inner sanctum, the operations center itself. Two detectives were huddled over some computer printouts in the corner, and two more were doing something at computers on a long table against the wall beneath the obligatory framed photographs of President Hillary Clinton and Chief Linda Hirsch. One of them called out "Sharkbait on deck!" and the four of them stared at her in open curiosity for a long moment, then turned back to what they were doing.

"Sharkbait?" repeated Kicky.

"That's your code name in here," Lainie told her.

"Well, that's encouraging!" said Kicky in exasperation.

"At least it ain't Jailbait," rumbled Jarvis.

She found herself in front of the biggest whiteboard she had ever seen in her life, hanging on the painted cinderblock wall opposite her, almost covering one side of the room. On the whiteboard was drawn in multi-colored erasable marker a crude and confusing, but judging from the erasures and marginal scribbles a steadily growing organizational chart of the kind long beloved by FBI and other law enforcement bureaucrats tracking the Mob or other criminal enterprises. The table was headed "First Portland Brigade" with a small box flow-charted out to the right side labeled "Second Brigade?" Below the main heading was a spider of layered boxes going down to the bottom of the board. The first layer consisted of companies, marked A through F. Most of the boxes were filled in with question marks. Only A Company was filled in with the name of a company commander, Billy Jackson, and a set of old mug shot photos of Jackson were tacked into his slot. Below Jackson was the name "James Wingo" and a set of mugs from Angola Prison, marked "Team Leader." Below Jimmy's box four boxes spidered out, one marked "Mister Rogers?", two with "Thing One?" and "Thing Two?" respectively, and one with only a question mark. This was the result of Kicky's first NVA mission, the punishment beating of Gregory Booth. There were more boxes sticking out hither, thither and yon from the main stem with slots for Lavonne, Kevin, so forth and so on. Off to one side was a box containing old police mugs of a woman in her mid-thirties labeled "Racine Wingfield, recruits female subjects, married Carter Wingfield FBI #288995-3." It took Kicky a moment to recognize the old lady who had interrogated her in the house in Gresham; the photos were thirty years old.

Some of the other boxes were already filled with names and photos. Kicky was surprised to learn that Ace's real name was Felix Biedermann, and she had to remind herself never ever to slip up and call him Felix. On another wall hung a row of clipboards on hooks, each with a file attached and covered with post-it notes holding little snippets of information, casual remarks made on one of Kicky's wires that might lead to identifying the individual, a list of assorted crimes either committed in Kicky's presence or imputed to that person in some conversation the surveillance had picked up, and other notations. "Slowly but surely, we're building up the kind of picture we need of who and where these people are, and one day when it's complete, we make our move," explained Lainie proudly. "We get them all in one big strike. Except for Lockhart, of course. He goes one way, immediately. Any word on him?" she asked pointedly.

"You should know," said Kicky sullenly. "You hear everything I hear."

"Yes, but the chief is starting to put some pressure on us to begin showing some results," admitted Martinez.

"I only saw him that one time in Jupiter's Den," said Kicky. "They're starting to trust me now. If I start asking questions about him or anyone in particular, like I'm trying to finger somebody, that will tip them off and get them really suspicious again."

"I know that and you know that, Kristin," said Lainie with a sigh. "But you have to understand, we're police, and police are supposed to arrest people who commit crimes. It's very hard to sit here day in and day out with bullets flying and bombs going off all over Portland with egg on our faces. I mention this because the pressure from up top to start showing some tangible results is getting heavier and heavier. We're going to have to start making some busts based on information you've provided, or mostly on what we've been able to figure out ourselves based on information you've provided."

"Oh, great!" moaned Kicky, burying her head in her hands. "No sooner do I start getting on the inside then you point them right at me! Oh, thanks a *lot!*"

"Believe it or not, Kristin, for once I sympathize, and I'm in your corner on this," growled Martinez. "The worst thing that could happen would be for something to alert the NVA that you're in there, before we are ready to strike. As much progress as we're making, that day is still a long way off. If we start making arrests we can't really account for, then that's going to set off alarms for them. I will hold off the chief as long as I can, and I will do everything I can to prevent you from being compromised. We just have to hope it's enough."

"If you blow it, I'll give you a collect call from beyond the grave," muttered Kicky in sick apprehension.

She noticed on further visits as the weeks went by, that the little boxes on the board were beginning to fill up, mostly with pseudonyms as the detectives attempted to match them with names. On a later trip into the operations center Kicky saw that Second Brigade now had its own whiteboard with names and a few pictures she had never heard of. "Are you getting all this information from me?" she asked Martinez. "I don't remember meeting some of these guys."

"The information we pick up from your wire is what you might call our base line," explained Lainie. "It's recorded, organized, cross-referenced in our database, and then gone over with a fine-toothed comb by myself and a couple of private consultants, military-trained intelligence analysts whom you have no need to meet. Don't worry, they don't know your identity. No one outside the task force does."

"I'm just Sharkbait to them, right?" put in Kicky.

"That's all," agreed Lainie, missing the sarcasm. "Even the people who are guarding your mother and your daughter don't know why they're doing what they're doing, although they may guess. You would be astounded at what we can deduce just from analyzing the casual comments these men make when you're with them. But you're not our only source of information. This room is probably the most comprehensive and accurate intelligence resource now in existence on the Northwest Volunteer Army, because we are collating every scrap of data we get on the NVA from every source, not just in Portland but all across the Northwest. Anything we pick up from casual wiretapping, any forensic evidence from crime scenes, any gossip our regular CIs overhear, anything significant reported by our investigators in other departments, mountains of old pre-10/22 material some of which goes back a quarter of a century, even gossip and sensationalism off the tabloid newspapers and TV—it's all in our databases now. Of course we also have access to the pre-10/22 federal and city hatecrime databases and intelligence files from across the country. One of your contacts will drop a nickname or some obscure bit of information that we can match, and then all of a sudden we know who and what the hell he's talking about. We go into our files, and usually we've got either mug shots or some surveillance footage on these people if they were ever dumb enough to attend any kind of racist function or anti-immigration rally or anything of that kind. Every public event these people ever staged and most of their private ones were always riddled with law enforcement operatives. We start with a code name, and if we're lucky a photo from your cab, we use holographic facial profiling and cross-reference everything, and we build up a profile, which eventually we cross-reference with something else, then we get a name and a bio, and that produces a hundred new leads. It's like the ripples in a pond when you throw in a stone, ever widening outward. You're the stone we threw into the pond."

"Let's hope I don't sink to the bottom for good," replied Kicky dryly.

"Every day we are learning more about their tactics, their mindsets and the way they think, and of course who they are and where they hang out. Eventually we'll be able to scoop them up all at once, and they'll never know what hit them." Lainie was completely wrapped up in her vision, and the closer it got to fulfillment the more careless and the more inclined to risk Kicky's life for a big payoff she would become. She had already made it clear that if Cat-Eyes Lockhart ever showed they were going to drop the hammer. This scared Kicky paralytic.

Kicky lived for her visits with May and Ellie, the only thing that kept her sane. These had settled into a weird kind of twilight world where she

appeared at the motel, played and watched cartoons with her daughter and socialized with her own mother as if she was just a working mom dropping in for a normal visit, forcing her whole situation out of her mind for a few hours, and then she disappeared again until the next time. She was amazed in her own mind that she hadn't snapped under the pressure and either headed to the liquor store for a bottle of Jack Daniels in violation of NVA General Orders, or gone looking for a crack dealer in violation of General Orders and the law as well, but always the picture in her mind of the last time she had hugged Ellie kept her on the straight and narrow. She was terrified that if she slipped off the rails and did something while under the influence it would not only finish her with the NVA and maybe finish her literally, but that it would thereby destroy her daughter's life as well.

The tense new life seemed to be affecting May as well, for the better. Kicky noticed over the weeks that she seemed sober and alert even though haggard with worry, and the wastebasket in her room was no longer full of empty beer cans and broken-down twelve-pack cartons when she came in. May caught her looking at the empty wastebasket once, and even with the female contractor guard in the same room, she said, "I'm cutting back on the brew. It's not good for my blood pressure, especially around here." Kicky made some noncommittal comment, but her heart gladdened. Somehow she sensed that her mother had just told her that, in this extremity, she would do what she had to do in order to protect Mary Ellen. May might not succeed, but at least she would not fail because she was drunk. It was in its own way the deepest gesture of love Kicky had ever gotten from her mother. Again and again Kicky tore her mind apart trying to think of some way to get out of the deadly trap she was in, but so long as she could not get May and Ellie away from their captors, she knew that Martinez and Jarvis had her by the throat and she had no choice but to keep getting in deeper and deeper.

The situation was not made any better when Kicky drove on her first hit.

It hadn't originally been intended to turn out that way. Early on a black and drizzly November night, Kicky was driving a maroon Subaru SUV on one of her occasional single-vehicle scouting trips, with Jimmy Wingo in the front seat and the company commander, Billy Jackson, in the back. It was the first time he had ever ridden with her, and the first time she had seen him since their brief meeting in the Burger Barn. He had greeted her with a courteous "Good evening, comrade," when he got in at the downtown rendezvous point, and otherwise had not spoken to her during the whole excursion so far. Wingo had told her where to go, which was across the Williamette River to the Oregon Convention Center, and they circled several times around the

odd-looking building with its eerie twin glowing green towers and the bizarre pendulum-like sculpture. Jackson and Wingo had exchanged comments on the traffic conditions and were clearly spotting exits. "You can't get into the parking lot without getting a ticket and getting the vehicle photographed on CCTV, so just keep on going around one more time," Jimmy told her. "You thinking Holladay or Martin Lucifer Koon for the tickle, boss?"

"Oh, let's come in from Martin Luther King Boulevard," said Jackson. "I like the irony of it." Kicky had no idea what they were talking about, nor did they volunteer the information, but she presumed someone was going to be killed or something blown up. After a while Wingo told her to take them back to the original rendezvous point north of the river. "Go through downtown," he said. "Actually, downtown is one of the most secure areas for us, because if we have to bail it's a lot easier to escape on foot into the crowds, and there are MAX stations and bus stops all over the place and other ways to E & E the area. Worst thing is to get pulled over on a freeway, because there's only one way you can go without attracting all kinds of attention, especially from a helicopter. You're on an interstate and they get a chopper locked onto you, you're in deep shit."

The Christmas lights were already up in the Pearl and the downtown Portland area, even though it was still only a week before Thanksgiving, and the streets were brightly lit and reasonably filled with shoppers. They were cruising down Park Avenue just past the Nordstrom department store, when Jimmy Wingo said in a sudden, sharp voice, "Sir! On the right!"

"I see them," said Jackson calmly. Kicky glanced over to her right, but saw nothing except the sidewalk and some pedestrians. "Lot of traffic down here."

"Comrade Jodie's a good driver," said Wingo. Kicky started to say something, then realized he wasn't talking to her, he was simply stating a fact to the company commander. She felt suddenly pleased and honored. "Float it or pass, boss?" asked Wingo.

"Float it," said Jackson.

"Turn right on Morrison and swing back around the block," Wingo ordered her. She did so. "Watch your speed and your signals and keep your eyes peeled to the left for any cops or other nasties. The CO and I are going to take care of some business." Kicky turned right on Morrison Street. "What the hell is he thinking?" wondered Jimmy out loud.

"American hubris," growled Jackson behind them. "He's some rich yuppie bastard who's had everything his own way his whole life, and he thinks he's fucking immortal and invincible. Well, he's about to learn that no means no." As Kicky turned right again onto Broadway she saw Wingo calmly pulling his

ski mask out of his back pocket. He opened the glove box and tossed another one onto Kicky's lap. She picked it up.

"Now?" she asked. She glanced over to her right and saw that Wingo had his .357 out, and behind her she heard a tiny click as Jackson took the safety off his own weapon.

"Not yet. Wait until you make the turn back onto Park," he replied. She turned right onto Yamhill Street, cruised down the block and turned right again back onto Park Avenue. Her guts were quietly turning into water inside her. She waited for the vibration of the cell phone to tell her that her handlers back in the operations center at least understood what was going on, but none came. She deftly pulled the mask onto her face with one hand. They went past the Nordstrom entrance again. "Slow down a little," said Wingo. "There they are." Kicky looked over and saw a tall white man, forty-something, dressed in a fine tawny overcoat, wearing gloves, walking down the sidewalk with his arm around a slightly shorter woman with coal-black skin, a very short Afro, and gold earrings in her ears. The negress was wearing a fur-trimmed dark coat and carrying a Nordstrom's bag. The couple was laughing, their breaths frosting in the air, and as Kicky drove by not twelve feet from them, the white man leaned over and kissed her. "Trying to change your luck, are you, traitor?" breathed Wingo viciously. "Okay behind you, Kick? Don't pull over, just stop. Now." She stopped the Subaru and Wingo and Jackson both threw their doors open and piled out of the vehicle. "Back in a jiff!" Wingo called to her before they scampered between parked cars to the sidewalk.

Kicky twisted her head around and looked behind her, but she couldn't see much except the head and shoulders of the interracial couple. Then came the lightning-like muzzle flashes and thunderous explosions from the Volunteers' guns that echoed up and down the tall buildings along the street, glowing in the red and green lights of Christmas. The couple seemed to break apart, whirl, and then dropped out of her line of vision, and Kicky heard screams and shouts and the sound of running feet as the crowd fled, many of them running out into the street in panic, in front of her and behind her. Before she could blink an eye, both men were back in the Subaru, slamming their doors shut. "Pull off, as fast as you can but don't peel it and leave any tire tracks," ordered Wingo. "Head down Park, turn right on Burnside, and we'll get back across the river and dump this vehicle." Kicky did so mechanically. She still couldn't wrap her mind around the fact that she had just witnessed a double homicide; it hadn't had time to register.

Behind her Jackson was speaking on his phone. "I need a cleanup on aisle nine," he said. "Somebody busted a ketchup jar."

"Aisle nine?" asked Wingo over his shoulder. "Okay, Kick, I'll tell you where to go once we get over the river. A comrade will pick us up, then we'll get you back to your own car." He leaned over and touched her shoulder. "How you holding up?"

"You guys were so fast I think I'm having the adrenalin rush right now I should have had back there," said Kicky, laughing a little shakily.

"Target of opportunity, comrade," said Jackson from the back. He might have been speaking of the weather. As they approached the Burnside Bridge through Old Town, they ran headlong into two police cars with sirens screaming, followed by one of the special armored personnel carriers, heading the other way. "RRT, and they're playing our song," said Wingo. "Looks like nobody's described this ride to them, and if we're lucky and the witnesses have any sense they won't, but we'll dump it anyway."

Behind them Jackson made another call on his cell. "Running Rats heading for that ketchup spill on aisle nine," he said. "Advise our co-workers to avoid Park Avenue and downtown generally." He closed the phone. "I don't like going into the clear like that, but sometimes you have to," he remarked.

Ten minutes later they pulled into a parking place on a darkened side street. "What now?" asked Kicky.

"It will take a few minutes for our transport to get here," said Jackson. "In the meantime we sanitize this SUV. My fingerprints and Jim's don't matter as much, since they already have us tagged, but yours do, comrade. We're going to booby-trap it, of course, and with any luck whatever cop or car-stripping nigger opens it will splatter all over the street, but sometimes the bomb squad spots and disarms our traps, plus they can also lift fingerprints from bits and pieces. They find even a partial from you, and you're toast. Anything you touched, the steering wheel, the door handles, anything on the driver's side that might hold a print needs to be scoured."

Wingo reached under the seat and pulled out a plastic shopping bag. They got out of the Subaru, and Wingo came around to the driver's side and took a rag and a bottle of silver polish out of the bag. He soaked a big spot of polish into the rag, and vigorously wiped down the whole steering column, the inside driver's door, the dashboard and the outside of the door. "Abrasive, destroys prints," he explained. Then when Wingo was finished, he took a bomb out of the bag, what appeared to be four or five sticks of dynamite or TNT taped together with black electricians' tape. Kicky realized with a start that she had been driving around with a bomb under the seat next to her. A bolt with an oval eyelet protruded from the top of the bomb, and below it was a small black box with a dial attached that was held onto it by perforated

metal strapping. Wingo took out a small length of wire, hooked one end into the eyelet with a small d-ring, and turned the dial. A small red light came on the box. "Armed in sixty seconds," he said. He carefully inserted the bomb under the front seat and looped the other end of the wire around the inside of the door handle, and closed the door. "One of the Red Baron's little gadgets," he told Kicky. "Now we need to un-ass this area in case the Baron screwed up, or else I did, and it detonates prematurely."

The three of them walked up the street for several blocks, past closed storefronts and a few bars and fast food joints. Kicky hugged her coat around her against the cold and the icy misting drizzle, with her pistol jammed into her belt beside the cell phone in its holster, which still had not vibrated. They entered a small park and walked along the edge of it, not going all the way in. "Watch out for niggers and crackheads in here," said Kicky, remembering some of her own escapades the same place, in what seemed like a long lost previous life.

"I think they need to watch out for us," said Wingo with a chuckle. A silver Explorer pulled up along one side of the park. Jackson waved and the lights blinked, and they got in. The girl Volunteer Lavonne was driving, minus Kevin. She had a thoroughly illegal police scanner on the seat behind her, hissing and gabbling code numbers and clipped phrases. "They're really screaming on the police frequencies about that float you guys pulled," she told them. "The guy was some kind of ambassador, and the Sheba was his wife. Some kind of African."

"Yeah, well, he should have been careful what kind of souvenirs he brought back from Booga-Booga Land," said Wingo. Lavonne took the long way west and then turned back north across the Willamette, and an hour later they were back to where Kicky had parked her Toyota. "This is your stop," said Wingo. He got out and walked her to her car. "Seriously, Kicky, how are you doing?"

"It was a pretty freaky night," she admitted. "But if you're worried I'm going to go all mushy in the head, do the whole guilty conscience thing, find Jesus and confess my wicked racist sins to the cops or something like that, don't be. Look, I knew what I was getting into when I first talked to you in Lenny's roach hole. I know I've still got a long way to go before I prove it to you, but you can trust me. Maybe I'll get there one day."

"You're closer than you think," said Wingo with a smile, and before he turned and walked back to the Explorer he gave her a brotherly kiss on the cheek.

XI

Hearing The Screams

O, God, that I were a man!
I would eat his heart in the market-place!

Much Ado About Nothing—Act IV, Scene 2

Annette Ridgeway had led a life of sufficient privilege, and sufficient just plain good fortune, so that until the age of seventeen she had never attended a funeral before. On this cold and rainy afternoon in January, her luck ran out. She stood with a group of her family and friends on the sodden grass beside a long dark hole of brown earth into which some men in overalls were about to lower her only sister. Janet Ridgeway had turned sixteen only a month before she swallowed an entire bottle of her mother's sleeping pills, and almost a whole bottle of Jack Daniels from her father's liquor cabinet. She then passed out on the plush carpeted floor of the rec room in the two million-dollar family home in West Linn, Oregon, and choked to death on her own vomit.

Annette stared at Jan's peaceful face, like a golden little angel, visible through the glass window at the top of the coffin. The minister was droning in the background about the saving grace of Jesus Christ, but Annette tuned him out. What he was saying had no relevance to what was happening to her. It was just background noise. Annette watched the face in the glass slowly disappearing into the ground, burning into her mind forever the last sight she would ever see of her sister. They had only been a year apart; Annette's parents sometimes joked with them, "You were a mistake, Annie, but you were so beautiful we just had to make another one." This would be the last

time that she would ever see this person, this part of her that had been there always, now been ripped away from her for the rest of her life, now sliding down into the earth out of her sight forever. Annette knew that she had to control herself, that she mustn't go insane. She leaned over the edge of the grave, her long blonde hair falling from her black-draped shoulders, straining for that very last glimpse of all. She could see her sister's dead face, barely visible in the shadows at the bottom of the grave, before the dirt began to fall on it and she was gone.

Her boyfriend, a tall and good-looking kid in a somber suit named Eric Sellars, grasped her arm, afraid she would fall in. "Annette, we need to go now," he said, quietly but firmly, gently easing her away from the grave.

"It's not over," she said.

"I know," said Eric softly. He understood perfectly well what she was really saying to him. "But the ceremony is. You need to come away now and be with your parents. They need you." Annette turned and walked away from the grave without another word. She had not cried during the entire funeral. Since the one explosion of hysteria and grief in Eric's arms when they had heard the news together, she had not cried at all. Annette went straight to her sobbing wreck of a mother, Lorraine. She quietly took Lorraine's arm from her father and led her back to the waiting black stretch limo parked along the gravel cemetery pathway. It was as if none of the other hundred or so people attending the funeral even existed. Annette ignored them all, and none intruded.

Ray Ridgeway stared after his wife and daughter. He was a distinguished-looking man in late middle age, expensively dressed in Armani and professionally coiffed. He prided himself on requiring neither Rogaine nor Viagra at his age, and he had the bright and even teeth of a young man, polished but not even capped. Ray was the CEO of Continental Bank, a senior partner in the most successful brokerage firm on the West Coast, and a power player in the financial world. He had just made the stunning discovery that rich and powerful men down through the millennia always made at some point in their careers—that he was powerless to cheat death. His child was dead, and there was no one to negotiate or bargain with, no one to threaten, no one to bribe, no strings that could be pulled, no way to fix this. Technically Jan hadn't even been murdered, she had taken her own life. Ray's common sense and lifetime of experience in the real America told him with perfect clarity that the man responsible was completely untouchable, and that there was nothing to be done. He was shaken to the core of his being by the loss of his youngest child, and he was icy with fear for his oldest.

He beckoned to young Sellars. He had approved of this boy from the beginning, a steady and intelligent young man planning a career in engineering, and he was grateful for Eric's relieving him of his fears for Annette's future, since even at their young age he could sense that they were a solid couple and would probably make it if they decided to give it a go. It was Jan who had been driving him and Lorraine frantic for the past year. "Eric, is Annette . . . all right?" Ray asked the younger man anxiously.

"I don't know, sir," Eric told him frankly. "She won't talk to me."

"Or me. I've tried. I'll try again tonight," said Ray.

He did try again that night, asking Annette to join him in his study in the West Linn mansion. She sat down on the couch, still wearing her black mourning dress from the funeral. "Mom won't take a sleeping pill," she said. "She says she won't ever take anything again. I suppose that's understandable in view of what happened to her last prescription. I think she'll sleep, though. She's exhausted. Empty, I suppose would be a better word."

Ray poured himself a stiff shot of Jack, aware of the irony of consuming the drug that had killed his daughter as a means of ameliorating his grief at her death, although he said nothing. He knew that Annette would catch that irony as well, but he said, "This is a hell of an occasion for me to ask you this for the first time, but do you want one? Have you started drinking yet?"

"I don't think I'm going to start," said Annette.

"Smart decision," said her father with an approving nod. "But then, all of yours are smart. I wish your sister had possessed your level head."

"Dad, no need to dance around it. Jan's decisions were just plain stupid. She was self-destructive, she had no sense of self-esteem and no inner strength. She let the whole adolescent angst thing get on top of her, she just went with the flow, and it killed her. She got involved with drugs, she got involved with a nigger, and she did both at once. If that's not the classic definition of a self-destructive personality, I don't know what is."

Ray looked at her oddly. "The psychobabble I get. You picked that up from your mother and her hundred and one self-help books and fads, not to mention TV. But the racism is a new one on me. Where did that come from?"

"Where racism always comes from, Dad," said his daughter calmly. "From close and regular contact with blacks."

"Oh? And how many blacks do you have close and regular contact with at Ashdown Academy?" inquired her father. "Three? Four?"

"One was enough," she replied coolly. "Look, Dad, can we take all the shocked disclaimers as read? Or to quote one of your own favorite sayings, don't piss down my back and tell me it's raining. I know what every white

person in this country knows, even if they're all too terrified to say it out loud. They're not Africans-Americans, they're niggers. They aren't equal to us in any way, they never have been, they can't tie their own shoelaces without an affirmative action program, and they're not even very nice. Now, what did you want to say to me?"

Ridgeway looked at her, bemused. "Okay, fine, we'll leave the deep political and philosophical debate on diversity and multiculturalism for another time. And yes, you're right, we all know in the privacy of our own thoughts that when all is said and done, they're nothing but niggers, and they won't ever be anything else. But the fact is that society doesn't allow that viewpoint anymore. I always thought of myself as pretty smart, but I'll admit to you, I have no idea how on earth we have gotten to—well, where we are, but we have. The point is, Annette, and it's the point I have to make sure you understand completely, is that whether we like it or not, we have to live in the real world. Down throughout the centuries, society has always had certain rules that men and women were expected to live by, and I don't mean just the laws on a statute book. Always there have been certain people who by common consensus, however arrived at, have been allowed to flaunt or disregard those rules, so long as they do so within certain commonly accepted if unstated parameters of discretion. This Lucius Flammus is one such. This society has decided, for what reasons I will not even try to speculate, that tall men with black skins who can bounce a ball up and down on a wooden floor are a politically and socially protected species. For all practical purposes, Flammus is immune from the consequences of his behavior. The fact is that other than a few minor narcotics violations, which we can't prove, his behavior isn't only not illegal, it's actually encouraged as part of his public persona."

"How can you talk about Jan's death in those detached bullshit terms like it was some kind of sociological phenomenon?" cried Annette bitterly.

"Because it is the only way I *can* talk about it, the only way I can think about it, and not lose my mind! The only way I can not take that gun out of my desk and go kill Flammus, thereby destroying not only myself but you and your mother, and losing all we have, and leaving you two alone and destitute in this horrible place," said Ridgeway harshly. "Annette, suicide is not the solution to anything. It wasn't the solution to Jan's pregnancy, and it wouldn't be any kind of solution for me, or you, or your mother." He knelt beside her. "Honey, do you understand what I am saying to you? Do you understand that with your silence, your refusal to grieve, your refusal to accept her death and get on with your life, you are scaring the hell out of Lorraine and me? And Eric too, I think?"

"So we're all nothing but a bunch of hogs slopping at the great American trough, and every so often the big black butcher comes among us and drags one of us away squealing, and we just look the other way and accept it as the price of all that lovely swill and jam our snouts back in deep, so we don't hear the screams?" demanded Annette. "Is that it?"

"Yes," admitted Ridgeway. "I know how contemptible that sounds, but yes, Annette, that's how Americans have to live, because the powers that control our existence have decreed it. You live your life, and you try to do the best you can for yourself and your family. Insofar as possible, you avoid all contact with the system, especially the so-called justice system. You stay away from politics and controversy and anything that might get you noticed, you build what you can for those you love, and you hope to God that every time that black or brown butcher comes into the pen, he passes you and your loved ones by and takes someone else. And you don't hear the screams. You never let yourself hear the screams. You mustn't, Annette. You must condition yourself, harden yourself, train yourself, deceive yourself if need be, however you have to do it. But you *never* let yourself hear the screams off in the darkness, because if you do, that way lies madness and self-destruction, and you may well drag your loved ones with you. I'm sorry, but that's the way real life is, Annette. I understand how terrible this sounds, and if by telling you this I have lost your respect, then I am deeply saddened. But I am your father, and I have to tell you these things, because no one else will. I am telling you, desperately trying to convince you, because you're young and idealistic, and in the world of today that is deadly dangerous. Normally we hold up youth and idealism as good things, and so they are, but only in certain channels that the powers have pre-approved. I know you, honey. I know that stubborn streak you've had since you were a little girl, like that time when you were five years old and you sat at the dinner table until four o'clock the next morning rather than eat your Brussels sprouts. You are dangerously close to letting your youth and idealism draw you in a direction that society does not approve, and *will not allow."*

"I never did eat those damned Brussels sprouts," Annette reminded him.

"No, you didn't," Ridgeway agreed with a soft laugh. "You got me there. But honey, if you try to pursue this matter of your sister's death, you won't be a little girl defying your father and a plate of vegetables. You will be crossing a line that America forbids you to cross, and you will be punished more savagely than I think you can possibly imagine, especially with the, uh, situation here in the Pacific Northwest the way it is now."

"Maybe the NVA will solve the problem and kill Lucius!" said Annette irrepressibly.

"Maybe," agreed Ridgeway. "I have to say I don't think much of his good judgment in remaining at Ashdown in view of what's going down in the city. Nor will I shed a tear if and when that happens. But Annette, I want you to promise me something. Dead serious, I want you to promise me that you won't do anything stupid along that line." His voice was anxious.

"And just what do you think I'm going to do, Dad?" she asked artlessly.

"Now don't *you* go pissing down my back and tell me it's raining, young lady!" snapped Ray. "I know perfectly well what is going on in that beautiful head of yours, and I say to you again, this isn't a plate of Brussels sprouts you can get your way on through sheer mule-headedness! I want you to promise me that you're not going to try to contact this damned gang of racist psychopaths who are running around Portland murdering people and bombing things, and try to get them to kill this Flammus character!"

"And how would I do that?" laughed Annette merrily. "Come on, Dad! It's not like they're in the Yellow Pages under A for Assassins or anything! And none of the kids at Ashdown are likely to hang with them after school. Our student parking lot looks like a Lexus and BMW dealership. Not a pickup truck with a rifle rack in the bunch."

"I don't know, but honey, I am scared shitless that you are going to go floundering around in biker bars in McMinnville or something stupid like that, asking dangerous questions about some truly dangerous people, and you're going to get into some horrible situation. Either the police or FBI will pick up on what you're doing and arrest you under the Patriot Act or Suppression of Domestic Terrorism Act, and I will have to spend half our savings on lawyers to get what's left of you back—sorry, I know that sounds horrible too, but you know what I mean—or else what's worse, you might actually stumble across a real racist death squad and they'll kill you. Annette, *please!*" her father begged her urgently. "Promise me you won't do anything stupid like that! We've lost one child, and now you're all we've got left. If we lose you, your mother and I will die too, inside, in a way that doesn't bear thinking about. Please!"

"I promise, Dad, no bars in McMinnville," she told him.

* * *

"Okay, so if you promised to stay out of bars in McMinnville, how *do* we find the NVA?" asked Eric Sellars as they walked along the quad at Ashdown Academy. They were dressed in their dark blue school uniforms, with a dark

green tartan plaid skirt for Annette, along with parkas and sweaters against the weather, their books under their arms. It was their first day back after the long Christmas break. The school authorities had told Annette she could have some more time off if she needed it, but she had responded that she wanted to get back into the routine of school as soon as possible.

"*We* don't," said Annette. She took a deep breath "Eric, I think we need to quit seeing each other, and you need to put some visible public distance between you and me. I'm going to do something, one way or the other, and my father is right. I'm probably going to end up destroying myself just as surely as Jan did when she swallowed those pills. I have no right to take you with me on this death trip."

"I'm in," he said. "I mean it, Annette, I'm in. I loved Jan too, not like I love you, but she was important to you, and that made her important to me. If you don't want to be with me anymore, I can't make you, but if that's the way you want it, then I'll go after Flammus myself. As corny as this may sound, if I can't be with you I don't much care what happens to me."

"I know," she sighed. "That's what bothers me. I thought a lot about what Dad said, about what will happen to him and to Mom and to you if I fuck this up, which I probably will."

"But you're going ahead anyway?" he asked.

"I have to," said Annette. "It just can't be any other way, Eric. Dad was wrong about one thing. At some time we have to lift our heads up from the trough, and we have to let ourselves hear the screams. I can't let this go, Eric. If I don't let myself hear the death scream of my own sister, if I pretend I don't hear because I'm afraid or because it's just too darned *inconvenient* to hear, then it will get easier and easier from then on, and eventually I will be just as deaf and dumb and blind as everyone else. Somebody has to hear the screams, Eric, and do something to stop it all. Don't get me wrong. I'm not Joan of Arc, and I'm so scared of what I'm doing I think I may shit myself sometimes. But I just can't do anything else."

"That old saying about the truth will set you free is crap," said Eric. "The truth isn't liberating, it's lethal. We live in a world based on lies, and anyone who chooses truth, they're going to try to destroy. There is just no way I can stand by and let you go into this alone, Annette. You're doing it for Jan. So am I, a little. But mostly I'm doing it for you. I want to, I have to, and I don't want you to ever blame yourself. You offered me an out, and I said no. I'm in. Now how are we going to find the NVA?"

"I've got one possible idea," she told him. "About two years ago, Dad and I were coming back from the All-State swim meet in Salem. Remember, the

one where I won the junior hundred-meter? We were in one of his company cars, a Caddy, and as we were going down the interstate an engine light came on and it started to lose power. Dad pulled off at Woodburn, and we found a gas station with a service section. It was kind of seedy, but the old guy there seemed to know his stuff. Turned out one of the Mexicans at the bank motor pool hadn't bothered to check the transmission fluid, and the transmission was screwed up, and so Dad arranged to leave the car there and called a limo to come down for us from town. Anyway, we ended up hanging around this gas station down in redneck country for a couple of hours. They had a waiting room, sort of, with some old magazines, and I noticed there were a couple of copies of the *Northwest Republic* stuck in among the old *People* and *Sports Illustrated* magazines."

"That's the newspaper the Party put out, back before they were banned after Coeur d'Alene?" asked Eric keenly.

"Yeah. I wasn't really interested in politics back then, and I just glanced at them. But I wandered into the office area where the vending machines were, and I also noticed that on the back counter this guy had a couple of bumper stickers from the Party put up, and a little stand with those little flags in it, an Oregon state flag but not a Stars and Stripes crossing it. It was that Jerry Reb flag they show on TV sometimes, the one that looks like France, except it's blue and white and green."

"I doubt he still has it there, since it's good for life imprisonment these days," commented Eric.

"No, but don't you get it?" Annette pressed him. "That guy must have been with the Party, or he knows somebody who is. He might be able to point us in the right direction."

"If he's still there," said Eric. "If he hasn't been arrested or fled underground himself after Coeur d'Alene. Okay, so what do we do? Just walk up to this total stranger and say hi, guy, can you hook us up with the NVA, because we've got a nigger we want them to kill? I'm sure he'll fall over himself to be helpful."

"It's all we've got," said Annette.

"Speak of the damned devil!" said Eric, his lips turning down in a bitter sneer, his eyes riveted across the quad. Annette looked over and saw a group of students coming out of one of the mellow red brick buildings, all wearing the neat blue serge uniforms of Ashdown Academy, boys with trousers and girls with skirts and knee socks, and both with the blue blazer and Academy patch. In the center of the group was a huge figure, all six foot six inches of Ashdown's star forward and shoo-in first-rank NBA draft choice, Lucius Flammus.

Flammus must have had some Watusi or other Nilotic ancestry. His skin was so black as to look almost as blue as the serge of his jacket, and instead of the usual round Negroid skull his cranium was elongated, almost hatchet-like. Stripped down into his basketball uniform, his body was lithe and superbly muscled, not the typical negro athlete template built like a refrigerator. As big as he was, Flammus moved down court like lightning, and he shot with the speed and accuracy of a striking cobra. He boasted, correctly, that in his entire life he had never missed a free throw. If Flammus scored less than seventy points in a game, he was having a bad night. He was eighteen years old and still had not reached his full growth; the sports doctor on loan from the NBA who was assigned to his specially tailored training program predicted that with the help of certain special "nutritional supplements" he'd top off in a couple of years at six foot eight.

Lucius Flammus was a stupid being who made up for his stupidity with a sharp, cruel, vicious cunning that compensated somewhat for the fact that he was a moron. He was totally without a single vestige of moral feeling or conscience. He ate, slept, and lived for but two things on earth: basketball and white females. Another one of his boasts was that he had never slept with a black or a Mexican girl. He did not use drugs himself, at least not hard drugs, since that would have interfered with his basketball game, but he kept a whole pharmacy on hand of both legal and illegal substances as party favors and bait for anything and everything white and female he could get near. Using crack cocaine and ecstasy tablets, it had taken less than two weeks for him to charm, seduce, and abandon Annette's confused and vulnerable sister Jan, who was just starting her second year at Ashdown Academy, a year behind Annette. Jan hadn't gotten the message, and she had made the mistake of going to Flammus's dorm room one night in November, looking either for more drugs (according to Flammus) or some kind of reconciliation with the great love of her life, according to Jan's incoherent iPod-recorded suicide note, which Ray Ridgeway had allowed Annette to hear, but not his wife. At the conclusion of this encounter either the two of them had a "farewell break-up fuck" (Flammus's version) or Flammus had raped Jan (her iPod suicide note version.) This was the act that had left the girl pregnant, depressed, and half out of her mind, or rather more so than she normally was, and that had led to her New Year's Eve freakout and death on the rec room floor.

Now Ashdown Academy's official Black Boy With The Ball bee-bopped down the sidewalk with his admiring Caucasian coterie in tow, laughing, shucking and jiving, and babbling in his best gangsta rapper style. He was completely unconscious of the two pairs of white eyes watching him from

across the quad, raging hatred and deadly serious murder in their hearts. After Flammus and his entourage had turned the corner, Annette said, "I've got French class fifth period and a study hall sixth, which I can cut."

"Gym for sixth, which I will be glad to cut rather than look at that ape showing us all how he's got more moves than Ex-Lax," said Eric.

"Feel like a drive down to Woodburn?" asked Annette.

"Yeah," said Eric.

It was about four in the afternoon when they pulled up to Jarrett's Tune & Lube in Woodburn. The sun had come out on their drive down, the Oregon sky was blue for a while, and the rather seedy clapboard gas station was illuminated in the pale wan light of a crisp and cold winter afternoon. They were in one of the Ridgeway family Lexi, the white one, which Annette had decided was appropriate for this trip. They watched as a middle-aged man with long hair in greasy jeans and a plaid shirt pumped some gas for a customer and checked her oil. "That the guy you remember?" asked Eric.

"That's him," said Annette.

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure," she said.

"I thought you said he was old?"

"He *is* old," said Annette. "Well, old compared to us."

"Okay, so how do you want to do this?" asked Eric. "Go buy some gas we don't need and start dropping hints, tell a few nigger jokes, what?"

"Let's just do it, Eric." She turned and looked at him. "Last call, Eric. You can at least stay in the car. You know I'm not asking because I doubt you. I'm asking because I love you, and I owe you one final chance to back out of this."

"I know," said Eric, opening the car door. "I love you, Annette. Now let's go see if we can cop ourselves a couple of life sentences." They got out of the car as the customer drove away and walked up to the pump jockey.

"What can I do for you kids?" he asked cheerily. On closer inspection he was a thin man of medium height; his long hair beneath the battered and stained baseball cap on his head was a dirty blonde laced with gray, and he looked at them through cheap Wal-Mart wire-rimmed spectacles with thick plastic lenses. They looked down and both spotted an odd tattoo on his right hand between his thumb and forefinger, a diamond with the crude letters "AB" over it. Both the young people recognized it as a prison tattoo.

"This is going to sound kind of weird, sir, but we're trying to find somebody," said Eric. "I think you might be able to help us."

"And who might that be?" asked the man politely.

Annette stepped forward. "Okay, look, I'll tell you exactly what this is all about. Sir, my name is Annette Ridgeway. This is Eric Sellars. You probably don't remember me at all, but about two years ago, my father and I stopped here at your station for a couple of hours to get our car fixed. When I was here then, I saw that behind your counter there you had a little stand with a couple of flags on it. There was an Oregon state flag, and there was a three-colored flag that was blue and white and green. Plus there were some copies of a newspaper in your waiting room called the *Northwest Republic.* I think you can guess who we're looking for. Now, have we come to the right place?"

While Annette had been speaking, a change had come over the man in front of them. It was impossible to define, except to say that during her few words the man seemed to become somehow *hard* and *real.* When Annette had begun speaking, he was a man of flesh and blood. When she finished, through some silent transmutation he was made of steel.

"I am going to ask you a question," he told them both in a soft voice that struck them almost dumb with terror. He did not raise his voice, or make any threatening gesture, but all of a sudden both of them understood what they had gotten themselves into. "Who else have you told about me and about this place?"

"No one," said Annette.

"We told no one," confirmed Eric.

"I see. So you two fucking rich kids have the gall to come into my place of business and imply that I am some kind of racist terrorist? You're saying that I hate people because of the color of their skins or their national origin? That I am in some way disloyal to the United States of America? I'll tell you what. Both of you get back into your goddamned Lexus and you get the hell out of here. Do not ever let me see either of you around here again. Am I making myself quite clear?"

"Yes, sir," said Annette, gulping. Suddenly she knew that this man was turning over in his mind whether or not he should kill her and Eric.

"Yeah, okay, man, our mistake," said Eric. "No offense intended, okay, man? Fine, we'll go. Just be cool, all right?"

The two of them backed away and made it back to the Lexus. Eric started the car and then all of a sudden there was a knock on the window. He rolled it down. The pump jockey leaned in and said to them both, "Look, I don't know what the fuck kind of game you two kids think you're playing. But I'm going to give you a word of advice. Whatever it is you're doing, stop it. One thing I learned at a very young age, about your age, in fact, is that if you go looking for trouble, you're gonna find it. You don't want to go looking for

the Boys. Because if you do, then somebody who isn't as loyal to this great country of ours as I am might make a phone call, and then the Boys might come looking for you. You don't want that. Trust me on this, you don't." He turned and walked away, and Eric peeled the Lexus out of the gas station.

The man went inside the gas station, opened the drawer and pulled out a cell phone, and dialed a number. A male voice answered. "Sugar Shack."

"You guys got any more of those jelly donuts you sent me last week?" asked the man.

"Plenty," said the man on the other end. "You need some?"

"Yeah. I need some donuts, right away." He closed the phone. *Damn!* he thought to himself, looking around the gas station. *I've been here for ten years, and now I have to go on the bounce because of a couple of goddamned kids!*

Back in the Lexus, Eric and Annette were so shaken by the encounter that they pulled off several intersections up the interstate and went into a Denny's for coffee and a quick cholesterol fix. "Jesus," whispered Eric as they sat in a rear booth inflicting death by ketchup on plates piled high with delicious fried things. "I think the death angel's wings just brushed our shoulders. I swear I thought that character was going to kill us! It wasn't what he said, just the way he looked at us! Maybe he just didn't have his gun on him at the time, and that's why we survived. I think you're right, Annette. I think he *is* NVA!"

"Keep your voice down!" hissed Annette. "Yeah, I think so too, but it doesn't look like they're going to listen to anything we have to say."

"Can you blame them?" asked Eric. "Two total strangers rock up out of nowhere and ask them to go kill some guy? I mean I know, that's what they do, but think how it looks to them. Why should they trust us?"

"I guess it was a stupid idea," admitted Annette with a sigh. "But it was our only shot at finding them."

"Yeah, well, we tried, anyway," said Eric. "So what now? Maybe we can get Lucius busted on drug charges? You know all that shit he has in his dorm room is still technically illegal. Maybe we can ruin his basketball career."

"And do you think anyone gives a flying fuck about him having drugs?" demanded Annette wearily. "So long as he doesn't get hooked on them himself and screw up his jump shot? The Portland cops won't do anything, they'll just tell us to go talk to the campus cops, and the campus cops will give him a pass on the Dean's orders like they always do. They don't object to his keeping girls overnight in his dorm room. What do they think he's doing with them, playing Parcheesi? Nobody is going to help us and nobody is going to do anything about him. Flammus is immune, Eric. He can do

anything he damned well pleases, so long as he performs on the goddamned basketball court. You know that."

"He knows it, too," growled Eric, the rage and hate starting to build up again inside him as he thought of the arrogant, smirking anthropoid he had seen with his arm wrapped around Janet Ridgeway. "I think that's what pisses me off so bad. The way Flammus knows he can do anything he wants and he just accepts it as the natural order of things. Like he's the king of beasts at Ashdown Academy because he can bounce a ball. He's in one of the most exclusive prep schools in the country, and he can barely write his own name, just because he can bounce a ball. He's got his own special tutors and a whole harem of star-struck white girls to do all his homework for him, just because he can bounce a ball. He'll probably pass with a higher GPA than you or I will, just because he can bounce a ball. White girls are just there for him to use and throw away like empty malt liquor cans once he's drained them, mentally, and sexually. They're just there to service the Big Black Badass Bakketbawl Player. He doesn't care one goddamned bit who he hurts, because white people's children and white people's pain and suffering don't count anymore in America. White people's daughters are just sex objects for mud people's pleasure anyway, so who gives a damn about them? He doesn't care what he did to you, or your parents, or me when he took Jan away from us. Lucius Flammus probably doesn't even know you exist."

"No," whispered Annette, staring at the corner of the table, her mind racing. "No, I don't think he does, does he? You know, Eric, I think you may be right. I think you may have hit on it." She looked at him. "Right now I am thinking over everything Jan ever told me, everything we have been able to learn about their relationship, if you want to call it that, and I think you're right. Even though I go to the same school as the girl he murdered, I don't think Lucius Flammus even knows that I exist. He's never acknowledged my existence. He's never said hello to me in the halls or tried to bullshit me and pull me into his little circle of whores. He likes them young and fresh, like Jan. I think to him I'm just another blonde bimbo he sees around, a blonde bimbo he may or may not have time to get around to before he goes on to play basketball for Duke. I don't think he knows who I am at all."

"So?" asked Eric suspiciously. He had a vague perception where she was going with this, and he didn't like it.

"So I can get close to him," she said calmly. "I can make him believe I'm a whore like all the rest of them. I can steal one of Dad's guns, get him alone up in his dorm room, and kill him."

"And what happens to you after that?" demanded Eric.

"I know it's risky. That's why I don't just steal the gun and walk up to him in the cafeteria or the gym and blow him away," she said. "I get him up in his dorm room and claim he tried to rape me. I was defending myself, and with his reputation who will believe otherwise?"

"So you just happen to go up to a dorm room with the man the whole school knows was doping and screwing your sister, and who drove her to suicide, with a gun in your purse, and you end up shooting him in self-defense?" demanded Eric. "Nobody's going to buy that, Annette. You deprive Ashdown Academy of its prize nigger hoops player and several million dollars in subsidies from the NBA for his care and feeding, pissing off the school administration and 50 million basketball fans who are slavering waiting for this asshole to show up on their TV screens, and you think you're just going to dance away on tiptoe like Tinkerbelle? Annette, granted your dad is rich as hell and he can get you a legal dream team that will maybe get you off, after a two hundred-day court case, so long as nobody ever utters the N word at any point during the trial. But in the process you'll ruin him financially and business-wise, you'll probably drive your mom into a mental institution with worry, you will drag Jan's name through the mud and you'll immortalize this last wretched year of her life on every sleazy cable TV talk show, make her name synonymous with sex and drugs and teen suicide everywhere that CNN and Fox News and Court TV reaches, and that's the whole damned world! The racial angle will be especially titillating. I'll give you this, Annette, you're a real fox, and you'll look very winsome going in and out of court and sitting at the defendant's table for the cameras, while millions of pervs have sexual fantasies about you, and this whole cesspool of a country feasts on Jan's carcass. Jesus, Annette, don't you get what you'll be doing, to yourself and the rest of us?"

Annette looked up at him, her eyes wet with tears. "Yes," she said. "I'm so sorry, Eric, but I have to. Right now there is only one thing in my mind, in my heart, and in my soul. My sister was mauled to death by a black animal, and it will *not* be allowed to live. Dad says we have to just learn to accept it when the black or the brown butcher comes into the pen to take away one of us pale hogs for slaughter. No! No, I won't accept it! Never! An animal took Jan away from me and put her in a hole in the ground forever, and I am going to kill it."

"No, you're not," Eric told her gently. "*I* am going to kill it. Now, you listen to me. I don't have any place to get a gun, so you'll have to snag one of your father's weapons for me. That's okay. I'm in and out of your house often enough so if this goes bad, I can claim I stole it. That's all you need to do,

Annette, just get me the piece and some ammunition. I haven't figured out how, and it will take some planning, since I'd kind of like to survive and marry you and have a little girl with you that we can name Janet, but I'll do it."

"We'll do it together," Annette told him, taking his hand. Eric decided not to start a long and wearing argument with her that he knew quite well he would lose.

"Okay," he sighed. "So, how hard can it be to plot a nigger-killing? The NVA does it all the time."

* * *

Planning a murder turned out to be a lot harder than they thought. As research, Annette had the idea of going to their local video store and renting a large stack of the "CSI" television series and its many spin-offs, which had been popular in the previous decade, to study crime scene investigative technique that might be used against them by the police. "No, don't rent them," said Eric. "We rent them on our own cards, we're leaving a paper trail right from the beginning. Same thing with downloading them to our computers. You need to hit the ATM, draw some cash, and then we split it and we each go to different malls in Portland on our own and buy one set of episodes in each video store, only one, so no clerk remembers us coming to the counter with a whole bunch of these things. Then we study each episode and make notes, and after we're done we throw all of them in a dumpster somewhere. No, a bunch of separate dumpsters. We can't let anyone know we're interested in how to whack people out."

The two young people did so, and they were able to get most of their research done in a single weekend in the basement rec room at Annette's house, the same one where Jan had died, which Annette found reaffirming and poetically just. Eric reassured Annette's worried parents on Saturday night when Ray took him aside during dinner and hesitantly brought up the subject of condoms. "It's not like that, sir," Eric told them, "And if it was, I can get all the condoms I need from the dispensers at school. No, Annette and I are just spending as much time as we can together trying to re-normalize, if you get what I'm saying. We're just watching TV and talking."

"In . . . *that* room?" ventured Lorraine Ridgeway hesitantly.

"Yeah, I know, it kind of freaked me out a bit at first, but I think Annette wants to face it and beat it," Eric told her. "Look, folks, I hope you know I wouldn't do anything to get Annette in trouble. She's got enough trouble as it is."

"We know that, Eric," said Ray gratefully. "I'm just glad she's got someone like you, her own age, to help her through this."

"I think if you give us some space for a little while, she'll come down and level off," said Eric in a voice of sincere concern. "You might say we're working through some anger issues."

"Thank you, Eric," said her mother with a relieved smile. Fortunately neither parent walked in on the two of them and discovered exactly what they were watching and making notes on. On Monday morning a number of crime show discs went into dumpsters around the city, and that afternoon Eric and Annette met in the school library to compare notes.

"Okay, so what did we get from all that, besides about twenty-three hours of political correctness and maybe a cumulative hour's worth of worthwhile information?" asked Annette.

"A couple of points spring to mind," said Eric. "First off, do the hit outside, not inside, preferably in the woods somewhere. An outdoor crime scene is much harder for a CSI team to work, and there's much more chance of weather and animals and such contaminating the evidence. An indoor hit is too confined. All the evidence is pretty much there in one room for them to find."

"Check," said Annette practically. "Second, always make sure you *get rid of the gun.* A good defense lawyer can square almost anything except for DNA and their connecting you to the murder weapon."

"That's a weak point," said Eric. "Should we maybe not use one of your father's guns, but try to get our own from somewhere? I know some loadies who can probably hook me up with a Babu."

"Uh, I don't think that's what they call illegal gun dealers any more," said Annette. "And if they ever did, it was in New York. That was TV, remember? But if we buy from someone, that puts us in the power of the person we get the gun from, who will be able to identify whichever one of us makes the buy. My Dad isn't dumb and he'll know what we've done, and he will go nuts, but he won't rat us out to the police."

"Yeah, good point," said Eric with a sigh. "Which one do we borrow? Your Dad has how many pistols?"

"Four," said Annette. "Plus a couple of shotguns and a .22 rifle, and a deer rifle. He bought them years ago, before you practically had to sign your name in your own blood and provide your whole life's story since kindergarten on a BATFE form to own a firearm legally. I don't know if there's any police or government record of those guns or not. He's got a .22 Ruger revolver, a .357 Magnum with a short barrel, a cowboy-looking .45 revolver, and a German

Luger he says my great-grandfather brought back from World War Two as a souvenir. Which one do you want?"

"Skilled Mob and NVA hit men apparently use .22s all the time, up close and personal, but I'm not a skilled hit man. Flammus is a big nigger, and I need something that will put him down with one shot, and the second will finish him for good. I don't want a wounded animal charging me. Which one is your Dad least likely to miss?" asked Sellars.

"He takes the .357 with him a lot when he travels. He's got a special permit for it, because as rich as he is and as important in banking as he is, he's a possible terrorist target. I don't know if we have any bullets for the Luger, and it's old and it might not shoot anyway. It will have to be the .45 cowboy gun. Dad told me once it's called a Colt Peacemaker. It's a replica of the old Wild West gun and I know we've got a box of .45-caliber shells for it. I don't know how often Dad looks at it. He won't miss it for a while. When he does, he'll know, and he won't ever trust me or look at me again in the same way, but he won't rat me out. Or tell Mom."

"You're okay with that?" asked Eric curiously.

"I haven't got a choice," she said with a shrug. "We need to hold off on my stealing the gun until the last minute, so Dad doesn't miss it too soon, but we will also need to test fire it and make sure it works."

"Yippie ki yi yay, then," said Eric. "After it's done we'll need to throw it into the river."

"Not the river," corrected Annette. "The cops drag the rivers along the shorelines and under bridges around Portland for NVA guns about once a week, all up and down the waterfront and as far up as Longview and The Dalles along the Columbia. They use metal detectors and stuff. It's the first place they'll look."

"Right, I forgot," said Eric. "Okay, I've got it. Afterward I take the gun home and down to my dad's workshop in the basement. He's got everything down there, including a metal-cutting jigsaw laser. I'll cut off the barrel and then slice it into washer-sized rings, so ballistics can never fire a test round and match the bullets that killed Flammus. Then I slice the weapon itself into four or five unrecognizable pieces, and scatter the pieces into different dumpsters all around town. It will take me almost all night, but my folks are used to my doing weird stuff down there at all hours. So that's the gun gotten rid of."

"Check," said Annette. "If you are going to be doing the shooting, you wear disposable gloves and a long sleeved shirt to catch any of the powder flash, so they can't find powder residue on your hands with a paraffin test. The gloves and the shirt need to disappear as well."

"Check," said Eric. "So with what we've got so far, looks like we need to lure Flammus out in the park or the woods someplace."

"I'll take care of that," said Annette.

"You know I'm still not comfortable with that," said Eric with a frown. "Okay, okay, we won't go over it again. You get him out into some kind of outdoor woodsy type setting, I'm waiting, I shoot him, then we both beat feet in opposite directions and I get rid of the gun, my shirt, and the gloves I'm wearing. But look, you can't be seen with him, because if you are then you're the first one the cops are going to come after. They'll probably interview you anyway, because of Jan, so you'll need an alibi as well. If anyone does see you two together, that means we have to drop this plan and find another one."

"I agree," said Annette. "I've decided I'm going to do this, Eric, but it would be so much nicer if I didn't end up coming out of prison when my hair is white as snow, if ever. How do we catch him alone? It can't just be any place, it has to be fairly near where we're going to do it so I can give him the come-hither and get him to you, and do it all without getting into a car with him. Any time you get into a car you leave something of yourself behind that a sharp CSI unit can pick up on if they're looking. For them, placing you in the victim's car or placing him in your car is almost as good as catching you with the gun."

Eric sighed. "Yeah. That's a poser. He almost never *is* alone, except when he's in his dorm room at night, and even then half the time he's not alone. You know he demanded a room to himself when he came here, no roommate, so that he could 'bring in bitches' as he put it? And Ashdown gave it to him without a quibble. You know, I think this damned school is almost as responsible for Jan's death as Flammus is."

"This school and all it represents," muttered Annette angrily.

"Somehow we've got to catch Flammus alone, you lure him to me, then I kill him and we beat feet, which means both of us will need to have our cars nearby. We can't approach him anywhere on the school grounds, because this place has got CCTV security cameras out the asshole. I can see one pointed at us right now. Also, we have to kill him at night. Doing him in daylight is simply too damned risky. Any casual witness will get too good a look at us."

"You should wear a ski mask like the NVA, especially if we're going to blame it on them," said Annette.

"Uh, yeah, I guess you're right, but . . ."

"But what?" asked Annette.

"You can't very well walk up to this coon and hit on him wearing a ski mask, so that means you're taking more of a risk than I am," complained Eric.

"That's very sweet and chivalrous of you, dear, and very silly," said Annette with a pleased giggle. "Screw your male macho, get a mask and wear it, and make it go the way of the shirt and the gloves and the gun afterward."

"Speaking of the NVA, how are we going to pin this on them so the cops go looking for spuckies instead of us?" asked Eric.

"Oh, that's easy." She reached into her purse and pulled out a Bicycle deck of playing cards, still in the cellophane wrapper. "Once you get your gloves on so you won't leave fingerprints, you cut open this pack of cards, and you carefully extract the Jack of Diamonds, and you put it in your pocket. You drop the Jack of Diamonds on his body, and the next day they'll all be yelling on TV about how The Cat has struck again. The rest of the card deck goes the way of the other stuff."

"It's Cat-Eyes, not The Cat, and he always uses a rifle," objected Eric.

"So they'll figure he just decided to do things a little different and get up close and personal with Lucius," said Annette with a shrug.

"Do you want to make a call to KATU claiming credit for Lucius as an NVA hit?" asked Sellars. "Use a rag to muffle your voice or something?"

Annette shook her head. "No, they shouldn't have any recording at all of either of our voices, and besides, I know there's a set form for those calls and there's an authenticating code word the goots give 'em, which we don't have. That's needlessly complicating things. They'll get the message if we leave the Jack of Diamonds."

"We still don't know just when and where we're going to do this," pointed out Sellars.

"Hmmm," Annette mused. "We need some inside information about Lucius himself, what some of his habits are. We need to start clocking him, but very carefully, so he doesn't notice either of us. Shouldn't be too hard, since he stays on campus or in the immediate neighborhood all the time."

"He won't admit it, but he's scared to go into town," said Eric. "He takes a couple of campus rent-a-cops with him in plain clothes when he does public appearances or he goes to the mall, for all the good they'd do him if the NVA decides to hit him."

"Getting him alone and outside is the problem!" said Annette. "Dammit, he can't have his entourage with him all the time!"

"What about the campus cops?" said Eric Sellars. "I wonder what kind of file they've got on Flammus? As much trouble as he's caused around here, it must be pretty extensive."

"You're good with computers. Can you hack into their system?" asked Annette eagerly.

"Even a good hack always leaves a trace," said Eric. "No, I just know this one rent-a-cop who likes to play Warrior World and he's having trouble with his gaming software. I'll offer to help him out, and see if I can't get him talking about Flammus. Meanwhile, try to think of some way we can set that monkoid up for the kill without getting caught."

Eric took Annette out to lunch at a local Burger Barn the next day and told her his news. "I spent last night over at the apartment of that campus rent-a-cop I mentioned," he told her. "His name's Mark Moore, by the way."

"I think I may know him from around campus," said Annette.

"Yeah, he's an interesting guy. Ex-military police, Iraq veteran, turned down for the police because of the affirmative action and also because he used to publish a blog when he was in Iraq saying nasty things about Bush Two. He hates it here at Ashdown riding herd on all us spoiled rich brats, but at least he gets partial medical for his mother, who's real sick, which you don't get much anymore in the private sector, so he sticks it out. He's like a lot of white guys, in that after he puts in his eight hours he goes home and logs on to his own private fantasy world online. He's actually pretty good at WW, up to level twenty-four with his latest character, Zoltan the Duel Master. He says it's either that or the bottle, and if he turns into a drunk he'll lose his job and his mom's insurance, so it's Warrior World. Anyway, we mostly talked computers for about four hours, I got his system fine tuned down to nanosecond response time on his function key and his mouse, and then he broke out the beers and we just started shooting the shit. Didn't take much prodding to get him off onto the subject of Lucius Flammus. Every white campus cop and half the staff hate that nigger's guts. I found out one thing: Flammus isn't quite as puritanical with his dope as he lets on. He likes to smoke weed, and after practice he usually sneaks out back of the gym to smoke a joint or two. Alone, since he doesn't want the coach and his NBA handlers and his fan club to find out he's a user. Did you know that damned coon already has his own web site and fanzine?"

"The hill that slopes down behind the gym is kind of wooded," pointed out Annette. "There's a little path that goes down to some picnic tables they put down there a few years ago as a kind of outdoor lunch area, that most people seem to have forgotten about. This time of year, it will be dark by the time he gets out of ball practice, and nobody will be down there. That's our kill zone."

"You're getting good at this," said Eric with a chuckle.

"Bullshit, I'm scared out of my mind, and if you have any sense you should be too."

"What about the security cameras?" asked Eric.

"I'm trying to remember what's back there," said Annette, resting her chin on her fist. "Seems to me there's only one at the end of the parking lot, and my guess is that Lucius himself probably doesn't want anyone in the control room watching him smoke his weed, so he probably just hangs out around the corner or behind the dumpster."

"We scout it out this afternoon," said Eric. "In the open. Everybody knows we're hooked up, and if anyone sees us poking around back there, they'll figure we just went out there to snog in private."

After school the two of them took a long walk out behind the Ashdown gym. They saw one camera on a light post at the far end of the parking lot. "It's panning," said Eric. "That means you have intervals of about thirty seconds when part of the lot isn't under surveillance. That's going to be really tricky, you schmoozing Flammus and keeping an eye on the camera at the same time."

Annette looked around. They seemed to be alone in back of the building; they could hear whistles and bouncing balls and splashing from the swimming pool inside. "Okay, we need to check out the old break area, but I don't want security to see us going down there. Let's start walking back toward the quad." They did so. Annette kept her eye on the camera, and when it was swinging the other way she said "Aaaaand . . . *go!*" The two of them scampered hand in hand across the parking lot and got down the embankment before the camera swung back. "That will look like we disappeared off camera, and if anybody's watching, they'll figure we went back into the campus."

A narrow gravel pathway sloped down between a stand of trees on the hillside, down to a small creek running parallel to Highway 212. There was a rustic-looking plank bridge and a few forlorn picnic tables, the wood damp and uninviting. "This is it," she said.

"You can get him down here in the dark, on a cold wet night?" asked Eric.

"For what I'm going to offer him, yes," she said coldly. "Don't ask."

"Uh . . ."

"I mean it, Eric," she said fiercely. "Don't ask. Not ever!"

"All right," he said quietly. "Closed subject. This is perfect. On the day, I bring you to school in my car. We hang out in the library until about four thirty, which is when practice ends. Lucius will need to shower and scour his nasty black ass, so give him half an hour. If he feels like a nice relaxing joint, he may slip out back up there around five. I gather from Moore that's his MO, so he can work up a nice case of munchies in time for dinner in the dining hall. I come down here first, with the gun . . . damn, those cameras

everywhere! You know once they find his carcass they're going to play back every disc and track everybody's movements with a fine toothed comb!"

"Plus, look at the ground here," pointed out Annette. "It's wet and muddy now and it will be wet and muddy when we do it. We're already leaving footprints. See?" She indicated them. "Plus, if it's past five o'clock it will be pitch black down here, and none of us will be able to see what the hell we're doing."

"Shit," said Eric with a sigh. "Okay, so it's *not* perfect after all," he conceded. "So what the hell do we do?"

Annette sat down on one of the picnic tables, ignoring the wet seat that soaked through her wool skirt. "Look, you know, maybe we're being too elaborate here," she suggested. "This isn't an Agatha Christie novel and we're not setting up some complex plot for Miss Marple to unravel. This is more like a Mafia hit, and I saw on TV once that one reason they're so seldom solved is their very simplicity. Some hood gets lured into the wrong car or walks into the wrong bar, badda bing badda boom, he's dead, there's no gun and nobody saw nuttin', and that's where it stays. I know what it said on CSI about trying to get the target outside, in the woods, but the parking lot is outside as well. Let's go back up and have another look at that lot and that security camera. Suppose we just catch him outside, blast him, and melt back onto campus?"

"What about the security cameras? Our little electronic trail of breadcrumbs?" asked Eric

"Uh, maybe we could get some different parkas and hide our faces, and then throw them away afterwards . . ." Annette frowned and furrowed her brow. "Jeez, this is hard! How do those NVA guys do it all the time?"

"I gather they mostly shoot down their targets on the street," said Eric. "I've heard of a few cases where they went into people's houses after them, but not many. Plus there's bombing. You know, I *am* an engineering student, and I could build us a bomb if we needed it. The chem lab has got enough ingredients in stock. I could make up a pipe bomb with some super black powder, use potassium chlorate instead of sodium nitrate, and that will triple its kinetic energy. And a bomb would really make it look like the NVA."

"Mmmm, hold that thought, but I'd rather not risk hurting anyone else besides the son of a bitch who killed my sister," said Annette, ruminating. "Look, I can't help but think our window of opportunity is still Flammus' alleged habit of stepping out back of the gym alone to smoke marijuana after practice. It seems to be the only time we know of when he's not surrounded by people. I think it's best we do it then and there, when we'll have some

light to see by from the lot and the building. Remember, it will be just gone dark. But those damned cameras, especially that one at the corner of the parking lot!"

"Let's get back up there," said Eric. "I want to check something." They hiked back up the path, peeped over the top of the grass and waited until the camera at the far corner of the lot swung away from them. Then they scampered up over the verge and onto the asphalt lot, and around the corner of the gym just as the camera was swinging back. They walked across campus hand in hand and swung a wide arc around, coming into the other leg of the L-shaped gym parking lot from the right side of the building. "Aha! That's what I thought I remembered!" he exclaimed. "They wired this place on the cheap, admittedly back before things in the Northwest got this hairy, so they probably saw no need to go overboard on security. There's only the one camera; it pans and covers both wings of the parking lot. Let's see if we can get down there while it's turned away . . . *go!"* They ran down the row of parked cars and were under the light pole that supported the camera about twelve feet off the ground, before it had panned back to the left. "Bingo!" he said softly. "We've got our plan of attack."

"Huh?" asked Annette, bewildered.

He pointed to a small half-inch conduit cable leading down from the camera to a steel switcher box at shoulder height. "They put this system in before the days of wireless, as well," he said. "Annette, look up. There's the camera, we can see it, but it can't see us, because we're right under it. This is the blind spot!

"On the morning of the day we decide to do this, we come in to school early," Eric told her. "We come in my Volvo, so there's nothing that actually points back to you, and that's a bit of chivalry I insist on, Annie. We wait until the camera is pointing away, and then we slide in and park in this space right here. We have to make sure the camera's pointing away so they will have no digital record of who parked in this spot that day. We get out, leaving the gun and two masks and my gloves and my old long sleeved shirt in the car. I'll need to bring a special shirt for the hit, so I can produce the clothing everybody saw me wearing on the day of the murder, if I have to. We dodge the camera and get onto campus without being recorded, at least not in this lot, and then we go on with our normal school day, hanging out late in the library like I said. About quarter to five, we leave together. When we get outside we walk down in front of the gym and as we turn the corner, we camera-dodge our way back to the car. Again, we have to make sure we're not recorded in this area. The lot should be pretty well cleared out by then. I'll back in park that

morning, and so we should have a clear view of the back door of the gym. When we get in the car I will take off my jacket and shirt and I'll put on the throwaway long-sleeve I brought, and the gloves. Then we sit and we wait. I'll bring some binoculars from home. When we see Flammus step out the back door, we have to move fast. The first thing we do is we check this parking lot for any possible witnesses. There shouldn't be any by then, since most of the residential kids will be in the dining hall chomping down.

"If the coast looks clear, then we proceed to Step B," Eric continued in a professorial tone. "I get out and I cut that electric conduit cover with a pair of bolt cutters, insulated handles so I don't fry my ass. That will shut down the spy camera. That's the point of no return. We will have to assume that security will immediately notice the loss of the camera and send somebody out, so we will have about five minutes, maybe a little less, before someone comes around that corner looking to find out what's wrong. That should be enough time. I get back in the car. Did I mention that you will be driving?"

"Thou art most gracious, my lord," simpered Annette. "I wondered where I came into this plan of yours."

"I'm going to need my hands free, especially my gun hand, as the old cowpokes down on the range would say. Once that camera goes I get back in the car and pull on my mask. You need to get a mask of some kind too. Yeah, I know, if someone sees us they might get the license number of the car, so the masks might seem pointless, but we might as well give ourselves every bit of edge we can. You start the car and drive toward Flammus, not too fast, because we don't want to alarm him. You pull up beside wherever he's standing puffing his joint and feeling pleased with himself, most likely on the sidewalk there, or maybe sheltering in the doorway if it's raining. If I can get a good clear shot from the passenger seat I'll shoot him dead center, then I'll get out of the car and put one in his head, close in. If we're going to be spending the rest of our lives in prison or dying on a gurney with a needle in our arm for this, I want to make damned sure the black bastard's dead. I put the Jack of Diamonds on him. Then I get back in the car and you drive off, around the gym, then out that exit there," he pointed over his left shoulder "Then out onto the entrance drive, down onto 212, and home. We drop you off first in West Linn, and then after supper I'll ask Dad for the keys to the jigsaw for some iron brackets and fittings I'm making for our new deck, and tear down the gun. I'll also shred all the other stuff into rags and burn them in our waste furnace we use for sawdust and such. The next morning I'll leave for school and take a tour of the scenic dumpsters of Portland."

"Of course, all it takes is one witness to ID the car and we're toast," pointed out Annette.

"If we see one single person in the area who might witness the hit, then we abort," said Eric. "But you know, it will be dark, and even if somebody does see it go down by accident, it will probably be at a distance. If all of our other forensics comes up squeaky clean we might be able to bluff our way out of some guy's fleeting glimpse of a vehicle under a street light. But I agree, it's a risk. Especially using one of our own cars. You want to back off and try to come up with something else?"

"No, I want to get this done," said Annette, shaking her head. "I don't know how long I can keep all this up before I start gibbering. I have a good feeling about hitting him in this area, and it's the only likely place we've come up with. In this time and place there can be no justice without risk. Let's do it."

"Okay. Now, if the cops don't buy the NVA angle, you'll receive a visit from them, since you have a motive for whacking Flammus. You tell them we left and came straight home, and don't vary from that story. Be very vague about where I was parked, but only if you are asked. Don't volunteer anything. If it starts looking at all dangerous, be very prim and polite, shut your trap, and yell for the best lawyer your father's money can buy. You're rich enough so they can't pull a Patriot Act on you. They'll have to actually prove something, with evidence."

"Got it," said Annette. "When's the next basketball practice?"

"Today," said Eric. "But it's too soon. We don't have the gun yet. Next practice is Thursday, day after tomorrow."

"I'll get the gun and the ammo for you tonight and give it to you when you pick me up tomorrow," said Annette. "We'll need to find some place to test fire it. Let's hope my Dad doesn't notice it's gone before it's served its purpose. What if Lucius doesn't come out to smoke his dope on Thursday afternoon?"

"Then we have to wait for him every practice night until he does," said Eric. "Sound good to you? Any questions?"

"If there are, I'll ask them when we go over this for the hundredth time, which is the number of times we need to go over it. But yes, it sounds good. Will Jan rest easier after this?" Annette wondered aloud.

"Will you?" asked Eric.

"I know I will," she said.

"You know, there's another advantage to this plan," said Eric soberly. "Doing it this way, you don't have to degrade yourself with your sister's murderer, in body or in spirit."

"I noticed. Plus I get to wear a mask, like a real terrorist. Eric, thank you." She kissed him, and Annette's kisses were rare enough so that each one was a treat worth remembering.

* * *

They did go over it a hundred times, and in the gathering darkness on Thursday evening, it all worked perfectly. The dark gods of homicide favored them in all things. Annette was amazed at herself, how calm she was, how right it felt as she pulled a baseball cap down over her head, a scarf up over her face, and eased the Volvo up beside the huge negro. She heard him scream "Muthafukka!" one last time as the .45 Peacemaker in Eric's hand split the air in a thunderclap and a lightning flash, splattering the wall behind Flammus with his blood. Then came another thunderbolt as Eric got out of the car, leaned down and fired into the kicking, gabbling black lich on the ground, and a sorry-ass nigger died a nigger's death. Eric tossed the playing card down on the ground beside the corpse, got back into the car, and they left. The ride home was completely silent. In Annette's driveway they came together in a passionate kiss, and before she got out of the car she whispered to him, "This weekend we make the time and find the place, and I don't mean the back of a car or the band room this time." And they did.

Nor did Annette even get a visit from the police. The law bought the NVA angle without question. The media certainly did. The talking heads on television and the headlines in the newspapers shrieked in horror, "RACIST TERROR CLAIMS NBA HOPEFUL," and "CAT-EYES LEAVES HIS CALLING CARD ON CORPSE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ATHLETE," and "OREGON MOURNS FOR PREP SCHOOL HOOP STAR." Dean Hopkinson spluttered in a stunned and ragged voice to the reporters, "We have no idea how that racist murderer got onto our campus or got off. It's like he's a ghost!"

If Ray Ridgeway noticed that one of his handguns was missing, he said nothing. He said nothing at all, in fact, about Flammus' death, which was a significant omission. Annette took that to mean that he probably suspected something, since she knew her father was far from a fool, but he had simply decided that now was not the time or place to go into the matter, for which she was intensely grateful.

Once more Annette had occasion to wear her mourning dress, a delicious irony in which she delighted. Three days after the killing of Lucius Flammus, classes were canceled at Ashdown Academy and the entire student body and faculty drove to North Portland in buses or in their own cars to Flammus'

funeral at the First African Methodist Church, a large building that fortunately had a large parking lot across the street to accommodate the fleet of cars, buses, and limousines. Eric escorted her, dressed in an immaculate suit with a black armband, and they sat grim-faced through the eulogies and stood respectfully for the hymns from the robed black singers, albeit the choir was smaller than usual. Many of Portland's African-American residents were finally starting to get the message, and were departing for healthier climates outside the Pacific Northwest. One of the most moving of the eulogies from Ashdown came from Wade Schumaker, Annette and Eric's English teacher, a portly middle-aged man who literally broke down in tears at the podium, so distressed was he at the loss of this brilliant young adornment to Portland's African-American community and to the gorgeous mosaic that was America.

The funeral was crowded with state and local politicians and media, and surrounded by a security cordon of hundreds of heavily armed police and National Guard and FBI SWAT teams; the NVA had been known to attack funeral services that threatened to turn into political statements before this. Eric and Annette waited patiently for the crowd to thin out before crossing the street to where the white Lexus was parked, beside a long black stretch limo. "You actually didn't burst out laughing!" Eric told her in a low tone. "I'm impressed. Now that was above and beyond the call!"

"I don't care if they arrest me now," said Annette. "If they just take me and not you, I honestly don't care if they kill me now, Eric. I've done right by Jan and however long I have to live without her, I can take comfort in that."

"The Sicilians say that revenge is the only dish that tastes best when it's served cold," said Eric. "Well, that may be, but I can tell you, it tastes damned good served hot as well! Give me the keys, I'll drive." They stopped at the rear of the Lexus and as Eric took the keys from Annette, he felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around and found himself facing a spare and bespectacled man in a chauffeur's uniform and cap, presumably from the VIP limo next to them.

"Hello again, Eric," the man said with a polite smile. "Hello again, Annette."

"Uh, do we know you?" asked Eric suspiciously.

"Sure you do," the chauffeur said easily. "Hank Jarrett. I used to run Jarrett's Tune and Lube down in Woodburn, but I've got a new job now. I had to give up my service station, see, when a couple of smart-ass preppy kids came by asking stupid questions."

Eric gulped and mumbled, "Uh, well . . ." He and Annette took a step back, but Annette almost stepped on the toes of someone standing behind

her. She whirled and saw a lean and handsome young man with auburn hair, a devilish twinkle in his blue eyes and a slight, sardonic smile. He was dressed in a suit as neat as Eric's, with the same black mourning band on his arm.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Sellars," he said. "Good afternoon, Miss Ridgeway. My name is Jesse Lockhart. I'm told you two have been taking my name in vain."

"Oh *shit!"* gasped Annette, white-faced.

"Oh shit, indeed," said Lockhart amiably. Behind them, Jarrett opened the door of the limousine. "We'd like a word, please," said Cat-Eyes, gesturing toward the black yawning interior of the limo. "Get in the car."

XII

"Are You In Or Out?"

Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there;
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain . . .

Hamlet—Act I, Scene 5

Annette and Eric looked at each other. They knew that they couldn't risk screaming for the nearby police. Even if the Volunteers didn't shoot them on the spot, they could hardly afford to draw attention to themselves, in view of their role in the death of the black man whose funeral they had just attended. Eric took her hand and squeezed it, and they got into the limousine. Lockhart got in behind them, and they found themselves seated in the spacious rear compartment across from two other men. One was wearing a neat suit and a blue ski mask over his head. The second was a large man with a chestnut ponytail and beard, dressed in jeans and a jacket, beneath which they could see a large .357 Magnum in a shoulder holster. Lockhart sat down beside them, and the chauffeur-dressed Jarrett got into the front seat behind the wheel, then rolled down the partition window so he could listen in. Eric broke the ice. "I know this is a stupid thing to say to people who are probably about to kill us, but are you guys aware of the fact that you're surrounded by a hundred heavily armed cops and government gun-toters of various kinds?

Either you've got balls the size of grapefruit, or else you're just plain nuts. I'm curious. Which is it?"

"Audace, audace, toujours l'audace," said the man in the mask. His voice was teasingly familiar. "Danton. French Revolution. Fortune favors the brave and all that rot."

"Okay, what happens now?" asked Annette. Her voice was calm, but her hand was almost crushing Eric's. "Mr. Lockhart, will it do any good to apologize for our appropriating your Jack of Diamonds signature? I know you're mad at us, but we didn't realize it was copyrighted material, so to speak."

"Oh, hell no, I'm not mad," laughed Cat-Eyes easily. "I'm just glad you guys didn't fuck up the tickle. You've actually augmented my rep and helped confuse the enemy. I don't normally use a handgun, but now they've got something more to addle their brains with, and your dean's comment about my being a mysterious ghost who can make myself invisible is a plus. Adds to my legend and all that crap. These comrades of mine wanted to have a word with you, and I asked to come along out of curiosity to see what kind of kids have the stones to do what you did and then hang it on me. You guys did a damned good job, by the way. Congratulations."

"That's from all of us," said the big bearded man. "I'm Comrade Thumper."

"I can imagine," said Annette, eyeing him. She looked at the man in the mask. "Do I know you?"

"Not yet," said Jimmy Wingo. "Maybe you will in future, maybe you won't. That's up to you. I think you can guess why we're here. The Army is always looking for new talent."

"How did you find us?" asked Eric.

"The fact that you both gave me your names was a pretty big help," said Jarrett from the front. "That and the fact that you were wearing Ashdown Academy school uniforms. We had our eyes on you even before you cacked that coon."

"That's reassuring," said Annette. Her voice was still calm but Eric could feel her hand starting to tremble.

"We wanted to see how you'd handle yourselves, and you did all right," said Wingo. "Actually, Flammus was already on our to-do list. We just hadn't got around to him yet. Cat here cruised the area around the school a couple of times scoping, the terrain and looking for firing positions and escape routes."

"I recommended we take him elsewhere, just before or after a game, when he was in transit," explained Lockhart. "An enclosed area like your campus is hard, if you have to beat feet right after your shot. Not many exits or possible

pickup points for a vehicle to catch you on the bounce. But you know that. Just for the record, can I ask how you pulled it off? Two revolutionary comrades to another?"

"Praise from the master," said Eric with a shaky laugh. "Well, you see, that nigger Flammus was a real louse. He—did things to someone Annette and I both cared about a lot . . ."

"We know about your sister, ma'am," said Wingo gravely. "For what it's worth, please accept my sympathies and the condolences of the NVA. We all lost a sister when Jan died, although I guess you don't understand that fully."

"I do understand," said Annette quietly. "Thank you, uh, Thumper."

"So you decided to kill Flammus," prompted Wingo. Jarrett spoke up from the front seat.

"Parking lot's clearing out," he said. "We better roll, or somebody might wonder why we're just sitting here."

"Okay, Jeeves, take her for a spin," said Wingo. "We'll bring you back to your car when we're done," he told the two young people, and suddenly they knew he meant it and they were in no danger. They both palpably relaxed.

Jarrett started the limousine and pulled away out of the parking lot. Annette turned to the driver. "Mr. Jarrett, I'm sorry Eric and I lost you your gas station. I know now it was a stupid and careless thing to do, but we wanted to find the NVA really bad, and your place was all I could think of."

"Don't worry about it, miss," replied Jarrett, smiling back at her. "It was time. I'm amazed the feebs never picked up on me before. You guys were a wake-up call. If you could remember the Party papers in my waiting room, I'm sure others could as well, and maybe the next guy who remembered would have picked up the phone to the FBI and done some dialing for dollars. I can get the business back after we run these bastards out of our country, if I want."

"You were saying about killing Flammus?" prompted Wingo again.

As they rode through the wintry streets of Portland, Eric quickly and accurately ran down the entire murder plot from beginning to end. Wingo and Lockhart looked at one another, clearly impressed. "Using one of your own vehicles was a mistake, but luck was with you, as it so often is with us these days. Otherwise that really was good work," said Wingo with an approving nod. "Good planning and execution. You both have the knack for the job, and you've got the belly for it. It's not everybody who can keep his cool, plant the package and thumb the detonator, pull the trigger and then not go to pieces afterwards. Even some of our own comrades don't have that kind of steel nerves, and they can't be used for wet work. Okay, I'm sure you know what the next

question will be. Where do you two want to take it from here, if anywhere? We understand that this was a private matter, and you may have always thought of it as a one-shot deal, or a two-shot deal, to be accurate." Annette smiled. "If you just want to leave it there and get on with your lives, that's 100 per cent your call. We'll take you back to your car and you'll never see us again. If you want to form your own group and continue the fight in your own way, without any official connection to the Army, then that's an option as well. We'll even give you one emergency contact if you ever need any help. Some people are doing that. Whatever their reasons may be, they don't want to be officially connected to the NVA or under Army discipline, but they are waging their own resistance struggle in small groups or as individuals. That's acceptable as well. In fact it's sometimes a good idea in this phase of the war, although at some point in the future, when this thing gets really big-time, we're going to have to connect all the dots. Or you can throw in with the NVA itself and keep on with what you've started. Have you thought about it?"

"I've been thinking about it since I watched my sister's coffin lowered into the ground," said Annette bitterly.

"We both have," said Eric soberly. "We're young, but even we can see that things in America can't go on this way. I laugh when somebody refers to us kids at Ashdown as privileged. Jan's death showed us that all our so-called privilege won't protect us against this—this filth, this madness, this—oh, this whole damned mess. We're living in a toilet and eventually we're going down the drain, one way or another. I don't know what else to call it."

"Don't worry," chuckled Wingo. "Greater minds than any of ours have spent their lives trying to describe the world we live in. Our job is to change it. One thing, though. I'm afraid for security reasons, which I'm sure are obvious to you, we need an answer right away. You say you've been thinking about it for a while, so you should be able to look into your hearts and know. Are you in or out?"

"I'm in if Eric's in," said Annette, looking at him. "I am willing to do whatever I have to do, but not be separated from him. We can't have one of us in and one of us out."

"Ditto," said Eric firmly. "I'm in if Annette's in, so I guess that means we're both in."

"You understand that if you become Volunteers, you may be separated anyway?" asked Wingo gently. "I mean separated bad, separated by death or prison or the just plain chaos and madness of war?"

"I understand," said Eric with a nod. "But if we don't join you guys and try and do something about the world we live in, for the rest of our lives we're

going to be looking over our shoulders because of what we did to Flammus. You know that as recently as ten years ago those FBI motherfuckers were dragging old men in their eighties out of their homes and throwing them into prison cells full of niggers and gang-bangers because of what they did for the Klan in the 1950s and 1960s? The Jews never forget, and they never forgive."

"You know about the Jews?" asked Hank Jarrett from the driver's seat in some surprise.

"All us so-called privileged people know about the Jews," Annette told him. "We actually know better than anyone else, because we see them up close and personal a lot more than regular people do. That's one of our wonderful privileges. Avi Cohen's a good example, this nasty little horn dog in my chem class and drama club who's been chasing me since tenth grade—says he can't help it, Jewish men just have to get blondes. Little cockroach. I don't suppose we could make him our next target?" she asked hopefully.

The masked man spoke up again. "Ah, now that will be your first lesson in Army discipline," he said in a firm and mellifluous voice. "You don't go selecting your own targets or comporting yourself in the manner of cowboys, with or without a Colt Peacemaker." He reached up and pulled his mask off, revealing a face they knew.

"Mr. Schumaker!" both Eric and Annette yelped simultaneously.

"In the flesh," said the teacher with a little bow. "Fresh from my touching and heartfelt eulogy for that fine young African-American athlete cut down in his prime by wicked, evil racism. God, Flammus was a nauseating piece of shit! I'm used to being compelled to pass muscle-bound ball-bouncers of all colors on orders from the administration, but Hopkinson told me Flammus had to maintain an A average when he could barely write his own name, and I got pulled into doctoring his SAT scores as well. I don't think I've ever been around a monkoid who made me feel more unclean than he did. You two fine youngsters have made the world a whiter and brighter place without him. I add my congratulations to those of my comrades here."

"So now what?" asked Annette.

"We take you back to your car, and you go home," said Schumaker. "On Monday morning you will be surprised to find there has been a change in your faculty guidance and career counselor, and it will be necessary for us to have a few serious counseling sessions in my office. If I remain satisfied with your moral fiber and your level of commitment, you will be given certain documents to read, and you will begin a training course that will teach you what you will need to know to fight to secure the existence of our people and a future for white children. Do you recognize that phrase?"

"Uh, no," said Eric, shaking his head.

"Those are the Fourteen Words," said Schumaker gravely. "From now on, for the rest of your lives however long or short they may be, you will live by those words. And possibly die by them."

* * *

Schumaker must have been satisfied with what he saw and heard from the pair of them in their subsequent meetings, because two weeks later, on a chilly night, Annette and Eric found themselves seated on a sofa in an apartment above an organic health food store in Portland's ritzy downtown Pearl District. They were sipping on big mugs of steaming herbal tea when the door opened and three men came into the apartment from the hall outside. The two young people stood up, not knowing whether they should snap to attention, or what.

"Good evening, comrades," said the big man in the lead, in a genuinely welcoming tone. He was Gary Bresler, battalion adjutant, a tall and beefy man with receding gray hair and big hands. Annette and Eric could see the shoulder-holstered automatic beneath the light sports jacket he wore, sans tie. He waved them back to their seats. "For your purposes, my name is Walter. I will introduce these other two comrades in due course. You're here on time. That's good. One of the things I will be emphasizing to you today is the absolute requirement for punctuality. When you are told to be somewhere at seventeen minutes past 3 p.m. exactly, you will be given a time check to set your watch by, and you will be there at 3:17. Not 3:15. Not 3:19. Being two minutes late, or sometimes two minutes early, can very often mean the margin of difference between a successfully completed military operation and your own torture, death, or lifelong imprisonment in the closest approximation to hell on earth that human beings have yet devised. And on that cheerful note, we'll begin." Bresler and Lieutenant Wayne Hill, the Third Section intelligence officer, sat down. The third man, Billy Jackson, went over and sat down by the window, his eyes half on the rest of the group and half on the street outside. He took off his light jacket and his tweed golf cap, and they could see that over his maroon polo shirt he also was wearing an automatic pistol in a shoulder holster. Annette and Eric both recognized him with a slight start, but said nothing. Both of them wondered when they would be given guns and shoulder holsters to wear.

Bresler started in. "Right. You two are now members of A Company, Second Battalion, First Portland Brigade, Northwest Volunteer Army. You are under military discipline as much as any other army in the world, and that

means you do what you're told, when you're told to do it, and how you're told to do it. There are four other members of that battalion besides yourselves in this building, including myself, these two comrades, and one other who is on sentry duty outside and whom you will not meet. This is probably the most of us you will ever see gathered under the same roof, for a long time to come. It will be some years before any of you will even be able to swear from personal experience that more than maybe a dozen of us exist at all, except that your daily viewing of the news will demonstrate the NVA's presence throughout the Northwest in the form of dead bodies. Some of ours, mostly theirs.

"You will very seldom if ever know us by our real names. For example, I am the Second Battalion executive officer, but you have no need to know my identity, and so you will refer to me today as Walter, and later by a variety of code names as needed." Bresler indicated Hill. "This scholarly-looking gentleman here you may call Oscar. I am authorized to tell you he is an operative of the NVA's Third Section, which would probably cause you both to shit in your pants if you fully understood what that means. Oscar is presently attached to the Portland command, and he is here to brief you on some things that we want you to do for us having to do with your school. It is possible that you will never meet either Oscar or myself again. Lieutenant Billy Jackson here is an obvious exception to the pseudonym rule. He's been all over the TV, including his stunning debut on America's Most Wanted, and his face is prominently displayed on all the DT reward posters, so it would be pointless to give him an alias for this meeting. Lieutenant Jackson is A Company commander, and so he will be your immediate superior. The three of us are going to teach you new comrades what you need to know about how the NVA operates as an organization and fights as a team. This is going to be your crash course in survival in an underground revolutionary movement, so pay attention. You will only be told all this once, and if you fuck it up then not only you but maybe some of your friends and comrades will pay the price in blood and agony. A few questions first. I gather you two are personally involved, and this is known around your campus?"

"Uh, yes, uh, Walter sir," said Eric.

Bresler nodded. "Okay, that will give you a valid reason for hanging out and being seen together a lot. Wade Schumaker is actually not assigned to A Company, but because you already know him we will preserve that contact and use him to transmit and receive instructions. You both have him for your faculty advisor now, I believe?"

"Yes," said Annette. "And he's faculty advisor to the Chess Club, which Eric is in."

"All right, so he has reason to deal with you in the framework of your school environment, but outside class I don't want you fraternizing with Wade or being seen with him in any non-academic situation. Ideally companies are supposed to be completely compartmentalized, but sometimes, as in this case, that doesn't work out in practice."

"What company is Shoe in?" asked Eric.

"You have no need to know that, so you will not be told," said Bresler. "The very first rule of underground operation is that everything has to be run on a strict need to know basis, and I do mean strict. As a corollary to that, you must never display any curiosity or ask questions about any other comrades you deal with, about specific events or people that have nothing to do with your own immediate work. I know that curiosity is a natural human impulse, but you have to learn to restrain it. It's not only dangerous to others, it's dangerous to you, because when a Volunteer starts asking too many questions, guys like Oscar here start to think about you. You don't want Oscar thinking about you. Trust me on this, you don't."

Annette quietly gulped. "We get it, sir."

"Don't get the idea that we're paranoid," said Bresler. "Paranoia is an unfounded and irrational fear that people are out to get you. In the case of the NVA, a lot of very bad people really *are* out to get us. And don't confuse security consciousness with paranoia. You have to learn to tell the difference."

"Uh, what exactly *is* the difference, sir?" asked Eric.

"A good rule of thumb is that security consciousness helps you survive and carry out your mission. Paranoia *prevents* you from carrying out your mission. Don't worry, once it hits home to you that your lives really are in danger, you'll develop that third eye in the back of your head you need. You'll have to, because if it fails you, you're dead. But we have found that once white people break free of the American bubble and get back into the proactive ways of our ancestors, all the old instincts re-assert themselves pretty quick. Aryans are natural warriors and a mere 80 years of refined sugar, MTV and political correctness can't dismantle thousands of years of racial memory. But enough of that. Like I've said, from now on you take your orders from Billy here, or from Wade."

"Orders to do what?" asked Eric.

"We'll get into that in a bit," replied Bresler. "Right now we need to get some basic information. Do either or both of you have transportation?"

"We've both got cars, both late-model," said Annette. "Mine's a Lexus, Eric has a Volvo. Rich kids, you know."

"That's good to know," said Bresler. "Both registered in your names?"

"Our parents' names," said Eric.

"All right. We may need those vehicles for operations, since sometimes a Lexus looks less out of place in a certain area than a pickup truck, but if we do we'll put on false plates. Not stolen ones, phony plates we make ourselves that will actually come up with a dead end name and address if the cops run them."

"You guys hacked into the DMV computer system?" asked Annette, astonished. "Oh, sorry sir, I know, you said we're not supposed to ask questions."

"We have a vast reserve of geeky white computer nerds who are absolutely brilliant, and whose lives were made pure torment by the niggers and spic gang-bangers in what passes for public school in this society," chuckled Hill. "Payback is turning out to be a bitch."

"Second question," said Bresler. "Do either of you have a gun?"

"No, sir, we destroyed the one that—the one we used on Lucius Flammus," said Eric. "I cut it up on my dad's laser press and I scattered the bits and pieces all over the city."

"Good thinking," said Bresler. By the window Jackson nodded silently.

"Will you give us guns?" asked Annette.

"Not now," said Bresler. "In the first place, you won't need them for the moment. In the second place, you'd have to conceal them somewhere. You can't walk around the campus at Ashdown strapped, because someone might see the weapons, plus Wade tells me there are metal detectors everywhere and security spot checks and searches all the time."

"Yeah, that's right," said Eric. "I mean, yes sir."

"When the time comes that you need to be armed for active service, you'll be armed," said Bresler. "In anticipation of that time, Billy will arrange several weapons training sessions for you where you will be familiarized with the M-16, the AK-47 and 74, pump shotguns and several handguns. Plus maybe an Uzi or two. Situations may arise wherein you have to be armed quickly, and we won't have time to show you how to load a magazine or clear a stoppage."

"It's not that hard," Jackson assured them. "Unless you're training for specialist work like long-range sniping or covert shit with silencers, anyone of normal intelligence can learn everything they need to know about the care and handling of firearms in order to do the kind of operations we do in a few hours. Like Samuel Colt once said, a gun is just a machine for throwing balls. It's not that complicated a tool. It's what's in your head and in your heart that takes real development."

"Okay, now I'm going to give you a rundown on general underground procedures," said Bresler. "Basically we have two kinds of Volunteers. There are those who are on the bounce like Billy here—that means that he is known as a Volunteer by the federals, and he lives on the run as an outlaw. We call these Volunteers U-Boats, because they must remain submerged and concealed. But there are many people who are secretly members of the Army, who are still in place in society and who still live outwardly normal lives doing normal things, blending in. We need to keep you two on the surface as long as we can, because that is where you will be of the most value to us."

"Kind of like secret agents behind enemy lines?" suggested Annette.

"That is exactly what you will be, yes," agreed Bresler. "And you two need to get out of your heads right now any idea that there will be anything romantic or exciting about it. It is a frightening, nerve-wracking, stress-filled way to live, and it will make you sick in every sense of the word." Bresler paused, and looked at them hard. "I have already told you that the first rule of underground operation is the strictest need to know. The second rule is that *no one must know* or so much as suspect that you are Volunteers. Not your parents, not your friends, not your priest, nobody. Kids—sorry, comrades I should say, I know you've already made your bones—your adolescence ended the moment you capped that monkoid, but you have to make sure it's dead. I have to emphasize to you that this is not some kind of cool secret club or chic little extreme hobby that you can let anybody in on in conspiratorial whispers, to awe and impress your friends with how daring and swashbuckling you are. You won't impress anybody, you'll get arrested and destroy your own lives and maybe some others as well. This doesn't just mean keeping your lip zipped about the NVA. It means that you have to blend in perfectly with your surroundings. You must live a life of total deception. You must become actors on a level that would win you an Academy Award in Hollywood. You must say and do all the right things. You must be properly liberal, politically correct, diverse, tolerant, inclusive, and whatever else they call white people eating shit and grinning while they do it these days, in your particular grove of Academe. You must hug a nigger every day and sing Havah Nagilah every night. You must react with shock and horror at the latest evil atrocity perpetrated by the NVA, and participate in every required Two Minute Hate against your comrades and wicked white racism in general, and you must shout louder than anyone else. You must never express even the slightest politically incorrect opinion in class and hold your Jewish teachers in that goo-goo-eyed reverential awe the kikes love and expect from us. You must wear a mask hiding your true face from all the world, and in time that grows

harder and harder to do. It can drive you insane, and I mean that literally. It's happened. But you must never let the mask slip. You have taken on a burden that you cannot, must not, dare not share with anyone outside the Army. No one must know. No one must suspect!"

Jackson spoke up from his seat by the window. "Comrades, don't take this wrong. But the fact is that you grew up right at the top of this shit heap, in the penthouse, with all the light and the color and the new paint job, windows open to the warm summer breeze and such. Most of us, including me, grew up in trailer parks and renter houses and crummy Section 8 apartments and a lot of us, including me, have done time in prison. You simply can't have any idea what it is like to be locked in with a lot of black and brown beasts, worse than beasts. And the prisoners are even worse. Clearly you're both brave enough to risk it. You've proved that. But if you have to go into that place, the worst weight you can have pressing down on your soul night after night is to know that you put yourself there by some mistake you could have avoided."

"We know enough to be afraid, Lieutenant," Eric assured him. "We understand what Walter is saying."

"Good," said Bresler. "Moving along here, the next thing you need to be drilled in is communications. You both have personal cell phones?"

"Yes," they both said with a nod.

"Give Billy and Schumaker the numbers, but those are for emergencies only," Bresler told them. "All your personal calls go on your bill and leave a paper trail. You will need to buy throwaway Mighty Mart or some other cheapo phone of the kind which are used for most Army business, mostly via text messaging since that way the enemy can't pick up anyone's voice through a cell site and do a voice print match. You will have to memorize the numbers we will give you for Billy and Wade. Do *not* put those numbers into the phone's memory or speed dial. Never have more than one of these extra phones on you. If you're searched and someone finds the extra phone, you can say you bought it when you lost your regular phone but then you found it again, or you bought it to keep in your car, or something of that kind. But if the feds find six or seven extra phones on you or in your room, they'll realize they've got a live one. We change phones every few weeks, and if we feel something has been compromised somewhere along the line, you'll be instructed to get rid of your special phone and get a new one. On the phone you will use codes, sometimes simple, sometimes complex. We have found that the simplest and easiest to remember are words and phrases having to do with junk food and booze, Burger Barn, Pizza Express, Taco Shack, beer brand names, and so

on. We tried some dealing with niggerball, but a lot of the assholes who are listening to us actually follow that crap, and sometimes our messages didn't make sports sense and so they stood out. You are going to have to memorize these codes, and I warn you, they change as often as the phones.

"Now, meeting procedure," Bresler continued professorially. Annette and Eric felt they should be taking notes, but knew better than to ask. "This meeting here tonight is rare in that it's indoors, because Oscar and I wanted to sit down with you two, look you over, and have a nice long chat. Most of your meetings will be outdoors or in public places like restaurants, parks, museums, MAX stations, so forth and so on. You will not be coming here again, and after tonight all connection between the Army and this apartment will have been obliterated and it will have new tenants, probably illegal Chinese. Most of your meetings will be with Billy or Wade, but sometimes you will be told to meet someone you have never seen, in which case you will be given an identification and authentication procedure. When you meet such a person you will accept any command he or she gives you as coming from your Army superiors and do whatever he or she asks of you. It may be as simple as giving someone a ride out of town, they may ask you to hold a package or an envelope and deliver it at a certain time and place, they may ask you to find out some information and report it back, it could be anything, although it will not be a hit or a bombing. If and when we decide you're ready for one of those, then Billy himself or else the Second Battalion explosives officer will walk you through it."

"Meet a guy on the platform with a copy of the New York *Times* under his arm, sidle up to him and say 'John has a long moustache?'" asked Eric.

"I always liked Climb Mount Nitaka," chuckled Hill.

"Something like that," replied Bresler with a slight smile. "When you are given a meeting date, you *be there.* 'Stuck in traffic' don't cut it, because if you miss a meeting we're going to assume something has happened to you, you've been arrested, and we kick in a whole lot of security and clean-up procedures, moving any arms dumps you may know about, closing down any locations you may know about, pulling people out of places where they might be exposed, so forth and so on. Remember what I said about punctuality. When you set out for a meeting, leave early and always spend a *minimum* of an hour wandering around town, checking to see if there's anything suspicious that looks like you may be followed. Park your car some distance from the meeting point and proceed on foot, again checking for surveillance. If you get there before the person you're supposed to meet arrives, then you hang around sipping a Starbucks or reading a newspaper or something for *fifteen*

minutes and no more. Any longer than that and it starts to look obvious to an observer that you're loitering. If that happens, you immediately phone in to Billy or to Wade that the meeting was missed. You then go to your E & E point until we can investigate and find out what the hell happened. Any questions so far?"

"What if we think we *are* being followed?" asked Annette.

Wayne Hill fielded that one. "First off, try to be certain. Make sure your eyes and your gut aren't playing tricks on you if you can, because if you're being followed that means the feds have made you as a Volunteer, and that is almost as bad as an arrest itself, not to mention meaning that your arrest may be imminent. The clean-up procedures begin just as if you hadn't appeared for the meeting at all, and continue until we debrief you and figure out what's going on. It's better to be safe than sorry, of course. Just try to be as sure as you can."

"Be especially watchful going into the immediate area of the meeting," said Jackson. "If you see anything that doesn't strike you as kosher, pardon the expression, then you exit the area, and as soon as you can you text a one-word message to me or to Wade. The present code word is spaghetti, but that changes regularly. You then try and lead whoever is surveilling you as far away from the meeting place as possible and try to shake them at the same time. Then when you think you've shaken them, you go to your E&E point."

"E&E point?" asked Eric. "You mentioned that before. What's that?"

"Escape and evasion point," said Jackson. "Each of you needs to pick out a place, a secret place known only to you and no one else, where you can go if the heat comes on. You must tell *no one else,* not even each other. Every Volunteer has such a place in reserve, usually several."

"The key to your safety is that *no one must know,"* said Bresler with added emphasis. "Also, it can't be any place like your Aunt Sadie's house, no place with any connection to you or your family where ZOG will think to look. You take your special phone with you and then you wait for someone to call you. Do not try to call us or anyone you know after you send the bailout code word, because if you are in fact being surveilled, they have a number of ways they can monitor your call and see who you're calling. Remember, a lot of times police surveillance is deliberately heavy and easy to detect, because what they're trying to do is panic you and see who you call, where and who you run to."

"What if there's a mass raid and everybody except us gets picked up?" asked Eric. "What if all of a sudden there's no one on the other end to make that call to us in our hideout?"

"If you don't hear from anyone in a reasonable time, then you assume that's what has happened," Bresler told them frankly. "Then you fight on. Just the two of you, or if necessary, just the one. A Northwest Volunteer is a soldier, and he or she is expected to carry on active and armed resistance against the Zionist occupier until they can no longer do so through death or imprisonment. You must take responsibility for forming your own team of new recruits, then a company, then a brigade, so forth and so on, the cell that began with just the two of you dividing and reproducing like an amoeba. That sounds impossible, doesn't it? Well, I can tell you it has already happened, especially in the weeks and months after Coeur d'Alene. There were cases where three, two, even one Party comrade was cut off completely, and instead of going into hiding they fought on and regenerated into working, fighting crews and even whole companies before they managed to re-establish contact with the Party and the rest of the Army. If your hearts are strong and your courage does not fail you, it can be done. We are Aryans. We can do anything we want."

"And the outlook isn't quite that bleak," said Hill. "We have in fact been able to establish some procedures to bring Volunteers in from the cold when need be. There are some numbers you can call if you get cut off, and in time you'll know them. You won't be given those now, because to be blunt you haven't really been seasoned yet. We give you two credit for a bravura performance with that nigger Flammus, but you have to understand that we need to size you up and work with you for a while before we trust you with certain information. This is nothing personal. It's for everybody's safety, including your own, and it's a precaution we have to take for the success of the Army's mission. No offense."

"None taken, sir," said Eric. "Annette and I know we're on the bottom of the totem pole, and in any army the privates always get the shitty end of the stick. No offense, sir."

"None taken," replied Bresler with a low, rumbling laugh. "Speaking of the shitty end of the stick, we need to brief you on what to do if you are arrested. This is the bad part, and I'm not going to try and sugar-coat it. As you know, since 9/11, under the Patriot Act and assorted subsequent Homeland Security laws, you no longer have any right to remain silent or right to an attorney or phone call or anything like that. All the arresting officer has to do is log you into the jail or some military base as a so-called domestic terrorist, and the United States Constitution ceases to exist. They don't even bother to ship people out of the country anymore; every federal and military police facility now comes equipped with special sound-proofed interrogation rooms and instruments of torture, under what they call the Dershowitz Protocols.

The guy that dreamed them up was a Jew professor at Harvard Law School, believe it or not. But simple arrest may not be as bad as it seems at first. It depends on what they know, and we've found they often know a lot less than they let on. More and more people are getting picked up in just plain random sweeps, for purposes of interrogation and intimidation. Institutional terrorism, in fact. ZOG just pulls in a mixed bag of people, shakes it up and sees what falls out. You could get picked up for just being in the wrong place at the wrong time or simply because you have a white skin. If it looks like that might be the case, then you play innocent to the hilt, *deny everything,* and scream at the top of your lungs for your lawyers or in your cases, since you're rich, you scream for Daddy and Daddy's lawyer. I gather both your parents are sufficiently wealthy to have some pull with the system?"

"My father is CEO of one huge bank and president of three or four smaller ones, and on every financial board of directors on the West Coast, and my mom is the daughter of a United States Senator," said Annette, "And my other grandfather was governor of Oregon once. I've been a guest at the White House and played in the Rose Garden with that little gook kid Chelsea Clinton adopted. I don't think I could just disappear without my folks raising a hell of a stink."

Eric spoke up. "My dad's an IT engineer, he runs his own company, and he's an inventor. He's got enough high-powered patents and video game copyrights to choke a horse. He's almost as rich in his own quiet way as Annette's family, and I know he wouldn't ever give up until he found out what happened to me."

"Yeah, well, you get DT slapped on your jacket once you're inside, and nothing's any good anymore," said Bresler. "Nobody's pull will help. We're scaring the bejesus out of those leeches in Washington, D.C. and Jew York worse than anything that's happened since the Third Reich, and they're lashing out in sheer panic and terror. But it can't hurt. Like I said, play innocent as long as you can and if it's just a roust, they might kick you loose. But once it becomes absolutely clear that they know, and you're not going to talk your way out of it, then you clam up and you give them nothing, and I do mean nothing, other than the Five Words. *I have nothing to say.*"

Oscar spoke up. "We used to caution people about not trying to play verbal games with the cops, not making the mistake of thinking they could outwit them, but the horrible fact is that this latest batch of thugs out of Quantico don't even seem to be trying to do that anymore. They're so filled with fear and mindless hate for whites, not to mention twisted sadism, that they just use the stick now, never the carrot. Beatings, torture, and worse stuff."

"You will be tortured," went on Bresler matter-of-factly. "Every kind of beating imaginable, of course. The good old ZOG standby, waterboarding. Needles under the fingernails. The electric chair with electrodes on your nipples and your genitals and up your bodily orifices. Injections of acid under your skin. Being flogged with wire whips heated red-hot. An old Roman technique called the *strappado.* Some federal facilities even have a mechanical rack with steel rollers, so they can quite literally go medieval on your ass. Since 9/11 and the Patriot Act, all this is now perfectly legal for any prisoner who has been arbitrarily classified as a terrorist, with or without reason. These men and women who run these interrogation centers and prisons will do things to you that would make a dog vomit. They have been given absolute and uncontrolled power over your body and they will use it to the utmost, to get information for their Jewish masters and also because they enjoy the hell out of it. No one expects you to endure it, although I never cease to be amazed at the stories that come out of these infernos of certain comrades who never break, of others who have died under torture without saying any more than the Five Words. The Army asks that you give us twenty-four hours so we can break down and relocate anyone and everything you can spill. That's all. We ask that you endure whatever agony they put you through for a single day, and then as much longer after that as you can, as a matter of your own personal honor and commitment to a future when such horrors will not be. You will know when the time comes when your body and your soul can take no more. But until that time comes show us, show yourself, and show God how strong you can be."

Hill interjected in a quiet voice, "You should also understand that ever since Abu Ghraib, it is public knowledge that the United States routinely uses systematic sexual humiliation as a method of torture and degradation to break the spirit of their real and perceived enemies," he told them. "It will start when you are strip-searched and your body cavities violated by guards and police and FBI agents of the opposite sex, in the case of NVA prisoners these officers being almost always black or brown. You will be walked along corridors and cell blocks and displayed naked and in chains in front of other prisoners, and you need to realize that you will both almost certainly be repeatedly raped by non-whites and by homosexuals and lesbians, both sexually and with assorted foreign objects, which sometimes results in hemorrhage and death. I'm not trying to frighten you, comrades. I'm trying to prepare you. This is what our enemies do."

"We've thought about this," Annette replied. "This is what has to end. That kind of thing is why we are doing this, among other personal reasons. That kind of horror is what we're fighting against, isn't it?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Hill with a respectful nod. "It is."

"Billy, since you're going to be these two young comrades' CO, you might want to take it from here?" suggested Bresler. Jackson got up from his seat at the window, and without comment the executive officer rose as well and went over and replaced him, keeping an eye out the window on the street outside. Jackson sat down in the chair Bresler had vacated. Annette tried not to stare at Jackson, yet she was surprised at how ordinary he looked. He was a wiry young man with a neat haircut, not too much older than she was, not even much beard to shave so far. Yet she saw a strength and maturity about him that she could almost never perceive in the white boys of her own generation, except for Eric. His green eyes had a coldness about them that would have told her, even had she not known who he was, that here was an incredible being who had become almost unknown in her lifetime, a genuinely dangerous white male. She shivered with the realization, in an instinctive, ancient feminine recognition. She was beginning to understand exactly what she was getting into.

"There are some other things you need to know about the way Volunteers operate, comrades," Jackson told them. "Have you been shown a copy of the NVA General Orders?"

"Yes, sir," replied Eric. "They're on the internet, if you know where to find them."

"Much to ZOG's displeasure, yes, they are," said Jackson with a snort of wry amusement. "You need to memorize the General Orders, but don't print them out or download them. Possession of a hard copy and downloading are both federal felonies, technically still a capital offense, although since they appeared on the net and so many people are familiar with them now, they're backing off on that somewhat because they've finally twigged that it's kind of ridiculous to execute someone for looking at a web page. But they are tracking down any hapless kids who download them, beating the crap out of them, and sometimes prosecuting as well. I assume, then, that you have read General Order Number Ten?"

"Yes, sir. Don't worry, we both know we have to stay straight," Eric assured him. "We tried pot a few times like most kids our age, but neither of us are really into it, and even before all this happened we didn't drink that much anyway."

"From now on you don't drink at all. Period, end of story," Jackson told them flatly. "I won't even mention drug use. I shouldn't have to, because it's beyond the pale. Niggers and Mexicans use drugs, white people don't, and that's the name of that tune. Wade tells us that he's had his eye on you and there is no sign of that in either of you two. If there were, you wouldn't be

here, no matter how many bubble-lips you clipped. I am sorry to say that there are some officers in the NVA, especially some of those crews out in Idaho, who are slack on enforcing General Order Number Ten. You need to understand very clearly that I am not one of them."

"It's a centuries-old American issue," said Oscar mildly. "Total prohibition has always been simply impossible to enforce. Hell, they tried to dry up the whole country from 1920 until 1933, and they couldn't do it."

Jackson scowled. "Yes, sir, I know, but this isn't a history lesson, this is a deadly serious fight for the survival of our race and for our own personal survival in the face of a monstrous and murderous enemy. We are trying to bring down the worst and most powerful tyranny mankind has ever known, and we're doing it on nothing but sheer ferocity and raw guts. Never before in human history have the material odds between two combatants in a conflict been so lopsided as this. *We cannot do this with drunks,* and human nature being what it is, the only way that we can make completely sure our Volunteers are never drunk at a crucial moment when they are needed to do their duty to their race, is to demand and receive total abstinence, as in you do not under any circumstances put alcohol into your mouth. The NVA is a disciplined revolutionary organization, a paramilitary organization, and we have the right and the duty to demand this as a matter of personal fitness to serve. I will accept nothing less than 100 per cent compliance from any Volunteer under my command. If a man cares more for his whiskey bottle or his beer than he does for his own future and the survival of his race, we neither want him nor need him. Or her. A drunk or a pothead is a danger to himself and others, and it would be lunacy to try and get mileage out of him. If you two can't stay off the weed and the booze, there is a very good chance that you'll get yourselves arrested or killed, which I would be sorry to see. Not to mention the fact that you might get other members of A Company arrested or killed, and you might get *me* killed, which I damned sure don't want to see! There is one, and only one exception to this General Order, a certain special kind of duty that we'll discuss with you later on this evening, Comrade Ridgeway."

Annette opened her mouth to ask a question, but Jackson waved her to silence. "That will be explained. You two hear me loud and clear on this. If you ever show up drunk or high, or if I ever smell liquor on your breath, you're out—both of you—because I consider you two to be a team and I expect each of you to ride herd on the other one and make sure they perform their duty. One of you will be out for disobedience and the other will be out for letting your partner disobey. We haven't had to cashier many

Volunteers so far, because we've been choosy about who we ask to join, but it's not a pleasant process and it involves assessing that person as a potential future security threat and taking corrective action if we feel it's necessary. Guys, I'm not trying to threaten you or intimidate you. I am simply telling you straight up how things are. We will be trusting each other with our very lives. We have to live closer and become tighter than any band of brothers and sisters, and part of that process is that we *must know* that each of us can rely on every other man and woman in our team to do their duty. I trust that this will be the last time I ever have to speak to either of you about General Order Number Ten."

"It will be the last time, sir," replied Annette quietly.

"Good," said Jackson with a smile. "Now, before we go any further, a little bit of the fun part. Both of you will need alias names. In your NVA work, and on the phone and on the computer and in text messages, you will always refer to each other not by your real names, but by your Volunteer names. By the way, on the phone and when you're dealing with any other Volunteers besides the ones in this room, my own name at present is Arthur. Now how about you two? Any preferences? But whatever you pick, don't get too attached to them. Your Party names will be changing every few months."

"Tom and Becky," said Eric immediately.

"There you go," giggled Annette merrily. "That's an inside joke. Eric and I have known each other since kindergarten, and in the sixth grade he was Tom Sawyer in the school play, and I played Becky Thatcher. Our first kiss was onstage, in front of all the other kids and a couple of hundred parents and spectators."

"I made damned sure I got that role," reminisced Eric happily. "Had to beat up Marty Landers for it."

"Nothing wrong with the odd inside joke in your Volunteer work," said Hill with a smile. "We try to be happy warriors. I chose my own name of Oscar after another Oscar who lived a long time ago. He had a list of Jews. So do I."

"Tom and Becky it is, then," Bresler concurred. "For the time being."

Jackson continued, "Okay, Tom and Becky, A Company is what is known as an active service unit, which means that we plan, initiate, and execute actual physical attacks on the enemy. We shoot people, we burn things, and we blow things up. We're the guys in the ski masks, the last sight that many a Mexican and monkoid and badge-carrying federal goon sees on this earth. Some of the staff people are beginning to call outfits like ours line companies."

"I thought all units were, uh, active," said Eric.

"All units are, in that if ZOG catches any of us we all get dragged away to torture and death," spoke up Bresler from his window seat. "There are other kinds of companies, though, with specialties. Some have purely support and quartermaster duties. Some have purely intelligence functions, some are technical companies like our teams of computer geeks, some do propaganda, some are special high-powered Third Section death squads that carefully stalk and take out important targets, so forth and so on. We're two and a half years in since 10/22, and there is already a good deal of variance across the Northwest in the way we're organized. In every state and county, the local brigade commanders are going with what they find works for them. For example, here in Oregon we now have NVA battalions, which are mid-level units comprised of six or eight companies. There was a long debate about this, having to do with the fact that we're getting in more and more Volunteers all the time but we have to keep individual teams to roughly five or six people, i. e. the number of people who can squeeze into a single automobile in case they have to do the Resurrection Shuffle real quick. To make a long story short, we decided to experiment with dividing brigades into battalions here in Portland, whereas in Seattle and Spokane they're keeping it at two levels, brigade and company, and to handle the influx they're creating more companies with more compartmentalized teams or crews per company. Both methods actually seem to work equally well."

"What about Idaho?" asked Eric. "Or am I asking too many questions?"

"This is nothing that the enemy doesn't already know," replied Bresler. "Idaho and western Montana are developing oddly, maybe because they're so damned *big* and they don't have the concentration of cities and people we have along the I-5 corridor here. Most of the units there are rurally based, and they're developing into something we call Flying Columns, groups of 30 to 60 Volunteers who roam the countryside more or less at will, like Jack Smith and the Montana Regulators, and O.C. Oglevy's lunatics out in the Idaho Panhandle. They're the guys that decorate the roadsides with nigger and Mexican heads on sticks. Something is developing out in the Wild East of the Homeland that is starting to look very much like liberated territory. The feds simply do not have the manpower to cover that entire huge area, especially with millions of their soldiers scattered across the globe anywhere there's oil and fighting to steal it from the natives. So there are very large stretches off the interstates and along the blue highways, towns and villages where the NVA more or less rules the roost. We're already trying some Flying Columns west of the mountains, like Tom Murdock's column in the south part of the Olympic peninsula, and Corby Morgan up around Port Townsend and Port Angeles

in the north. I'd say our First Brigade Third Battalion out along the North Shore would be good candidates for that. They've almost created just such a liberated zone to the west of here, in Columbia and Clatsop and Tillamook Counties. Counties the feds are increasingly careful to avoid."

"Captain Hatfield and the Wild Bunch?" asked Annette eagerly.

"That's what the media call them, yes," responded Hill with a chuckle.

"We've heard of them, Hatfield and his Winchester and his hat with the feather in it. Almost all the white kids at Ashdown think they're super-cool, although we only dare to say so in whispers," Eric told them.

"I'll tell Zack that next time I see him," laughed Jackson. "He'll be intrigued to learn that he has preppy groupies. Anyway, getting back to what I was saying, another way we do it here in Oregon that is slightly different from the rest of the Army is that we have separate EOD units in each battalion."

"What's EOD?" asked Eric.

"Explosive Ordnance Delivery. Bombing units," replied Jackson. "The EOD unit has its own quartermaster who is responsible for obtaining explosives and material to make explosives. They have their own techs who make timing devices and radio-controlled detonators, mechanics who install special shocks and other modifications in any vehicles used for transport. Then there's the packers who actually construct the explosive device itself and install it in the vehicle or whatever the delivery system is, as well as facilities like chem labs and specially constructed hidden storage places for explosives, etcetera. Elsewhere in the Homeland each NVA company has their own EOD people, or Volunteers in the company who are assigned to that duty, and their own explosives and equipment and supplies. This means that when a company gets rolled up, arrested or killed or dispersed because of a security breach, not only the number of guns the Army has but also the explosive capacity at its disposal is diminished. EOD-related stuff is high maintenance for us. It tends to be bulky, heavy, dangerous and conspicuous to move. It cuts down on a company's mobility, and mobility is how we survive and keep on fighting. So the way we've been doing it for some months now here in Portland is that anyone from company commander on up can propose a bombing target. It goes up the line and is approved by battalion or brigade, the tactical details are worked out, the battalion explosives officer figures out what is needed, the ordnance is prepared, and then it is delivered to the active service unit assigned the mission for delivery to the target. A Volunteer, or usually two, goes to a designated pickup point, takes charge of the explosive device and takes it away, or drives it away if it's a car or a truck bomb, and then delivers it to the target and detonates it. The EOD people who provide

instructions for use are always masked, so they cannot be identified if the mission goes wrong. That way our explosive capability is much harder for the enemy to get at."

"But what if the EOD unit itself is caught or betrayed?" asked Eric. "Also, suppose something comes up wherein an active service unit needs a bomb in a hurry and can't go through all that red tape, er, I mean procedure?"

"That hasn't happened yet," said Bresler. "If it does, we re-build the EOD company by pulling in people from other units. Thus far the system seems to be working. But each company quartermaster has several devices stashed away in case a target of opportunity presents itself that requires a quick response, like if we see some Unionist's car parked in an accessible place and we tailpipe him. Plus a lot of smaller devices to use as booby-traps. A company commander can use them at his discretion."

Jackson chimed in. "By the by, one exception to this is hand grenades, which are worth their weight in gold and more fun than a barrel of monkeys. When any quartermaster gets grenades they don't last long. He shares them out among the floaters, and they go out and toss 'em. You will notice that Portland has a lot fewer Mexican cantinas and bodegas on every corner now. I've mentioned this stuff because although right now the heavy lifting in the boom-boom line is done by a special unit, you will be given cross-training in explosives and handling, and if you show any aptitude for it you might be asked to join EOD. They're always on the lookout for new talent, and as the XO mentioned, we may have to reconstitute the EOD unit on short notice. How are you guys in chemistry class?"

"I'm going to be an engineering major," said Eric. "I'm familiar with a lot of the basic chemistry already."

"Then we may have a career opportunity for you," said Bresler. "Hopefully not too short an opportunity."

"I'm only so-so," admitted Annette. "We've got a couple of really intelligent science geek kids at Ashdown, though. They might be willing to help. I've noticed science kids don't like niggers and spics much."

"Good," said Wayne Hill. "Now we begin to get into the nitty gritty about what we want the both of you to do, at least at first, until you're more seasoned and we think you're ready for more wet work. The first thing I want you to get into is recruiting, which is something that every Volunteer does, but not in the sense that you may think. One of the most serious and necessary security precautions the NVA practices is that no one joins the NVA. The NVA joins you. You don't just walk up to the other kids in your school and say, 'Hi, guys, anybody up for a little domestic terrorism?' Remember the

prime directive: you *never* admit to anyone under any circumstances that you are with the NVA. What you have to do, both of you, is to compile a list in your own minds of the kids at your school who in your opinion might secretly hold racial views, the ones who are really sick and tired of all the negroid and government bullshit, the ones who have had relatives or loved ones killed in Iraq or Iran, the ones who could be potential Volunteers. Work with Wade Schumaker on this; he will know these kids as a teacher and you will know them as fellow students. You must *never* approach these kids yourselves, no matter how sure you may be that they're ready and willing. You will give Billy here a full profile of each possible recruit, and then you forget about them. They will be observed and approached separately by a Volunteer specially assigned to recruiting duties. Sometimes it takes months of observation and investigation before we make up our minds to approach a potential recruit. Sometimes we never do. If we do recruit anyone else in your school, you may not even be told about it, unless we see some tactical advantage in adding someone to your team.

Hill continued, "Beyond that, we are very interested in the student body at Ashdown Academy for another reason. Their parents. Ashdown is one of the most upper class prep schools in the Empire; the kids who go there are the sons and daughters of the ruling élite. Senators and Congressmen, major corporate executives from Fortune 500 multinationals, major media executives, the most senior civil servants, Hollywood stars and production moguls, intelligentsia and powerhouse public figures. We have to know the enemy, know everything about him. I want you to send me, through Billy here, every item of information that you can come up with about every kid at Ashdown, what their parents do and when and how they do it, their movements, their divorces and scandals and private lives, anything that we can't get from the publicly available media. Wade has been doing some of this for us, but you guys will have a much better perspective because the kids will say things to you they won't say to a teacher or authority figure. You keep your ears open, and make notes in your mind. To save time and make sure you make a full report, you can type up this information and put it on a CD if you like—not a hard copy whose printer could be traced—and use a school computer, not your own laptops. Then you just pass the CD to Wade or Billy. A lot of this intelligence will be irrelevant to our purposes, but you pass on everything you pick up about anyone, and you let us decide what's relevant and what isn't."

Jackson spoke up. "Look, comrades, I don't want to sound like I've got a case of blue-collar envy, or keep harping on your relative social and wealth

positions in life. I'm not making smart-ass cracks about rich kids here. I'm not like that. I'm a National Socialist. This war is about blood, not economics. It's about bringing all white people together so we can sink our class and religious differences, ride out the storm of the 21st century and survive as a race. But to do that we can't all be ex-convicts who grew up in trailer parks and work as manual laborers or pump jockeys. We really do need to recruit active Volunteers on your elevated socio-economic level. We have to know about your fellow students and their parents because these are the people who run America. These are the people who keep American society functioning, such as it is. These are the people who will eventually make the collective decision that the war has to come to an end and that means they have to give us the Northwest Republic as the price of peace. That's why we consider you guys to be an important catch."

"Not to mention the fact that after independence we're going to need skilled, intelligent, educated people to build a new nation and a new order of society from the ground up," added Hill. "Now, I can't give you any idea what this intelligence you provide will be used for. Maybe nothing bad. But it's conceivable that you could be setting the parents of some of your friends up for assassination. If you have a problem with that, tell me now," Hill concluded.

"They say this is a race war, Lieutenant," said Eric soberly. "But it's more than that. It's a civil war between whites over the presence of non-whites in America, just like the one from 1861 to 1865. Once again, they've got us killing each other simply through their being here. They shouldn't be here, not at all. Annette and I understand that there are going to be white people who choose the other side. We wouldn't have come here tonight if we weren't prepared for that. We understand the implications of our actions and we'll take the consequences."

Annette spoke up as well, in a determined voice. "Sir, when you ask me to make war on Ashdown Academy, you're asking me to make war on a whole system that allowed an animal to get close to my sister and destroy her, for no reason other than the fact that his skin was the color of shit and he could bounce a ball on a wooden floor. A system that looked the other way, and treated my sister's death as just one of those things, like an automobile accident or a tornado—as if black hatecrime against white people is some kind of natural disaster or visitation from God that no one can do anything about. A system that told me I was to forget what happened to my sister, forget she ever lived, accept her death like pigs at the trough accept it when one of them is carried away to be slaughtered and just keep on shoveling the

slops into their faces. That's all white people are in the long run. We're just livestock to these people. They slaughter us whenever they choose, in Iraq, or in an alley, or in a nursing home if you're old and white and poor and some Third World doctor decides he needs to cut expenses. I have to make sure that my children and Eric's won't have to go through anything like I have done with Jan's death, ever. Eric's right, I understand the implications and the consequences. Ashdown Academy and everything it stands for has to go. I pray to God I don't have to hurt anyone who is my friend, but I will do so if I have to in order to bring this horror to an end, and if that's wrong then I will take that sin on my soul. You don't have to worry, I'm in this all the way."

"Well said, both of you," replied Jackson with a nod.

"Ah, now, as to going all the way . . ." began Hill delicately. He looked at Jackson, who laughed in a wry tone and shook his head.

"No sir, you go right ahead," Jackson said. "I want to hear how you tell this."

"All right," said Hill. "Comrade Ridgeway, I will be blunt. You are an extremely attractive girl, blonde hair, blue eyes, good slim figure, the very archetype of female beauty that men of all races in this society have been taught by Hollywood, the media, and the advertising industry to desire above all else. Please don't mistake my reasons for saying this. I'm not hitting on you, this is all business. My understanding from Comrade Schumaker is that when you and Comrade Sellars here whacked that burrhead, you were planning originally to entice him into position through flirtation and the implied promise of a sexual encounter, over a period of several days. Is that correct?"

"Look, I know the NVA is against all race-mixing, and so am I, my God, especially after what it did to my sister Jan! Yes, I wanted to avenge her so bad, I would have done whatever I had to do. But I didn't actually do anything!" protested Annette. "At first it was the only way we could think of to get that ape away from all his fellow baboons on the basketball team and his lickspittle white entourage, but Eric was able to figure out a way so I didn't have to do it."

"Would you be willing to do it?" asked Hill bluntly. "Don't worry, we get it. We understand and we approve. This is a tactic that the NVA has used in the past to lure targets into position, away from their security. In fact, it's one of the oldest plays in the covert ops book, for God knows how many centuries past. It's called the Honey Trap. There have always been female spies, and the young and beautiful ones have always used the same weapons. I am going to ask you quite simply: would you be prepared to do such a thing if

necessary? If a situation arises where it is needed, would you be willing to serve as a Lorelei?"

Bresler cut in to explain, "In Germanic myth, the Lorelei were like the Greek sirens, beautiful female spirits who sang and combed their hair on the banks of the North Sea and the Rhine. They enticed sailors to their deaths on hidden rocks."

"I want you to understand before you answer, comrade, that this is a request, not an order, and it is a request involving a situation that may not even arise," Hill told them. "The NVA is an army and usually an order is an order, period, but there are a few exceptions, and this is one of them. No female Volunteer is *ever* ordered outright to do this kind of duty. It would be not only wrong and immoral and horribly cruel to a comrade, but no matter how disciplined and professional she is, a girl who is a reluctant participant will inevitably at some crucial point let her reluctance and her repugnance show, and by doing so possibly blow the mission, and maybe get our own people hurt or killed. We have women comrades who are willing to do this, and we have others who are not. I have known female Volunteers who tell me they are quite willing to shoot an enemy between the eyes point blank, and who have proven that they'll do so, but they won't lure him to his death. That is entirely their personal decision and we respect it, as we will respect whatever decision you make."

Annette glanced over at Eric; he gave a barely perceptible but definite nod. The other three NVA men caught the nod but said nothing. Annette took a deep breath and replied, "I don't think I could do it with a nigger," she said. "The Flammus situation was unique to me. I couldn't have even contemplated it, if that beast hadn't violated and killed my sister. I'll be honest with you, I don't think I could do it with a black, sir," she repeated. "Probably not a Mexican, either. I could try if I have to, but they would probably sense something was wrong, like you said. A Jew I'd do it to in a heartbeat, because it was a Jew lawyer who sued the school and made them pass Flammus and keep him in school when the stupid ape failed all his courses, because flunking him violated his so-called civil rights. A white man—well, it would help if I knew who he was and why he had to die, but yes, I'll do it if that's what the Army requires of me."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Hill with a nod. "I will keep that in mind, and it may be that we never need to employ you in that capacity, but it's good to know we've got another Lorelei on call if we need one."

"You may recall that earlier I mentioned there was one exception to General Order Number Ten, when a Volunteer is allowed to drink under special circumstances," said Jackson. "The one exception is a female Volunteer

on Lorelei duty, and maybe someday a male Volunteer on gigolo duty if the target is some female fed or media Barbie doll in a power suit, although I haven't heard of that happening yet."

"Once," interjected Hill laconically. "Female U.S. Attorney in Seattle, and I was the man. I couldn't get any weapons past the metal detectors at the Hilton, so I had to use my hands. I mention that, Comrade Ridgeway, so you will know that I'm not asking you to do anything I haven't done myself."

"Uh, okay," said Jackson, looking at Hill oddly. "Anyway, a lot of these setups occur in bars or at cocktail parties and such affairs. It helps to get the target not just horny but drunk, so his judgment falters. The feds and most of our enemies know about our no-booze rule, and a woman who isn't drinking alcohol might set off an alarm bell in the target's mind. So you can have a few drinks if it ever comes to that, but you will need to be getting your target as drunk as you can while staying as sober as possible yourself. If you're detected you're in the same danger as any Jerry Reb on active service, so it's not like it's much of a vacation from the rules."

"Wade said you guys now have a nine o'clock parental curfew on a school night?" spoke up Bresler.

"Yes, sir," said Eric. "It's not that our parents don't trust us, they're just afraid for us with all this horrible racist violence going on all over town. They're scared we might get in trouble." Annette giggled.

"Okay, it's eight now, so you'd better scoot. Remember what I said about taking the long way back and checking for surveillance." Bresler rose and shook hands with both of them. "In case we don't meet again, comrades, welcome to the wild and wonderful world of domestic terrorism. For what you must do now in the shadows and the darkness, some day your children will walk in the light."

"I'll make sure they get back to their car okay," said Jackson.

After the three of them had left, Bresler sat down on the sofa. "Thanks for sitting in, Wayne, but I know you didn't come tonight just to check out a couple of preppy kids. I could have handled it, or Billy."

"I know," said Hill with a sigh. "I needed to talk to you alone, Gary this is top level confo. This place has been swept?"

"I did it myself, just before the kids showed up," said Bresler "Nothing electronic in this apartment that's not running off house current. I unplugged the TV and there's nothing coming from it. The place is clean, I think. Do you trust me or do you want to do it again?"

Hill understood that no offense was meant and he took none. A Third Section operative could trust no one, and everyone knew why and accepted

the fact. He didn't take Bresler up on his offer to do a second electronic sweep of the apartment. "We have a problem, Gary."

"That sounds bad," commented Bresler.

"It is," said Hill, taking a deep breath. "Gary, I think there's an informer in First Portland Brigade. Most likely in your battalion."

XIII

A Mouse In The House

"Jockey of Norfolk, be not too bold,
For Dickon thy master is bought and sold."

Richard the Third—Act V, Scene 3

Bresler let out a long sigh and then buried his face in his hands. "Oh, *Christ!"* he moaned. "I know this will sound pathetic, but are you *sure,* Wayne?"

"You know I wouldn't ever say such a thing unless I were convinced it were true, Gary," replied Hill compassionately. "I'm going to run what I've got by you. If you can see something I've missed, if you can explain some of the things that have been happening, then I'm all ears."

"You know I'm going to fight like the very devil to stand up for my people and prove you're wrong?" said Bresler.

"I wouldn't expect anything else from you, Gary, and neither would your Volunteers. I hope you *can* prove me wrong. No one would be happier than me if that turns out to be possible. But I don't think so."

"First question. Who else have you spoken to about this?" asked the XO.

"My own boss at Threesec, Matt Redmond. Commandant Coyle. Now you."

"Not Bud Lawlor?" asked Bresler.

"No. Captain Lawlor's in the mix," replied Hill grimly.

"Jesus Christ on a raft!" cried Bresler in astonishment. "You think the *battalion commander* might be a traitor?"

"No, I don't, actually. I think it's someone lower down, but I simply said that Lawlor's in the mix, and so until we rule him out definitively, he can't be brought in on it."

"When we do, and he knows you talked to me first before him, I hope to hell he's an understanding guy," remarked Bresler.

"So do I," agreed Hill. "But he's a soldier and he knows how these things work, how they *must* work. I don't like pulling rank, Gary, but I need to remind you that although we're both lieutenants, I'm doing double duty as Brigade intelligence officer and political officer."

"Yeah, I know, you got the biggest dick and now you're swinging it," said Bresler bitterly. "Okay, next obvious question. How do you know it isn't me?"

"For one hundred per cent certain? I don't," admitted Hill. "But you're not in the mix, so far as I can tell. The series of red-flagged incidents I'm querying, specifically nine of them, began back in the late summer of last year, before the two Portland brigades split into battalions. The first three red flags affected three companies in what was then the original First Brigade, A, B, and G."

"That would indicate someone with cross-company access and information," said Bresler.

"Theoretically, yes, but you know as well as I do that out here in the real world, where the bullets are flying, compartmentalization breaks down all over the place. Companies help each other out on operations, guys who are on the bounce from one company hide out with people from other units, boyfriends and girlfriends split up and one gets transferred, so forth and so on. But there is another more significant tip-off. The split into battalions took place in early October, and the subsequent six incidents involved the Second Battalion's A, C, D, and H Companies. No problems in First, at least none that aren't clearly explicable."

"Third Battalion? Zack Hatfield and the Wild Bunch?" asked Bresler, still stunned by the revelation of possible treachery.

"No, Zack's boys don't seem to be affected, at least so far. Just the urban crews. It looks like our bad apple went with Second Battalion when the brigade divided."

"Beautiful," muttered Bresler. "Sorry, man, this has knocked me for a loop. I'm not thinking straight. Go on."

"You came over from Second Brigade in December, and you didn't move up to the XO position until January when your predecessor was arrested," said Hill. "That's one of the questionable incidents, by the way. So far as I

can tell, you're clear on five of the nine red flags, since you weren't in First Brigade when they occurred and you had no way of knowing the information the enemy got hold of. Plus there's one final situation besides all that, where we honestly don't know what the fuck is going on, but it looks damned odd. I'll tell you about it in a bit, but I'm positive you didn't know about that one, so you couldn't have spilled the beans to anyone. I've got to have someone I can trust to help me on this, help me sift through it all, find common denominators, pinpoint who knew what and when they knew it. That has to be you. Sure, I have the authority to start hauling everybody in for sit-downs and interrogations, but if I do that, then the word will be all over the Second Battalion in twenty-four hours, and not only will everybody start covering their ass whether they've done anything or not, but if there is an informer, and repeat that I am certain there is, then we'll tip him or her off, and they'll bolt. I hate like hell to ask you to investigate your own guys, Gary, but this has to be done, for everybody's safety and for the mission of the Army. Besides, it's an order."

"I get the picture," said Bresler with a sigh. "Okay, I'll put some coffee on and you lay it on me, from the top."

"All right," said Hill. "I don't have to tell you that while we've been hitting the bastards hard and scoring some major points, the Portland command has been having a run of bad luck for some time now, especially First Brigade. Casualties, arrests, and quartermaster losses are higher here than any other unit in the NVA."

"You know there are reasons for that!" protested Bresler, spooning coffee into the paper filter for the coffee maker. "Portland is a very densely populated city, due to all those lefty-yuppie anti-development and anti-suburban sprawl ordnances they've had for a generation. We've got almost the same population as Seattle, in one-third the square mileage. Compared to the Puget Sound area, and certainly compared to anywhere else in the Homeland, we're packed in like sardines here. That makes it a lot easier area for ZOG to control and monitor with their closed-circuit TV cameras on every goddamned street corner, their other electronic surveillance, and their loyalist vigilante neighborhood Hatewatches. That means more nosy neighbors and potential security leaks cheek by jowl wherever we operate, more potential informers who fancy some of those $50,000 dollar per head Domestic Terrorist rewards, more spics and gooks and Mexicans and red, white and blue assholes around every corner to drop a dime on us. God, I envy the Wild Bunch all those wide open spaces and forests they've got down Highway 30! Of course, all that means there's more targets for us to take down, so this is where the NVA has to be. We're active as

hell, we float like a butterfly and sting like a bee, we bitch-slap ZOG someplace around this city every day, but more street action also means more things that can go wrong. Any time we come out to fight we're risking some kind of capture or compromise or betrayal, because by doing so we feed the enemy intelligence analysts more information, more pieces of the puzzle they can fit together. Cross your fingers and knock wood, but I'm amazed Cat-Eyes Lockhart hasn't been nailed yet, especially as casual as he is about walking around the streets. I don't know if he's completely fearless or if he's a little nuts."

"Both, I think. Yes, I know it's like you say, and I agree," said Hill. "But still, the fact remains that casualties and losses of arms and premises and equipment in Portland, and especially in First Brigade, are inordinately high. Seven men gone, two dead and five arrested, plus dozens of vehicles, over a hundred weapons, thousands of rounds of ammunition, and over forty thousand dollars in funds seized. There is an unusual pattern developing with those losses."

"What do you mean?" The coffee maker gurgled merrily in the background.

"Let's go over each red flag," Hill spoke without notes, from memory, since notes of any kind would have been a fatal thing for him to be found in possession of. "In September, a safe house in St. Johns was raided, with loss of weapons and ammunition and cash. The Portland Police Bureau talking head told the media that an alert local Hatewatch member called in suspicious activity to the cops. We tried to get confirmation from our own people in Portland PB but couldn't, which isn't surprising since those computer files are guarded like Fort Knox and we haven't been able to get in that deep so for, or find any way to hack in."

"I'm not surprised, since we've whacked out eight or ten of those treacherous *shabazz-goy* fucks," said Bresler. "What's their pay up to now?"

"Four hundred a week, tax free," said Hill. "A nice little bonus to that nice old Mr. Beasley down the street for a little part-time amateur spying, but our information is ZOG is getting fewer and fewer takers since Hatewatchers started turning up dead."

"Okay, that's one," said Bresler.

"On September 30th, an arms dump in a commercial storage unit in Gresham," continued Hill. "Forty weapons, more cash and ammo gone. Portland PB spokesperson says the cache turned up when a maintenance man went into the unit to look for water damage after a heavy rain or some such shit. Threesec got the name of the so-called maintenance man, some Mexican we can't locate, presumably illegal."

"That's two," said Bresler.

"October 20th, Volunteer Steve Bright from B Company arrested at his home in St. Johns by Running Rats. They broke in silently, caught him asleep and he couldn't resist. Portland PB says he was originally sought on warrants for unpaid traffic tickets, of all the ridiculous things, and after his arrest they found weapons and material indicating he was NVA."

"Now that has more than a whiff of bullshit in it," agreed Bresler.

"It does. Like they'd send out a full Rapid Response Team in the middle of the night over traffic tickets! Those are the first three under the old Brigade structure. In late October the Portland command's formation into battalions occurred. On November 8th a major arms dump and machine shop for EOD was raided in Hillsboro, and Volunteer Richard Petrone was shot and wounded before being arrested. The Portland cops' story this time is that they busted a Mexican gang-banger who ratted out some suspicious gringos to save his own ass on a dope charge."

"I'm always nervous about doing anything in Hillsboro these days, it's become such a barrio," said Bresler. "But that's four."

"Number five. November 30th, the Second Battalion finance officer Roger West is arrested, his hard drive seized, and three covert bank accounts sequestered. Fortunately our finances were at a low ebb and we only lost about forty grand total, but another week and there would have been over two hundred thousand dollars in those accounts, Portland's cut from that Indian casino heist up in Washington that Tank Thompson's crew out of Dundee pulled off. Portland police spokesperson says a routine audit at one of the banks spotted something fishy. Now, do you begin to see what I mean by a pattern here, Jack?"

"It's all Portland police," said Bresler suddenly. "No FBI, no BATFE, no Homeland Security. How did the Portland flatfeet get to be such ace terrorist-fighters all of a sudden?"

"That's one suspicious aspect, yes," concurred Hill. "Number six is the worst incident of the lot. On Christmas Eve, Volunteers Lex Vannaway and Dutch Cripe are trapped by an RRT team in the downtown Denny's and are shot and killed, along with a waitress and several other diners wounded in the ensuing firefight. The Portland PB spokesperson praises the brave officers of RRT, who actually crashed an armored assault vehicle through the front window of the restaurant so they wouldn't have to fire at our men without cover. The cops claim that Cripe and Vannaway were recognized on a closed-circuit TV monitor by computerized facial profiling."

"So maybe they were?" suggested Bresler.

"Maybe," conceded Hill. "Incident number seven, January 7th. Second Battalion XO Peanuts Panczko is arrested at a shopping mall in Gresham. Portland PB claims the mall security guard's sniffer dog picked up gun oil and powder residue on him. We lost a good man, there. One of our guys in the Justice Center was able to get a message out, and he says Panczko may be dead. They heard him being tortured for several nights running, but no one has seen him since."

"Mother of God!" moaned Bresler. "I didn't know Peanuts long, but he was a funny guy. I liked him." He poured out cups of coffee and handed Hill one.

"Let's not give up on him until we have confirmation," said Hill with a sigh. "Incident number eight. February 3rd. Twenty-six rifles, assorted other arms and ammo, one of Portland's only two M-60 machine guns, and our one remaining RPG launcher scooped up from an arms dump in the Blue Skies Motel in Aloha. The manager was an NVA asset attached to A Company Second Batt, but he managed to E & E okay and he's now gone to full active service status with Billy. Portland PB says an alert Mexican chambermaid spotted the guns. These cop stories are getting pretty thin by this time. We know there weren't any Mexicans working there; our guy employed only Russian and Serb and white American girls, and the room in question was locked up and never cleaned. So we know they're bullshitting on that one."

"This isn't looking good," admitted Bresler sadly.

Hill scowled. "It looks even worse on incident number nine, February 8th. Volunteer Bert Nordfeldt was surrounded and arrested by a Portland plainclothes squad in the Sheraton hotel restaurant downtown. He had to go in light for a meeting, because of the metal detectors, so he didn't even have a gun on him. The woman he was supposed to meet saw the bust go down from the lobby. She followed procedure, yelled spaghetti and beat feet to her E & E point. She's been debriefed and everything she says holds water. I'm sure she's clean. In an amazing reversal of their whole policy ever since 10/22 in Coeur d'Alene, Nordfeldt is put into a regular police cell and he is allowed a court-appointed lawyer, some smarmy character from legal aid named Van Meek, who has a reputation as a scumbag even by lawyer standards. Van Meek can't get anything out of our guy except the Five Words, of course, but that doesn't matter, since he's doing all the talking. He tells Nordfeldt that he was recognized from Oregon's Most Wanted's Weekly Spotlight on Terrorism by a waiter in the restaurant named Alvin Johnson, a young white kid, college student."

"The Portland cops supposedly burned their own informant to the suspect?" snorted Bresler. "If you believe that, I have this bridge in Brooklyn I can let you have cheap!"

"Well, granted, that happens sometimes. Police and legal aid lawyers aren't exactly the sharpest knives in ZOG's drawer. But then, without being asked, this Van Meek scuzzball goes and sees Nordfeldt's mother and his brother and his girlfriend, all of whom were also pulled in and interrogated, but then released. He tells them the same story about the waiter kid. Naturally Johnson's name gets back to us, almost as if it was intended to. I go looking, very carefully because by now I'm smelling a rat."

"What did the Johnson kid have to say?" asked Bresler.

"Nothing. He's disappeared."

"So he took his 50 grand blood money and then he took off for parts unknown?" suggested Bresler.

"Maybe," said Hill. "Trouble is, I was able to ease my body into the kitchen at the Sheraton, into the manager's office, and get a look at Johnson's time card. He wasn't punched in on the night of February 8th. He wasn't even working the day Nordfeldt was pinched."

"Sounds like you need to have a little talk with jurisconsult Van Meek," said Bresler.

"We did," said Hill. "We detained him last night, in fact. Since he's a lawyer I actually read him the FBI's Dershowitz Protocols from my own copy while a colleague of mine was laying out the needles. Just to let him know it was all legal and above board. We never even touched him. By the middle of page two he was screaming for mercy. He admitted that the Portland cops put him up to it."

"Portland PB? Not FBI or DHS?" asked Bresler keenly.

"Portland PB. Two detectives first grade, very nasty mooks from the old pre-10/22 Hatecrime Squad, a brown Barbie Doll named Elena Martinez and her partner, a big badass nigger named Jamal Jarvis, aka the Mami and the Monkey."

"I'm familiar with their names, and I've seen some photos," said Bresler. "They've been on the hit parade almost since 10/22, but we can't seem to catch up with them."

Hill nodded. "Yeah, we've even sent Cat-Eyes Lockhart out hunting them a couple of times on tip-offs, but no luck. Jarvis and Martinez are cagey and they're smooth. They know damned well the Party remembers them from the bad old days, and they're both on the spot marked X. They've moved out of their old digs and they're living somewhere under cover now, they keep

their heads down and they move off the radar, which fits in with what we hear about them now doing covert DT work for the Portland department. Their names have cropped up in other contexts. Everybody in the department down to the janitor down at the Justice Center knows there's something going on with those two, but no one knows what. Now Van Meek says they're the ones who gave him this Alvin Johnson red herring. He swore he didn't know anymore about it, and I believe him. He just did as he was paid to do. He has no idea where the waiter is. I hate to say it, but I think that poor Johnson kid was just an expendable white boy and ZOG has vaporized him to keep up the masquerade and protect their rat."

"I suppose the legal beagle is buried in a landfill now?" asked Bresler carelessly.

"No, I let him go," said Hill.

"Uh, was that a good idea?" inquired the XO.

"Sorry as I was to turn a lawyer loose on society again, it was a calculated risk," replied Hill. "Whatever the hell is rotten in the state of Denmark, I don't want anyone downtown in police headquarters to know we're onto it. If Van Meek disappeared, Martinez and Jarvis would know we'd rumbled them. We had Van Meek sweating like a pig, including his hands, and I made him get a good grip on an empty shotgun and a .38 pistol. I also made him read a couple of standard NVA online propaganda pieces and slogans into a digital recorder. I told him that if he mentioned one word to anyone about our little tête-a-tête, his voice would be on every illegal NVA internet site and the guns he'd handled would be found in close proximity to some dead bodies of Portland cops. The guy is a rodent, with a rodent's instinct for self preservation, and he doesn't want to see those Dershowitz needles laid out for him again in a secret Homeland Security cell somewhere. He'll keep his mouth shut. I hope. So that's our nine questionable cases. Do you see the main pattern yet, besides the fact that it all seems to be coming out of a suddenly amazingly efficient Portland Police Bureau?"

"I'm not sure," admitted Bresler.

"I'm sure you've seen the media coverage, here and in other cities, when the FBI or Homeland Security or other cops arrest or kill our people, or raid our safe houses and confiscate weapons, or somehow interfere with or interdict our operations," Hill explained patiently. "Every time the feds pull something like that off, they go on CNN looking like the cat that got the cream and play their we-were-acting-on-our-sources number, highly classified, can't comment, nudge-nudge wink-wink, you get the idea. They want to make us nervous and paranoid and reassure their own backers that

they have this big web of informers in the NVA, which they don't, or we'd all be dead or in prison. The few people feds have been able briefly to slip in on us have all been peripheral and were spotted and dealt with before they did too much damage. That's the one big advantage of the 'you don't join the NVA, the NVA joins you' rule. In order for them to get an infiltrator in deep it would almost certainly have to be one of our own people who went bad after he got in, acting out of a personal grudge or for money. So far, that hasn't happened yet. Knock on wood."

"Not that you know of," Bresler reminded him dryly.

"True, not that we know of," admitted Hill. "This kind of official deception is a standard, Centcom-imposed psychological warfare protocol for all federal agencies and local law enforcement, a procedure that all of a sudden the Portland cops are violating all over the place. In each of these nine episodes, they've gone out of their way to try and offer us some kind of plausible explanation as to how each one happened. Why are they doing that?"

"Most likely, to try and distract us from the fact that that they now have a real informer," said Jack with a heavy sigh.

"And now for the kicker," said Hill. "You heard about that mess we had the other night over in McMinnville?"

"Yeah, I heard the cops had a shoot-out with some cholos and Red Morehouse and Tommy Coyle both had front row seats," said Bresler. "What the hell was that all about? The media said it was just some gang-bangers who'd been out cruising and doing bad acts. You're saying it wasn't a coincidence?"

"The gang-bangers were authentic, all right," Hill told him. "I've looked that over six ways to Sunday, and the actual firefight itself seems to be just what the media says it was. A carload of low-riders knocked over a liquor store, the driver was so drunk or stoned he rammed a cop car, and all hell busted lose. The cops shot two of the cholos, and the other two are in custody and getting their full legal due process, like white men never get anymore. I'm kind of inclined to put that down to one more instance of that odd divine intervention that seems to step in now and then to help us out since the white man started standing up and fighting. Fortune favors the brave, and all that. That diversion may have saved us from something worse."

"So, what were we doing out there?"

"The Wild West show took place right in front of a storefront in which the NVA was conducting a special command conference," said Hill. "We were being briefed on a new plan ZOG has come up with. They're organizing

some kind of special brute squad to invade the Northwest and deal with us hatemongers, Federal Domestic Terrorist Police or something like that. Apparently it will be kind of like the Black and Tans in Ireland a century ago. It's still in the planning stage, but Mr. Chips was bringing us the word from the Army Council to start preparing tactical and strategic plans to deal with a big increase in fed boots on the street and a lot tougher tactics. I myself was there from Threesec acting for Colonel Redmond, and Tommy Coyle and Harry Hannon both there to brainstorm."

"You had *both* brigade commandants and an Army Council member there in the same room?" demanded Bresler. "Jeez Louise, that was risky!"

"I know, but sometimes we just have to put our heads together and work out a tough problem, and this was one of those times. The meeting never actually got started because Harry hadn't arrived yet, and wasn't due for another fifteen minutes, when all of a sudden we hear gunfire out in the street. We scoped pretty quick that it seemed to be a Mexican beef with the cops, but we flashed spaghetti to Harry and beat feet anyway. We left Volunteer Ron Kolchak behind as rear guard to cover us from the roof. You know Ron?"

"Sure I do," said Bresler with a nod. "Good man. Probably the best sniper we've got after Cat-Eyes Lockhart."

"Okay, we all exited the building from the rear, weapons ready, didn't run into any trouble, we made it to our vehicles okay and un-assed the area. Ron stayed behind for about five minutes covering down, then he went out himself over the roof. No problem. But when he reported back to the safe house he had an interesting story to tell." Hill leaned forward. "Kolchak was packing an M-24 rifle with an infrared night scope. Between that and the streetlights he had clear vision for several blocks. Halfway down the next block, parked on the street, was an Oak Harbor Van Lines panel truck. It had been there ever since we arrived, didn't seem to be occupied, and when our scout car drove by there they didn't see any activity. Now, you have to bear in mind that there was a gun battle going on in the street right below him, and there were sirens everywhere and more cop cars coming. In fact, I think Volunteer Kolchak deserves a commendation for the grit he showed in staying as long as he did. But he sees a couple of the incoming cop cars pull up by this parked panel truck. Ron sights down on it with his scope, and he sees the back roll up and five or six people jump out onto the street and start running toward the intersection where the shooting and the yelling and the Spanish profanity was going on. Some of the guys from the truck are carrying long arms, M-16s and shotguns, and they're wearing baseball caps and blue jackets that Ron says he is sure were Portland PB issue. They're led by a man and a woman in

plain clothes. This group gets to the corner, followed by some regular cops who pile out of their squad cars with their weapons out. They stop, they mill around like they're confused for twenty seconds or so, and then one of the plainclothes cops, the female, waves the uniforms toward the incident with the Mexican stickup men in the intersection, while the party from the panel truck runs back to it, gets in and rolls down the door, the two dicks get into another parked car down the street and they all drive off. All of this takes place in a period of maybe sixty seconds, while all the ruckus is going on down below in the street."

"Oooo-kaaay," said Bresler slowly. "So there was some kind of plainclothes stakeout near the meeting site?"

"Apparently. Now get this: Kolchak swears on a stack of *Mein Kampfs* that the two plainclothes cops he saw in the lead were Lainie Martinez and Jamal Jarvis. He says Jarvis now has a shaved head, and he's wearing one of those Lion of Judah goatee beards, but it was definitely the two of them."

"Ron would know them?" asked Bresler.

"Affirmative," replied Hill. "He's not only seen our photos, he knows both of them from his days in the pre-10/22 Party when Lainie and Jamal used to haul him in and beat him bloody every now and then, just for shits and giggles. He said he wanted to take a shot for auld lang syne, real bad, but he forced himself to keep a cool head and think. He was surrounded and outnumbered, they didn't know he was there and he wasn't sure he could beat feet once they spotted him, he didn't know whether or not our officers had gotten clear yet, and furthermore it appeared to him as if the enemy themselves were confused and caught off guard. If they didn't know what the hell was going on, Kolchak didn't feel it was his place to enlighten them. I concur with that decision."

"So do I," agreed Bresler. "Like Patton said, nobody ever won a war by dying for his country. He won it by making the other poor dumb bastard die for his country. Our guys need to live to fight another day. So what the hell were those two doing skulking in a panel truck a block and a half from where an Army Council member and two brigadiers were about to huddle?"

"That's what we have to find out," said Hill. "I have to admit, Jack, that McMinnville affair is what throws me. There were only eight or nine very senior people in the whole Army who knew that such a meeting was going to take place at all. I had Tommy prepare a list of five possible venues, with me only picking McMinnville an hour before. Harry and Tommy themselves didn't know when or where until an hour or so before the meet. They were just told to stand by and be available at any moment for a priority order. Billy

Jackson and Jimmy Wingo were on roving patrol outside in two vehicles, and each of them had one of their gun bunnies driving. They also did the preliminary security sweep of the meeting site, no bugs detected, but they didn't actually know what was going on inside the building or who would be there. I would have sworn that one was buttoned up tight!"

"A panel truck sounds like bugging equipment, though," said Bresler. "They might have had shotgun mikes or some of that weird microwave satellite gear. Did you sweep everybody who came in?"

"Yes, Red came down with those two kids from Dundee he uses a lot, Shane and Rooney, and Tommy had a couple of guys with him. I did them all myself as they came in the door, and nothing popped. I know, they can listen in on people in a basement now from satellites in space these days. They have fiber-optic micro-bugs that are the size of a pinhead, bugs that look like cockroaches and even scuttle across the floor, you name it. The old-fashioned wire stuck on some guy's shaven belly with surgical tape is as outdated as the flintlock. Whatever it was, I can tell you that they didn't seem prepared to move on us. It looks to me like some kind of observation stakeout. But how the hell did they know where to listen in?" Hill slammed his fist into his palm in frustration.

"So what do we do now?" asked Bresler.

"We take every one of those incidents and we review and analyze the hell out of them," said Hill. "We make a list of names for each red flag. Who knew about those safe houses and arms dumps? Who has had any contact with any of the Volunteers who went down, close enough to be able to predict their movements and finger them? Who knew what and when did they know it? Then we take the list for each incident and look for matches. There are bound to be some. Then we take all our matches and try to fit them in with the other incidents, even if it appears there's no connection. Comrade X knew about Steve Bright, but did he or she know about the EOD machine shop? Did he or she know someone who knew about the McMinnville meeting site? Comrade Y knew Peanuts Panczko, but did he or she know about Roger West, or could they have found out? Once we've narrowed it down to a few suspects, then it gets tricky, because we will have to devise some bogus setups to entrap them and see if we can make some Portland cops show up on cue at a certain place and time. These are the kinds of things that you will have to find out, Gary, because I can't without tipping everybody in the Battalion that there's a rat around, and you know that whatever else happens, we do *not* want that to get about. Our morale is high, largely because so far we have been able largely to prevent infiltration of this very kind. Rampaging

paranoia and mistrust can destroy the Second Battalion as a fighting unit just as effectively as any mass arrest. It can even seep out of the Second Battalion and infect other units, and we have to prevent that at all costs. This has to be handled quietly, efficiently, and above all quickly, before anyone else dies or ends up in the Justice Center torture chambers."

"Okay," said Bresler. "Any idea as to who we're looking for? I mean what kind of person? A profile, as the cops in the old days would say?"

"The key may lie in the fact that this seems so far to be an entirely Portland Police Bureau operation," said Hill. "If this was federal I would say we're looking for a man or maybe a woman, but more likely a man, with a strong military background, most likely in intelligence, but who probably has concealed that fact from the NVA and claims to have been just a grunt in Tikrit or something like that. He wouldn't conceal his military past completely, that would be impossible to do among men who have actually fought in the Middle East as so many of our Volunteers have, but he would be using a false name, and he would have impeccable and checkable references to back up his bogus identity. My guess is he wouldn't be burning minor arms dumps and single Volunteers. He would be doing like the FBI used to do to the Cosa Nostra back in the old days when they actually fought crime, when they sent in guys like Donnie Brasco. He would be primarily an intelligence gatherer, trying to work his way up the ladder, identify as many of our people as he could and transmit as much info as he could to his paymasters so they could hit us all at once with one big massive raid. Federal bureaucrats love big sweeps like that, so they can get their faces on TV and win that big promotion and maybe go into politics and launch a Congressional career.

"But the Portland police?" Hill went on, sipping his now lukewarm coffee. "Local law enforcement bureaucracies are intensely conservative and change-resistant institutions. My guess is they'd stick with what they know, which is get some petty criminal on the inside by some kind of hold they had on him or her, probably a heavy-duty prison rap they let the rat slide out from under. They tend to ignore big pictures and go for the quick fix, the quick bust to show immediate results. Quantity rather than quality. That's the way street cops get *their* faces on TV and get their promotions. That seems to be what is happening in this case. They're picking off random bits and pieces, an arms dump here, a Volunteer or two there. Their informer is probably under intense pressure to show results, to keep handing them busts and improve the stats. Whoever it is, the Mami and the Monkey are running them."

"So maybe we need to concentrate on snatching one or both of them and read them the Gospel According To Dershowitz?" suggested Bresler.

"A thought, a definite thought," said Hill in agreement.

"When we catch whoever it is, what happens then?" asked Bresler.

"You know what happens then," said Hill.

"Yes, I know," said Bresler irritably. "I mean, is there some kind of set procedure for this kind of thing? A court martial or something? I've never had to deal with it before, thank God."

"It varies according to circumstances," said Hill. "It won't be your worry, anyway. We have found that it's a good idea to keep the Army's dirty laundry as well out of sight as possible, even from the comrades. A disappearance is better for morale than an open execution. There is a special team of Third Section personnel who will handle it. If all goes right, one day a certain comrade will be gone, the others will be told that the person has been re-assigned, and that's that. Need to know and so forth."

"No," said Bresler decisively. "We won't do it like that. When the time comes, you call me. Wayne, I think a lot of this fine bunch of lads and lassies we have managed to assemble out of the wreckage of this continent's Caucasian population. Those two kids we had in here tonight are a good example. I got a good vibe off them. Northwest Volunteers are the best and the bravest and the very last hope for an ancient people and civilization, and if there is anyone who has betrayed them and betrayed the sacred trust we have taken upon ourselves, then I want to look right into their eyes just before I pull the trigger, so I know damned well that they will never, ever betray their own blood again. You can tell Matt Redmond for me that First Portland Brigade cleans its own house."

"Okay, if that's the way you want it," said Hill with a nod.

"That's the way I want it," said Bresler.

Later that night, Hill sat in his small room high above the city and looked down toward the Columbia River. The moon and the stars were out, and by their pale light he could see a fog collecting down over the water. His mind was too active for him to sleep. "Here, mousey, mousey!" he breathed to himself. He never thought of informers as rats, but as little mice, nibbling away at the sacks of grain in a barn or the loaf of bread in a pantry from behind, unseen except for the droppings they left that fouled the food and made it unfit to eat. "Come on, mousey, just stick your head out of your hole for a moment or two, so I can get a glimpse of you. Then you are mine, little furry one. I know you're out there somewhere, and I will find you."

XIV

Under New Management

O weary night, abate thy hours!
Shine comforts from the east
That I may go back by daylight,
From these that my poor company detest,
And sleep, that sometimes shuts up sorrow's eye,
Steal me awhile from my own company.

A Midsummer Night's Dream—Act III, Scene 2

Kicky McGee was amazed that there had been no uproar over the November killing of the former ambassador to South Africa and his Bantu wife; there was only the usual de-briefing the next day, and Jarvis and Martinez seemed more interested in the kind of firearms used and the booby trap on the vehicle than in the double homicide itself. "Look, doesn't it bother you that these guys killed a couple of people and you got them on tape, or CD or whatever you use?" she demanded incredulously. "Wouldn't this be a good time to shut this thing down and start arresting people? You've got them on the Big M now. Christ, what more do you want?"

"The two deaths were regrettable, certainly," said Lainie Martinez, "But as it happens, former ambassador Whitman was a Republican and a political opponent of the President, and our chief is a Democrat and a Clinton supporter, of course, so it's not viewed by the Bureau as seriously as you might think. We'll choose our own time to conclude Operation Searchlight and move in, Kristin, don't worry about that. We're actually glad this happened,

because now the NVA will know that you can keep your cool when the wet work goes down, and they'll begin using you on more serious operations."

"Oh, wow, just what I was hoping for," replied Kicky sardonically. Kicky was not yet aware that Linda Hirsch had grown impatient, and accordingly her handlers had already begun making arrests based on the evidence she had provided them, or what they had deduced themselves from the information she had provided them, and they had been doing so for several months already without telling her. She eventually picked up on it, and when she realized they were raiding NVA targets all around her it drove her into even worse depths of despair than she had been living with since her ordeal as an undercover had begun. One day in January she finally confronted Lainie Martinez, during one of her regular debriefings in the Justice Center interview room they used. "Are you just plain *trying* to get me killed?" she had yelled desperately. "These people are not fucking fools! By now they've *got* to know they've got a snitch on the inside somewhere, and they're probably looking for me! One of these days I'm going to get a call to go out on a hit with them, and it will be my own! Why didn't you at least *tell* me, damn you?"

"So you wouldn't throw a panicky hissy fit like you're doing now. Relax, Kristin," said Martinez dismissively. "We're being selective, and we're not arresting anyone who has had any extensive direct contact with you. There's no reason for them to suspect you. We've got to make some busts to justify the pretty hefty budget we're investing in this project, in you. That's the way this business works. We can't spend endless taxpayers' dollars for no results at all. Taxpayers' dollars some of which have been going to you. You've been getting five hundred a week tax free ever since last summer, as I'm sure you know if you check your balance with that ATM card we gave you."

"Yeah, it's a nice little nest egg now," admitted Kicky. "Too bad I can't draw any of it."

"We froze it to make sure you don't cash in and do a midnight flit on us, Kristin," said Martinez. "Don't worry, when this is all over we'll un-freeze it and you will have enough to start a whole new life with your little girl, wherever you want." Kicky had the strongest doubts that they ever intended to let her go, one way or the other, but she was trapped like a fly in amber and she simply couldn't figure any way out. The global positioning indicator was still in the ring on her finger, and they had made it clear to her that any attempt to remove it, or tamper with any of the monitoring devices on her person or in her cab or in her trailer would be regarded as a terminal breach of contract and would lead to evil consequences in the form of losing her daughter, and probably more electric therapy before she ended up going up

the chimney in the Justice Center's secret crematorium. Kicky had asked Lainie about the crematorium once, and the Hispanic woman had neither confirmed nor denied its existence. She had just smiled and said, "Gotta love that Patriot Act."

So Kicky continued with her nightmare existence, snatching a few hours every other day with her daughter and her increasingly haggard and distraught mother, driving the cab for pocket money, and running various errands for the NVA in almost all of her spare time now, including more punishment beatings, arsons, and bomb deliveries, although no more outright assassination runs. The pressure was beginning to get to her. Sometimes her longing for the crack pipe or even a bottle of Jack Daniels, anything to escape into oblivion for a few hours, became almost overwhelming, and at night alone in her bed she had to jam a sheet into her mouth and bite down on it to keep from screaming. She couldn't sleep, but she refused an offer of sleeping pills from the police pharmacy; she was afraid that they might be construed as a violation of General Order Number Ten by the NVA, and also that they might be traced back to their source. But mostly she was afraid to sleep, afraid that she would wake up and someone would be standing by her bed killing her, from the NVA, from the police, from whatever hell existed. Her nerves were worn to fiddle strings, she wasn't eating properly, and although she didn't lose too much weight her face was becoming haggard and hollow-eyed.

Her police handlers either didn't notice or didn't care. Her NVA comrades did. Jimmy Wingo was riding with her one day on a supply run, and after they left several suitcases and cardboard boxes in the garage of an apparently unoccupied suburban house, on the way back into town, he asked her in a concerned tone, "Look, Kicky, how are you holding up? You're looking a little strained lately."

"I am," she admitted. "I'm not sleeping so good. I guess it is kind of getting to me." She was silent for a while, and somehow she knew she had to say something else. "It's my little girl. My Mom's got her, you know I told you that and . . . well, It Takes A Village has been nosing around. Mom was living in a trailer in Oregon City, and a couple of weeks ago some bitch from Child Protective Services shows up when she was out at work and Ellie was in day care, and leaves a card in the door."

"Christ!" said Jimmy, genuinely concerned. "I hope she beat feet out of there with the kid, fast!"

"Yeah, believe me, white people who live in trailers know that when CPS comes cruising, you don't wait for a second visit if you want to keep your babies," said Kicky. "If they show up again they're going to want to know about me, where

I am and what I'm doing. I talked with Mom on the phone and . . . well, I told her to take Ellie somewhere and not let me know where. She said she would. Didn't argue. I think she knows what I'm doing, or knows it's something illegal, anyway. But it's going to be a while before I see my baby again. And yes, it's a strain, and I've had trouble sleeping at night, and it's no fun and it's probably showing. But you and the guys don't have to worry about me."

"We don't," Wingo assured her. "We've all got some ghastly loose ends like that floating around in our lives. You know if there's anything I can do, you only have to come to me."

"Thanks," she said. "Jimmy, can I ask you something?" She knew she was treading into dangerous waters here, and that having this conversation when she knew the cops were listening was in its own subtle way one of the worst things she had done yet to this man, but she couldn't resist. "How come you've never tried to hit on me? Is it because of, you know, well, what I used to do for a living?"

"Mmmm, in a way, yeah, but not the kind of way you're probably thinking," said Wingo carefully. "Shit, how can I say this? Of course I'm interested. Any man who sees you is interested, and you know it. But if I ever made a move on you, there's always the chance you might think I was, ah, making assumptions about you. It might have come across as disrespectful. That make any sense?"

"Yeah," she said with a smile. "Thanks, Jim." It was on the tip of her tongue to tell him disrespectful be damned, it had been a long dry spell, and why not stop off at her place on the way back? But then she remembered what was in her earrings and what was in her trailer, and she cursed herself. *I must be losing it,* she thought to herself. Now she was afraid he'd try to take it further. She knew she couldn't just leave it, though. "Uh, look, I really appreciate that. I have to be at work at four, I mean today, but maybe sometime . . ."

"I got to be someplace too," said Wingo with a chuckle. "That's one trouble with revolutions. They're not a singles bar. Romanticized bullshit aside, there's not really much time for recreation. Everybody's always got to be somewhere urgent, and it's kind of hard to fit hooking up into the schedule. If the timing ever works out and it's right for both of us, we'll know when. I hope that happens someday, Kick."

In her next debriefing session Lainie took her to task. "You should have come on a lot stronger," she scolded. "I keep telling you, you need to make a play for some of these racist oafs and get them in the sack. No telling what you could pick up through pillow talk. That's what female spies have always done. Jesus, it's not like you're Anne of Green Gables or anything."

"I'm a different kind of whore now!" Kicky snapped back at her.

Soon afterwards, Kicky's world went to hell. Big-time.

* * *

It began at one of the weekly interdepartmental conferences in the Justice Center between the Portland Police Bureau, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, the Secret Service, the BATFE, and half a dozen other agencies and organizations responsible for fighting domestic terrorism in the Northwest.

Ostensibly the purpose of these conferences was to share information and to formulate and execute a combined and cohesive strategy in dealing with the NVA threat. In actual practice they tended to degenerate into turf wars, petty digressions over inconsequential things, personality conflicts, mutual sniping and empire building, squabbling over money and resources, and general cat-fighting and feuding. The FBI regarded themselves as the prima donnas of law enforcement. They considered the DHS (correctly) to be dweebs and political appointee hacks, the BATFE (again correctly) to be mindless thugs, and the Portland cops (partially correctly) to be bumbling flatfeet of limited intelligence. The Portland cops regarded the feds of all departments (correctly) as arrogant and narcissistic assholes. The DHS operatives were indeed political flacks whose major job qualification was loyalty to the current administration, all of whom thought of themselves as James Bond, and the BATFE agents were sullen and hostile to everyone else at the table, feeling that they were being shoved aside. The government's lack of success against the Volunteers was never any mystery to anyone who attended just one of these meetings. The simple fact was that the people governing the United States of America were all stunningly incompetent.

Lately, though, Chief Linda Hirsch had been presiding at the head of the table wearing the self-satisfied expression of the cat who got the cream. Her people were showing results, killing and bringing in Volunteers and weapons and NVA assets, while the mighty FBI were chasing their tails. Portland FBI Special Agent In Charge Elliot Weinstein, the late Rabang Miller's quondam lover, was mightily pissed off. He was a small and wiry Jew with a bristling reddish moustache, bulging eyes and thick glasses that made him look like some comical Woody Allen character. He wasn't; he was one of the sharpest agents in the Bureau, or he had been until the shit had hit the fan in Portland and he kept coming up with a barrel of bupkis. Being baffled and run rings around by racist and anti-Semitic *goyim,* whom he held in

utter contempt, enraged Weinstein to the point of madness. Like many male Jews, his interaction with the bossy, matriarchal, and often depraved women of his own race was problematical, and he had made a point of marrying a blonde Wellesley girl as a trophy wife. He found Hirsch's open lesbianism revolting, her physiognomy repulsive, and he recognized in her an ambition and ruthless drive to climb the American ladder equal to his own, which he mistrusted and which made him wary and nervous. "Chief, once more I have to protest against the lack of coordination between the Portland police and the Federal arm, with regard to the operation you conducted in mid-town last night," he said in a sulky voice. "You know that Homeland Security regulations require the presence of Federal officers, preferably FBI, in any domestic terrorist operation. Your people are out there doing a cowboy act with no federal supervision or input at all."

"We bagged another racist, and with a little of my own needlework we were able to recover a dozen weapons and ten pounds of commercial explosive they didn't have time to move before we broke the son of a bitch," snapped Hirsh. "One would think that would meet with the FBI's approval. This is our city, Elliot, and we don't need your supervision to combat terrorist murder and hatecrime here. Nor are we obligated to share the credit for our own success and professionalism with you people."

"That's not all you're not sharing," muttered Weinstein's Director of Operations, an overweight and seedy-looking agent with a red boozer's face and blue broken veins in his nose named Don Farley. Farley was a short-timer who was about to complete his twenty years, draw his pension, and head for a cushy job in corporate security or somewhere in the bowels of the federal bureaucracy, one that would hopefully not interfere with his drinking as much as his present post. He was sticking it in Portland for the extra $1500 per month hazardous duty pay. With two ex-wives as well as his current spouse, several children going through college, and a mountain of credit card and mortgage debt that was massive even by American standards, he needed every penny he could scrape together, although the tension of life in the NVA's crosshairs had driven him into the bottle even more so than was usual for him. There were bets around the FBI office as to when Farley would go down for his first heart attack. Weinstein didn't like Farley or trust him, and he had tried several gambits to get rid of him or at least ease him out of the DO slot, but although Farley was a sloppy law enforcement officer, like many Bureau lifers he was an adept at inter-office politics and intrigue, and he had accumulated enough juice to stay firmly in the saddle as DO.

Linda Hirsch's eyes flickered briefly and then she turned abruptly to a list of vehicles and license numbers, stolen in the Portland area in the past two weeks and which might be in NVA hands. To someone used to her ponderous and inscrutable meeting persona, it was as noticeable as if she'd jumped like a scalded dog, and Weinstein picked up on it. His eyes narrowed, but he held his peace for the moment. When the lunch break came he tracked Farley down in the Justice Center bar and grabbed his coat lapel, spilling Scotch and soda over his already stained shirtfront. "Hey!" yelped Farley.

"What the hell was that cryptic crack you made in there about Portland PB not sharing?" demanded Weinstein. "Not sharing what? It seemed to get under Hirsch's skin, whatever the hell you were talking about."

"Nothing, just water cooler scuttlebutt," said Farley with a shrug. "The kind you'd pick up yourself if you'd be sociable, hang out with the guys after work and hoist a few cold ones like a normal person. I was yanking the fat bitch's chain. It's probably just bullshit."

Weinstein restrained an urge to put his hands around his subordinate's wattled neck and start squeezing. *"What* is probably just bullshit?" he asked, forcing himself to be calm.

"Portland PB is supposed to have somebody on the inside with the NVA."

Weinstein looked at Agent Farley strangely. Behind his spectacles, his eyes goggled dementedly. "And you . . . did not see fit . . . to *tell me this?*" Weinstein choked out, his voice rising to a maniacal scream.

"Cool your jets, man," said Farley in irritation. "I would have said something if I thought there was a damned thing to it, but it's crap. Gotta be crap. Jesus, Elliot, come on now! If we can't get anybody inside, trained agents with years of undercover experience, how the hell are the local yokels going to do it? It's just jealousy, probably comes from those apes in BATFE who can't stand seeing their thunder stolen. The Portland cops are on a lucky streak, sure, but that's all it is. If they had somebody inside, do you think they wouldn't have busted the heavy hitters like Coyle and Jackson and Lockhart, and this mysterious Oscar character we keep hearing whispers on the wind about?"

Farley was a fool. Elliot Weinstein was not. He went back to his office, closed the door, held his calls, sat behind his desk and went over in his mind everything that had happened over the past six to eight months, all the "lucky" busts and raids that the Portland Police Bureau had managed to pull off, as well as the increasingly transparent excuses given for those successes. He analyzed and assessed it all, and he knew. He spent the next several minutes

kicking himself in his mind for being so slow on the uptake as to not have figured it out on his own, then he rose and walked down a long series of corridors and into Linda Hirsch's office. "Is she in?" he asked her receptionist. "Never mind, I hear her." He walked into Hirsch's office and stood in front of her desk, waiting for her to get off the phone, looking down at the Chief like a basilisk of doom. When she hung up he did not wait for her to speak. "The game is up, Linda. I want your informant. I have the legal right to him under a string of regulations that you know as well as I do, and if you try to withhold him from me or feed me a line of bullshit, I will call the Director of Homeland Security personally, and he will come out here. We will have a sit-down, and when we stand up, you probably won't be employed any longer. You know I can do it, and I will. It's over, Linda. Who is he?"

Hirsch stared at him in baffled rage, but she knew it was over, too. She sighed and scowled. "It's not a he, it's a she," she replied.

Half an hour later, Detective Sergeant Lainie Martinez and Detective Sergeant Jamal Jarvis were seated in a conference room with Chief Hirsch, Elliot Weinstein, and Special Agent Don Farley. It was hard to say which of the three Portland cops were the most angry and horrified and chagrined, but they all knew they'd been busted and it was time to put as good a face on things as possible, and salvage what they could before the FBI commandeered Operation Searchlight completely. Lainie explained things in her usual cool and professional manner. "The undercover operative in question is not a police officer. She is an ex-convict, a prostitute and former drug addict who is cooperating with us for two reasons: to slither out of a first degree murder charge wherein she killed her pimp, and also because we now have custody of her two-year-old daughter. She is a very reluctant informant, she is subject to all of the psychological and personality problems you would expect from someone of her background, and she is completely terrified of the people she's with, as well she might be, since if she were even suspected of being a snitch she would be murdered without a second's hesitation on their part. The girl is a bundle of raw nerves, and she requires very careful handling. Agent Weinstein, I know you're not happy that you weren't informed of the operation, but I recommend in the strongest possible terms that you keep Sergeant Jarvis and myself on as her handlers, at least for the time being until you can transition to your own team. She's used to us."

"De bitch is mo' scared shitless of the Mami and the Monkey than she is of the goots, is what," contributed Jarvis.

"Agreed," said Weinstein coolly. He didn't like keeping the Portland PB involved any longer than necessary. He wanted Kicky all for his own so bad

he could taste it, but he knew that he needed to appear magnanimous in victory. "On one condition. I want to see everything you've got, everything you're doing, and every scrap of intel that you've been able to gather through this woman."

So they took the two FBI agents to the inner sanctum, the janitorial supplies suite in a remote part of the Justice Center, and Weinstein's jaw nearly slammed into the floor when he saw the huge organizational tables with photographs, file reference numbers, neat little boxes and flowcharts that now covered two walls of the operational center. The FBI doted on this kind of thing, and he was quietly frantic with stunned jealousy as he walked up to the charts and studied them. "Okay, the two brigades I get, we know that much, but First Battalion, Second Battalion, Third Battalion? When the hell did they create battalions? Hatfield and those bandits down on the North Coast are now a whole separate battalion by themselves? And all these others? Who the hell *are* these guys?"

Farley was studying the org charts in fascination. "Jackson I know, Racine and Carter Wingfield I know, Coyle I know, but who the hell is this guy Hannon? We thought Second Brigade was commanded by somebody named Wagner?"

"One of Hannon's code names," said Lainie.

"My God, *who are all these people?"* Weinstein muttered to himself. "What is all this?" he asked, gesturing to a large map of the greater Portland area on a corkboard studded with black, red, green, blue, orange, and yellow pins, as well as one white pin.

"Black are NVA murders and red are bombings, which I'm sure you can figure out from the locations," said Chief Hirsch. "Green are suspected arms dumps which we have under intermittent surveillance as much as our manpower allows, and as far as we can do without exciting suspicion and blowing the informant's cover. Blue are suspected NVA safe houses. Orange are the addresses of suspected terrorists, although those change all the time and we can't guarantee their accuracy for more than a day or two. Yellow are reported sightings of the Jack of Diamonds Sniper, Jesse 'Cat-Eyes' Lockhart, who is a person of especial interest to us." Detective Andy McCafferty walked up to the board, with a sidelong glance at the FBI agents, and moved the white pin to a different spot on the board.

"What's the white one?" asked Weinstein.

"That's the present location of Sharkbait, our code name for the undercover," said Lainie. "Her real name is Kristin McGee, her street name is Kicky, and her Volunteer name is Comrade Jodie. We have a GPI on her

all the time, of course, as well as fiber-optic sound and occasional video monitoring, but we find that keeping her marked on the board gives an added perspective."

"Nice code name for an NVA snitch," chuckled Farley grimly.

"We like it," said Lainie neutrally.

"How specific is your intel?" asked Weinstein, shaking his head. "For example, do you have any idea who killed Ambassador Whitman and his wife outside the Nordstrom department store in November?"

Andy looked at Lainie, who sighed and nodded her head. "Yeah, we know," McCafferty told them. "That was Billy Jackson, Jimmy Wingo, and our girl. Actually, we have the whole hit recorded on digital audio."

"What?" shouted Weinstein in astonishment.

"You want to hear it go down?" asked McCafferty.

He provided two sets of headphones, and Weinstein and Farley sat with their jaws gaping while they listened to the soundtrack of the double hit and the subsequent ditching and booby-trapping of the vehicle. "My God, you're *years* ahead of us!" muttered Weinstein.

"We got our shit together," agreed Jarvis.

"I would like to point out that the audio clearly indicates the murder of the Ambassador was a crime of opportunity, and we had no chance to intervene . . ." began Linda Hirsch.

"Never mind that," said Weinstein, waving it away. "Hillary never liked Whitman when he was in the State Department, he was a Republican, and she sent him to South Africa to get rid of him. He made waves about the occupation of Gaza, and frankly I think if the NVA hadn't whacked him, Hillary might have done. She's getting more and more impatient of contradiction. Of course you have to preserve this undercover at any cost. Don't worry, I get it. Now, let's get down to cases. You people have been using this woman for nickel and dime shit. It's time we got her up higher on the food chain, and I have just the right starting point. The Bureau doesn't have this kind of humintel, true, but we do have some sources of information through phone and internet monitoring, and our analysts have gotten pretty good at tracking the chatter and cracking the revolving codes these guys use. Not good enough to get ahead of them, but good enough to get a whiff of things now and then, and we've got a Portland whiff. You know about the plans that are on the drawing board in Washington for a Federal Anti-Terrorist Police Organization?"

"We've heard rumors," said Hirsch sourly, sensing an upcoming reduction in her authority when a federal paramilitary army descended on Portland.

"So have the NVA, apparently. We've picked up a buzz that a high-ranking Army Council member is on his way down from the Seattle area sometime in the next few days, for a sit-down with the local warlords here in Portland to discuss the matter. This is one occasion when we can be reasonably sure that a lot of their heaviest hitters are going to be in the same room together somewhere. We need to find out where, and we need to get our girl in there listening in somehow, or at least get the meeting wired. If the fish look big and tasty enough, we move on them." *"Our" girl is she, now?* thought Lainie bitterly.

"Were you planning on sharing this interesting bit of information with us?" asked Linda Hirsch with asperity.

"I don't think you're in any position to throw stones about not sharing information, Linda," replied Weinstein sarcastically. "Sergeant Martinez, you're in the enviable position of being the American law enforcement officer most familiar with the day to day operations of these people. Surely there has to be some way we can insert the undercover into this meeting?"

"This isn't a video game, sir," said Lainie, tight-lipped. "We can't move her across the screen and have her do flips and throw fireballs with a flick of a switch or touch of a button so she can break through to the next level. Right now she's just a foot soldier, a driver, an errand girl. I'm still not sure that they trust her fully, which may be one of the reasons none of them has approached her sexually yet. She hasn't even been issued a permanent NVA weapon. They give her a pistol every time she goes out driving for them, but they take it back afterwards. She goes where they tell her to and she does what they tell her to, and they're using her for more and more heavy stuff now, like bombing runs, but it's not like she can walk up to Jackson or Wingo and volunteer to show the Army Council guy the sights around Portland. All we can hope for is that she somehow gets involved in the normal course of NVA events."

"Okay, tell you what, let's just start at the beginning and see what we've got, and where we can go with it," said Weinstein, literally rubbing his hands together in sheer delight at the prospect of hurting the hated anti-Semites and at the same time salvaging his slipping reputation at the Justice Department in Washington.

The first time that Kicky heard that she was under new management was when she came in via the usual circuitous route for what she thought was a routine debriefing several days later, and she walked into the conference room in the operations center to find a vulturine panel of people waiting for her, including Martinez, Jarvis, Weinstein, and Farley. Beside them sat a balding,

hook-nosed man in a white lab coat, and when the door closed behind her she found two large men dressed as hospital orderlies standing behind her, one black and one Mexican. "What the fuck?" she hissed.

"Kristin, there's been a change in your situation," said Lainie. "From now on, you're working for the federal government, although Sergeant Jarvis and I will still be participating in Operation Searchlight. One of the things we are going to be doing is updating your surveillance and tracking technology. This is Doctor Feldman. He will be performing a simple surgical procedure on you today."

"The hell he will!" shouted Kicky, but he did. The two men in white grabbed her by both arms, and she was forthwith dragged by force, kicking and screaming and cursing, into a nearby elevator and then down two floors to the police infirmary, which had been cleared of all unauthorized personnel. There she was manhandled onto a gurney and strapped down. By now Kicky was hysterical and fighting violently, but to no avail. She thought from the gurney that her masters had tired of her, and that she was about to be put to death by the standard American execution method of lethal injection. She cursed them wildly and spat and bit, until without a word Feldman turned on a canister of anesthetic gas and fitted the mask over her face, and she lost consciousness.

To her surprise she awakened less than half an hour later, and half an hour after that she was back in the conference room. Her upper left arm and her shoulder was starting to hurt as the local anesthetic wore off. "We're a bit worried that the NVA people you're spying on for us might notice that you always wear the same several sets of earrings and you always wear the same ring containing your global positioning indicator," Weinstein explained smoothly. "We have accordingly inserted a subcutaneous microchip about the size of your thumbnail into the musculature of your arm, just below your armpit, where the bandage is. You'll be able to have that off in a couple of hours, and the swelling should go down within a day or so. Just wear long-sleeved blouses or a jacket until then, and it won't be seen. This device is all plastic and silicon, so it won't trip any metal detectors if you have to go through one or anyone scans you, and it serves the same purpose as all that fancy jewelry you're wearing. It's got full audio capability, it can pick up a normal speaking voice up to twenty feet, and it's got a GPI so we will know your whereabouts at all times. It also has the advantage of not being removable, in case you get any ideas about taking off your ring and your earrings and bugging out on us." Kicky buried her face in her hands. Now her last emergency option of simple flight after she took off her tracking devices was gone.

She listened with mounting horror as Weinstein explained what was wanted of her. She desperately tried to explain the facts of life to him. "Look, Mr. FBI, I don't know what these two have been telling you, but I am the lowest Injun on the totem pole in the NVA. I'm not even officially a Northwest Volunteer yet, at least I don't think I am. I'm still what they call an asset, a wannabe. The only way I have been able to avoid ending up lying dead in the woods with a plastic bag over my head is I do what I'm told, when I'm told to do it, and I do *not* ask questions! If I start probing and fishing and trying to find out about this guy you say is coming down from Seattle and this meeting you say is going down, that's going to set off every alarm bell in these guys' minds. I *can't* do what you're asking! How am I even supposed to explain the fact that I know about this stuff I'm trying to find out about? It's not like there's a rumor mill or grapevine in the Army. These people are as tight as clams about stuff like that. I've got a kind of semi-friendly relationship with Jimmy Wingo, yeah, but I don't think he's all that high up either, and other than Jackson I don't even know any officers, except maybe that guy I saw in Jupiter's Den and later in Lenny Gillis' apartment, the one who was with Lockhart."

"James McCann," said Lainie.

"Yeah, I think they call him Big Jim, but that's all I know about him. I don't even know what he does, never mind where he is. As for Billy Jackson, whenever I see him we exchange maybe a dozen words. I don't think the man knows what small talk is. How in God's name am I supposed to get this information out of these guys? They're the most suspicious people on earth. They have to be."

"We don't expect miracles, Kristin," said Lainie soothingly. "Just keep your ears open, like you always do, but if you see an opening, we do expect you to be proactive and make use of it. Do you understand?"

The rest of the afternoon was devoted to testing Kicky's new monitoring chip after the bandage was removed. Andy McCafferty smiled with approval as he took off his headphones. "Amazing," he said. "Better reception than we were getting before."

"Now we have something else new for you," said Weinstein with an oily smile. He held out his palm.

"Ewww!" said Kicky. "What the hell is that? A dead cockroach?"

"That's what it's supposed to look like," said Weinstein. "We call it a bug-bug, since it's a bug in every sense of the word. These little items have basically the same kind of microchip inside them as the one you're carrying in your arm, although without the GPI circuits they can be made even smaller.

These are audio monitoring devices, Kicky. I will give you this one, and later some more. I want you to carry it somewhere in your purse or on your person, and if you are in a situation where it seems that something might be going down in your absence that we need to listen in on, I want you to plant it for us someplace inconspicuous, in a corner or on top of a cabinet or under a sink, anywhere else where a dead roach wouldn't seem out of place and won't attract notice. When you do, I want you to make some remark about cockroaches to whomever you're with. We'll be listening in and we'll know you planted the bug-bug, and we'll activate it. Detective McCafferty, I'll give you the serial number and activation code for this particular piece of hardware. Ms. McGee, I understand that a low-ranking NVA gofer like yourself won't be invited to sit in while the big bosses have a pow-wow, but if you're deft enough in planting this for us, we can be there in spirit if not in the flesh."

"You realize that you are increasing my level of risk to the point where I will almost certainly be caught eventually?" said Kicky bitterly. "What do I get in return, and when does all this bad craziness end? When can I take Ellie and my mother and get the hell out of here?"

"We'll up your pay to a thousand dollars a week, tax-free of course," said Weinstein. "That's no problem at all."

"That's no damned good if I can't draw any money out of the account!" snapped Kicky. "I'm asking you again, when the hell is this going to be over?"

"Oh, it's not going to be over for a long, long time, Ms. McGee," said Weinstein. "You've got a long and fruitful career as a domestic terrorist ahead of you, as long as we can stretch it out. Don't worry about your safety, my dear, because believe me, I will treasure you. You and I are going to go far together, little *shiksa*." Even more than the FBI agent's words, Kicky was perturbed by something she detected in the goggling brown eyes behind the spectacles, the familiar first glint of lust. Jamal Jarvis picked up on it, too, and his white teeth flashed grinning in his black face. He had never dared to put the moves on Kicky, either out of career considerations or possibly because Lainie Martinez always made sure he was never alone with her. But he clearly found the thought of Weinstein nailing her to be a pleasant one, even if he could not. *Yeah, you gonna fuck dat little piece of pale tattooed pussy, ain't you, Jew boy?* he thought gleefully.

As it happened, at that moment Kicky got a beep on her NVA phone. She answered it with the cops and FBI all watching her. "Yeah?" she said.

Wingo's voice on the other end said, "You still feeling sick?"

"Yeah, I think I got that bug that's been going around," Kicky replied, staring at the mechanical cockroach in her hand.

"Well, take it easy and try and get some rest. I'll see you at the Hong Kong Garden when you get well and we'll grab some Chinese." He hung up.

She looked up at them. "They want me to call in sick to my job at the cab company," she said. "They must have something special going on. They usually don't want me to break my routine. I'm supposed to meet them at a corner on Southeast 31st Street as soon as possible."

"That's got to be it!" breathed Weinstein in triumph. "They want you for something in connection with this meeting. The Army Council man must be in Portland!"

The result of the night's subsequent activity was the bizarre and chaotic mess that Lieutenant Wayne Hill of Third Section was later to describe to Gary Bresler. Kicky was picked up in a battered Subaru Outback by Billy Jackson and Jimmy Wingo, who was driving. "Get in the back," Wingo told her.

"Get 'em up," said Jackson as soon as she was in the car, and Kicky raised her arms as he ran a portable metal detector over her whole body. Kicky was by now used to being periodically scanned. She knew it was a standard precaution, and was no more unnerved by it than usual. She was wearing a pullover sweater that concealed the new red bump below her left armpit, but the detector missed it. There was the usual bleep when it went over her handbag, and Kicky turned it out to show her keys, coin purse, and the usual assortment of junk. Jackson folded the detector and put it away, then handed her the usual 9-millimeter Beretta in an interior clip holster and an extra magazine. "One up the spout, safety's on," he said. She put the gun inside her belt at the small of her back and stuck the loaded magazine in her back pocket. They drove to a nearby elementary school parking lot and met Lavonne, who was driving a dark blue Nissan. Lavonne got into the Outback with them. "Okay, here's the program for the evening," said Jackson. "Two Volunteers per car, boy-girl in each, girl driving one, boy the other. We've got full tanks of gas, and we're going to go cruising around town in a circle until I get a call from Oscar. Then we're going to go to a place where he tells us to go, and I will check it out. If everything looks copacetic, I give him the all clear. Some of our comrades will then arrive and hold a little get-together, which should not last more than a couple of hours, max. During this time we will be hanging in the area, a little cruising, a little strolling on the street, whatever seems appropriate to keep us around but unnoticed. We'll be keeping an eye out for any unpleasant party-crashers who might want to interrupt our friends' evening. When they leave, we leave. Simple. Thumper

and Lavonne go in the Nissan, Jodie rides with me." Kicky felt the phone in her waist holster vibrate. She could almost feel the tension and anticipation back in the operations center.

It was even greater than she knew. *"Oscar!"* said Farley, his beefy red face between his headphones slack with surprise. "My God, maybe she's going to meet Oscar tonight?"

"That would make sense," agreed Weinstein. "We don't know exactly who or what Oscar is, but we know he's *mucho potente,* a major player."

"That's *muy potente,* sir," said Lainie in annoyance.

"Maybe he's the Army Council honcho?" suggested Jamal Jarvis.

"Mmmm, don't think so," said Lainie. "She's picked a few vibes about Oscar before. He's some kind of spook or intelligence officer, sounds like, Third Section, I think."

"Oh, God, if we can actually catch a Threesec operative!" gasped Farley in almost orgasmic anticipation.

"If we can catch him, we can use him to zero in on the Big Fellow himself," said Weinstein grimly. "Matt Redmond. Former DEA agent, former state detective from North Carolina, now head of the NVA's entire intelligence apparatus, along with his bitch wife Heather Redmond. Killer of FBI Assistant Director Charles Bennett and morally responsible for the death of Special Agent Andrea Weinmann and a dozen other agents as well, and that was back in the days of Clinton the First, never mind now." [See *Fire and Rain* and *Slow Coming Dark* by the author.] "Third Section are the real bad-asses, the heaviest hitters and assassins of all. Farley, get hold of our SWAT guys and scramble them."

"God damn it, Elliot, this is still technically a Portland PB operation!" howled Linda Hirsch. "She's our fucking snitch and I will not let you just come swaggering in here and grab everything for yourself! If there are high-ranking terrorists meeting tonight then let us go in, and at least have the decency to split the press conference, if it's going to be my last!"

Weinstein sighed, "Oh, all right, dammit, no time to argue! How soon can you have a Ready Response Team for us, Chief? But this is the last time! And you yourself stay here!"

"No, let her come, Elliot," joked Farley. "Big lady like the Chief would be great cover for me to hide behind!"

"Yeah, dat's where we usually find you fed muthafukkas when it comes time to throw down!" growled Jarvis. "Hidin' behind our cop asses!"

Billy Jackson drove the Subaru, and for once Kicky got to ride along as passenger. But he was no more inclined to small talk than ever before,

and Kicky wisely did not attempt to pump him for information as to what was going on. She figured she would find out soon enough, and so her conversation consisted of pointing out occasional police vehicles, to which Jackson inevitably replied, "I see them."

Finally she said, "Do you want me to just shut up about cop cars, sir?"

"Not at all," he said seriously. "Two pairs of eyes are always better than one. You might see one that I don't. When you're not driving, you should always be observing."

Finally a call came in on Jackson's cell phone. He listened briefly and said, "Okay." He pulled off into an office parking lot and the Nissan followed and pulled up beside him, Wingo in the passenger seat.

"It's McMinnville," Jackson told him. "Follow me. When we get there, I will park and Jodie and I will go into the premises. You guys park and stand watch. We should be in there five minutes or so. When I come out, if everything looks cool I'll let Oscar know." They pulled out and started heading westward into Yamhill County, still a semi-rural area that had not yet been completely swallowed up by the Greater Portland metropolis.

"Kind of far out of town, isn't it, sir?" Kicky ventured to ask.

"I don't think they wanted this meeting in the middle of the city where E & E might be difficult if it breaks bad," said Jackson. He said no more, and Kicky kept silent.

"You have a van or something big enough for the monitoring gear?" asked Weinstein back in the operations center.

"Oak Harbor moving van, Agent Weinstein," said Lainie. "It's got all the wires and hookups and also room for some troops."

"Okay, let's roll," said Weinstein, who had already sent Farley for their own FBI body armor, ID jackets, and a pair of M-16s. "We'll track them from the van."

When the two NVA scout cars arrived in McMinnville it was dark. They cruised down North Adams Street and Jackson pulled over beside a storefront that seemed to be empty. "Follow me," he said, getting out of the car, taking with him a small green plastic sports bag. Kicky did so. They went down an alley and found a small parking lot, with two or three vehicles. Jackson did a quick count of the spaces and looked along the residential street behind the store for more. "Okay, looks like enough parking. Let's go inside." The rear door of the store was unlocked. Jackson turned on the lights, and Kicky saw that the store was apparently under renovation, with piles of lumber and Masonite drywall lying in stacks, unplastered walls, joists, etc. "There have been people working in here at night, so we should be able to risk the lights

for a few minutes," said Jackson. He went into the back room and saw that a folding table had been set up with eight folding metal chairs around it. "Okay, the setup crew has been here," said Jackson. He took out his metal detector and also a strange electronic meter-looking instrument. "I'll check for bugs. You take a look around for anything that appears odd or out of place, anything that might constitute a security risk."

Kicky did so while Jackson scanned the place for monitoring devices. "There's some stairs here leading to the second story," she said.

"We'll have men up there, but go take a look," called Jackson. Kicky went upstairs and found a small empty apartment, its door unlocked, with cheap plastic and metal furniture, a sagging double bed in the damp and musty bedroom, several moldy objects in a turned-off refrigerator that had once been edible. She turned on the lights, looked around, and came downstairs and into the back room with the table and chairs.

"I don't see anything that looks dangerous," she told Jackson.

"Okay," the company commander replied. He closed his metal detector and then shut off the meter and returned them to the sports bag. He stepped out into the shop area and opened his phone, and spoke briefly in a low tone to someone on the other end. Kicky took the opportunity to pull the bug-bug shaped like a roach out of a small sheet of rolled toilet paper in her purse and stick it up high on an exposed ceiling joist. Jackson stuck his head back inside. "I just told Oscar everything looks clear. Let's go back to the vehicle."

"Yeah, nothing here but the cockroaches," said Kicky in a firm voice, not too loud. As she was getting back into the Subaru she felt the phone at her hip vibrate, and she knew that she had been heard, and that McCafferty had activated the listening device.

They pulled into a parking space about a block away from the empty store, where they could get a clear view of the front under the street lights. Jimmy and Lavonne cruised by in the Nissan and disappeared from Kicky's sight; Jackson got a call on his phone a minute or so later. "All right, they're in place. The comrades who will be meeting are now on their way from their various locations. Before we begin, you and I are going to go down to that espresso shop and get one small cup of strong coffee each. Not a large one. While we are there, we both use the bathroom. This is going to last several hours, and I don't want either of us to have to take a potty break and thus be out of position if anything breaks bad. Hence the small cup of coffee only. You damned sure don't want to be caught in a firefight with a full bladder, or you'll piss yourself. You won't mean to, you may not even know it, but you will. A couple of rules in the life: any time you get a chance to sleep, take it,

and any time you get a chance to empty your bowels and bladder, take it, even if you don't need to. You never know when you'll get another chance." They both left the car and walked down the street to the coffee shop.

"That guy's got to be an ex-cop who's done surveillance before," muttered Don Farley to himself in the van, listening in to Kicky's mike as they entered the McMinnville city limits. As it happened, Jimmy and Lavonne were availing themselves of a similar nature break at a gas station around the corner from where they were parked, and therefore neither party noticed the Oak Harbor van pull up and park a block away from where Jimmy and Lavonne were parked.

When Jackson and Kicky got back to the Subaru with their small coffees and settled into the front seat, Billy said, "We'll stretch our legs every twenty minutes or so during the surveillance, pretend to window-shop or something. Foot traffic along the sidewalk won't be too heavy on a weeknight. One more thing. If at any time we ourselves come under surveillance or we are challenged, and the situation looks like something we can talk our way out of without any shooting, we will have to pretend to be lovers, or possibly husband and wife, which is a standard and generally acceptable and explicable explanation for a man and a woman to be sitting together in a parked vehicle. It's one of the reasons we try and use boy-girl teams as much as possible. This entails a certain amount of play-acting and deception, as you can guess. If it suddenly becomes necessary for me to take liberties, comrade, I apologize in advance, and I assure you that no disrespect is intended."

"Uh, yeah, okay," said Kicky, bemused.

"Jesus, that guy sounds like he has a two-by-four stuck up his ass," commented Farley, listening on the headphones.

"Muthafukka probably gets off on killin' people, not fuckin' wimmins," said Jarvis.

"Actually, Jackson is supposed to have become involved in the NVA when his fiancée was abducted, raped, and murdered by two African-American men on the morning of their wedding day," said Lainie. "The perpetrators forced her to ingest a lye-based drain cleaner after they sexually assaulted her. The D.A. refused to call it a hatecrime because the accused weren't white males, although personally I think gender should have been factored in, even if it was a bit of a stretch. They pleaded out to Man One and got fourteen years apiece. Jackson seems to have become unhinged after that. I have no sympathy for the man. The system held up its end, he had his day in court, and his dissatisfaction with the verdict is no excuse for racist murder. Agent Weinstein, the Rapid Response Team is ready and waiting about six blocks

down. I told them to keep well clear of the area so we don't alarm anyone who shows up. I do suggest that if you intend to keep Operation Searchlight going, I pass the word that the Subaru with our operative in it be allowed to escape in the event of our moving in."

"Okay," said Weinstein.

In the Subaru Kicky said casually, "I suppose Jimmy and Lavonne will have to do the same if someone knocks on their windows?"

"Yes," said Jackson. "Don't worry, Jimmy's into you, not Lavonne."

"Did he say that?" asked Kicky with a gulp.

Jackson's smiles were infrequent, chilly and wintry when they did occur, but Kicky saw one now in the glow of the streetlights. "No, he didn't say anything, but I make it a point to observe the Volunteers under my command. That's one of the reasons I took you with me tonight. This is an even more important mission than usual, and I have to make sure everyone stays professional."

"And, uh, how would Lavonne feel about getting professional with Jimmy? I thought her and Kevin were . . . I'm sorry, I know that's a stupid thing for me to say in circumstances like this. I know this is supposed to be a revolution, not a Harlequin Romance paperback."

"Kevin is Lavonne's brother. Lavonne's man is in prison, doing life without parole for hatecrime," said Jackson gently. "The only chance she has of getting him back, ever, is for the NVA to win. She has elected to remain faithful to him, and we all respect that. Jimmy would never be unprofessional with her, nor would I allow such a situation to arise." A dark van slid by them in the dark and Jackson's phone beeped. He answered it, spoke briefly, and hung up. "That's Oscar," he told Kicky. "He's going in first and then the rest of them." Kicky stirred nervously; she wondered if Oscar would find the hidden bug-bug?

Meanwhile, on the other side of town Hector Lopez, Alfonso Cardozo, Manuel Artiguez, and Benicio Rodriguez had just stolen a BMW and were now cruising along knocking back a case of Coronas and smoking some weed. By the time the other vehicles cruised past and turned the corner, to park in the rear of the storefront, the four cholos were in the process of robbing a liquor store and pistol-whipping the owner. In the Oak Harbor van, the Portland detectives and FBI were listening intently both to the conversation going on between Kicky and Billy Jackson, and then when they heard the door of the shop opening, listening to the bug-bug Kicky had planted. There were several minutes of muffled sound of people moving around and low conversation, inaudible, and then the rear door opened and others came in. "Good evening, sir," came a clear male voice. "How was the trip down?"

"Evening, Oscar," came another man's voice. He sounded older. "Had to dodge some checkpoints coming into Vancouver, but Shane's a damned good driver. We the first to arrive?"

"First and Second Brigade commandants are on their way, sir," said the first voice. "Zack Hatfield may be a bit later since he has further to travel and we have word of some roadblocks he may have to get around."

"My God, we can wipe out their whole Portland command structure in one blow, and get Oscar at the same time!" yelped Farley in excitement.

"We can do better than that," breathed Weinstein, not daring to believe his luck. "I know that voice from old Party internet broadcasts. We can match it with voice printing, but there's no need. I know who it is. That's Red Morehouse!"

"Holy Mother of Pearl, we're getting Red Morehouse on digital!" said Andy McCafferty in shock and awe. "This is incredible! We're recording *Red Morehouse* on digital audio!"

"We'll do better than that! You'll be talking to him in person before the night's out, Detective," said Weinstein. He turned to Lainie. "Sergeant, let's forget about our usual turf wars, okay? Surely you can see that this is an unbelievable opportunity we can't pass up? Morehouse, two NVA brigade commanders and the mysterious Oscar. We can cripple the bastards in Portland and maybe throughout Oregon with one blow! To keep the operation going we'll let the Subaru escape if we can, even if it means losing Jackson, but you have to see that we can't let this slip by us!"

Lainie nodded. She understood. She hadn't planned on it coming down this soon, but she was professional enough to know that Weinstein was right. She spoke into her headphone mike. "Ready Response Team, alert. On your mark, guys. Wait for my order. We're going to drop the hammer on these racist bastards. Here and now, tonight."

"Roger *dat,* essay!" came the voice of the Mexican RRT commander.

Ten blocks away, the stolen BMW containing the four gang-bangers roared through a red light at sixty miles an hour, and a McMinnville PD patrol car saw them and gave chase, siren wailing and lights flashing. The cop called in the chase and other units began converging.

Inside the storefront Oscar was saying, "So this federal goon squad looks to be a sure thing, sir?"

"Yes, rather like the Black and Tans in Ireland, and they'll be just as useless, probably actually counterproductive from the enemy's viewpoint," said Morehouse. "My guess is that they'll be the absolute scum sweepings of every federal military and police agency, and they'll end up committing

atrocities against the white population of the Northwest that will turn the people against the régime in D.C. as none of our propaganda ever could."

"There seems to be some local police activity in the area, ma'am," spoke up a Portland detective who was monitoring the radio.

"That's always been one way in which tyrants lose," chuckled Morehouse. "They become frustrated, and they turn loose goons to intimidate and oppress the local populace, and . . . *what the hell?"* The listening cops heard the crash of a high-speed collision from both their listening devices and also on the street outside of them. A McMinnville police car had pulled into the intersection just past the storefront and the drunken and doped-up Mexican gang-bangers in the BMW plowed right into it. Several police cars with sirens screaming followed close on their heels. The police jumped out of their cars, the Mexicans staggered out of theirs, and everybody whipped out automatic pistols and started blasting at one another, bullets whizzing through the air like electrons. The events of the next few minutes were later accurately recounted to Second Batt XO Gary Bresler by Oscar.

In the Subaru Jackson stared at the carnage, started the engine, roared out of the parking place, hung a left around the corner and pulled up behind the storefront just as the NVA party, weapons at the ready, were evacuating the building. Hill ran over to the Subaru. "What the hell?" he yelled. "I saw Mexicans out the window!"

"I think that's it, sir," Jackson shouted back. "Looks to me like a bunch of cholos breaking bad on the cops, but we need to beat feet!"

"I'll call you!" Oscar replied, and then vanished into the darkness. Jimmy and Lavonne were also able to break contact with the scene and the whole NVA party scattered into the night.

The recriminations over the muffed operation lasted almost two weeks, and delayed the transfer of Operation Searchlight to federal control while Weinstein complained to his superiors in Washington, and Linda Hirsch used every ounce of influence at her command to retain control of Kicky and the whole project. By common consent Kicky was kept out of this inter-agency turmoil; both Portland cops and FBI had sense enough to maintain a united front to her. To her surprise, after one lengthy debriefing conducted jointly by Lainie Martinez and Elliot Weinstein, she wasn't called in again for several weeks, during which she did several runs for the NVA, one involving a fatal bombing of a homosexual bookstore wherein she delivered the explosive device, and yet she was not subsequently interrogated about these tickles. Kicky wondered what was going on, but she dared not ask questions. She did notice when she checked her inaccessible bank balance with her ATM card

that her pay had risen to a thousand dollars per week, for all the good it did her, so she assumed the FBI was winning the battle for possession of her.

Then one morning in early April she got a call to meet Wingo, who picked her up and took her to a split-level suburban home in Milwaukie. Billy Jackson came in as she was sitting in the living room. "Comrade Jodie, since you came in with the Army we've been pretty impressed with your performance," he told her. "We want you to drive for a very special comrade today."

The door opened behind him and a lean and handsome young man with auburn hair and devil-may-care blue eyes stepped into the room. He was wearing a polo shirt and cradling a huge rifle with a telescopic sight under his arm. Kicky knew him before he stepped up to her and shook her hand. She had seen him before. "Comrade Jodie? I've heard some good things about you from Jim and from your company commander here. I'm Jesse Lockhart. I was hoping you might give me a hand today."

At her side, her cell phone vibrated. They heard.

XV

Ragnarok On Flanders Street

Strike, fellows, strike! This is the man I seek!

Troilus and Cressida—Act V, Scene 8

From Sergeant Lainie Martinez's point of view, up until then it was a quiet morning in the Operation Searchlight command center. Elliott Weinstein and the rest of the FBI crew who were in the process of moving in and assuming control of the daily handling and monitoring of Kicky, were absent on a VIP security detail that was giving the government a lot of worry. A major political figure was doing a drop-in, a swift descent into the Pacific Northwest for a photo op, similar to those that D.C. big knobs had been doing for years in Middle East combat zones. It would be a quick in-and-out wherein the VIP would show his face for the assembled media entourage, schmooze some diverse and carefully selected service people and colorful locals, and do a closely chaperoned walkabout in some allegedly terrorist-infested area to show that it wasn't really terrorist-infested. The accompanying huge phalanxes of bodyguards, troops and SWAT gunmen, bomb-sniffing dog teams, armored transport convoys and hovering helicopter gunships were always neatly edited out in the media's broadcast sound bytes.

Feds and local cops in the Northwest hated these visitations; there was too much that could go wrong in a career-smashing way if just one Volunteer got within gunshot range or managed to plant an IED. This one was so secret that no one in the Portland PB even knew who was coming, when or where; all they knew was that all their Rapid Response Teams had been commandeered by the FBI and were on standby and ready to roll

when and where told. Weinstein had been especially jumpy for the past several days, and he had been assiduously monitoring every word picked up on Kicky's body mike for any indication that the NVA knew anything was up. But nothing jumped out at him, and he had been able to give his superiors in Washington an assurance that this time they would catch the spuckies napping.

Lainie and Jarvis had been going over some printed transcripts at one of the tables when suddenly Andy McCafferty, who was monitoring Kicky on the headphones, turned around and yelled one word: *"Lockhart!"*

"Shit!" hissed Lainie between her teeth. "You're sure, Andy?"

"Affirmative!" replied McCafferty.

"Well, I guess that means we're done with this gig," said Jarvis philosophically. "Had to happen sooner or later."

"Not necessarily," said Lainie with determination. "There may be some way that we can take down Lockhart and still maintain her cover!"

"But you know you gonna have to call de Chief?" queried Jarvis.

"Yes, I know!" she snapped back angrily.

"Yeah, I know who you are," said Kicky back in Milwaukie, her heart in her throat as she stood up to shake Lockhart's hand. He was cool and calm, wearing Chinos and a polo shirt, smiling at her. Kicky understood that within a short time he would be dead, and she would be responsible for his betrayal. It was all she could do not to reach up and touch the small, pellet-sized bump in the interior of her left bicep just below her armpit, not to claw at it. "I saw you once in a place called Jupiter's Den. Plus I see you on the news at least once a week. It's, uh, an honor to meet you, sir."

"Don't call me sir. I'm not an officer, just a Volunteer like yourself, troop," replied Cat-Eyes with an easy laugh. "You can call me Cat. Everybody else does."

"What's that weapon you're carrying?" asked Kicky in curiosity. "It looks like something out of Star Wars."

"Barrett M82, .50-caliber rifle," Lockhart told her. "I usually pack an M-21 rifle, which is a lot lighter, but this is going to be a complicated shot today, and I'm going to need a lot more range and striking power."

"We've got a really special run today, Jodie," explained Wingo. "Three vehicles, ten Volunteers in the attack group, and more will be in the area to give us support and run interference if necessary. We called you because we need a boy-girl team for front seat visibility in the main vehicle, with Cat here. This is something that just came up within the past twenty-four hours, and we had to slap together a plan pretty quick."

"Looks like this secret VIP of Elliott's ain't so damned secret no more," commented Jarvis back in the ops room.

Lainie was on the phone with Chief Hirsch. "Yes, ma'am, it's confirmed. Looks like they're going after our VIP visitor."

"You know what I told you," snarled Hirsch. "We move in and take that racist motherfucker down *now!"*

"Yes, ma'am. Should we notify Special Agent Weinstein?"

"Negative on Weinstein!" yelled Hirsch. "He's not grabbing this from me as well as the *shiksa.* The Cat bastard is mine! I'm going to pull two RRTs for you, and if Weinstein asks any questions, you tell him nothing! And you hold up on leaving the Center in pursuit until I can get my flak jacket and check out a weapon for myself! I'm coming with you!"

Lainie hung up. "Weinstein's out, and the Chief is coming with us," she told Jarvis.

"Oh, for—well dat's just fuckin' wonderful!" said Jarvis in disgust. "Now alongside havin' these crackers shootin' at us, we got to worry about watchin' de Chief's wide ass!"

Back in Milwaukie, Wingo handed Kicky a blue steel .38 snub revolver with a speed loader of six extra rounds. "This is just pro forma. You shouldn't have to do any shooting, just concentrate on your driving," he said as he took her out into the large suburban garage. There was a large maroon SUV parked inside. "Here's your wheels for this tickle."

"Cadillac Escalade!" said Kicky approvingly. "The Army really has some cool rides."

"This one's a custom job our quartermaster made up, just for special missions like this one, when the lads and lassies really want to ride first class. Armor plated doors and body, special souped up engine, even a nitro injector if we need to outrun somebody. Hell on gas mileage, but long on security." Wingo looked at his watch. "We need to roll. We're headed downtown, and it's a long drive. We need to be in place by noon, which means a lot of traffic, lunch hour rush and also more congestion due to this special event. It's in Waterfront Park. The target will be there. We think. We hope." He opened the rear of the SUV; the back seats had been folded down. He took out an AK-47 with a folded-up stock and slapped in a double magazine, two banana clips taped together in reverse, give him immediate access to the second magazine. Over his shoulder Wingo slung a pouch with several extra magazines, and Kicky noted several hand grenades on his belt.

"Going in loaded for bear today, are we?" commented Kicky.

"Big game," replied Wingo with a nod. The back seats of the Escalade were folded down, and Lockhart got into the back and stretched out, laying the long .50-caliber sniper's weapon beside him. "We ride up front, Cat in the back, concealed. We'll pick up the other two vehicles along the way. Here, wear these," he said, handing her a blue Sonics baseball cap and a pair of wrap-around sunglasses. "You need a bit of disguise for this one, in case anyone remembers seeing you behind the wheel. Also, here's a shirt for when we have to beat feet. Don't put it on yet. That tank top's okay going in, it's a nice spring day and people expect casual dress, but later on you'll want something to cover your tats while we do a fade." Wingo himself donned a black cowboy hat and amber shades of his own. "You'd be amazed what headgear and dark eyewear does to break recognizable profile and prevent casual recognition."

"Now if only the both of us could only do something about these damned tattoos," remarked Kicky dryly.

"Errors of a misspent youth," said Wingo with a shrug. "We do advise kids we bring in not to get any. Let's roll. I'll fill you in on the way. Take McLoughlin into town and then cross over the river on Powell Boulevard. We need to go into the Pearl, but approach from the west. We'll pick up our two escorts somewhere over the river on Powell."

On the way into Portland, Cat took over the briefing. "With any luck, Jodie, this is going to be a historic hit," he told her from where he lay on the carpeted rear bed of the SUV. "Portland is getting a visit by a major suit from Washington, D.C. The Vice President of the United States in person, no less."

"And you're going to take him out?" whispered Kicky, stunned. "Jesus!"

"If I can. The problem is that Oscar's people just picked up yesterday on the fact that it's even happening at all. We're light on details, but we know that he's making a surprise descent on the Earth Day festivities in Waterfront Park. Going to give a little pep talk about the glories of saving the environment and the wonders of diversity and multiculturalism, all the colors of the rainbow, the usual crap. I've never understood just why the hell white people should save the environment just so billions of mud people with skins the color of shit can befoul it. One unique thing about white people, we're the only ones who actually seem to *give* a damn about the environment. Anyway, we know the Vice President is going to be coming in by chopper direct from the airport, and if our information is correct, he should be on the ground in Waterfront Park sometime around noon-ish, but that's about all we know. No more details. This one is going to be pretty much a float, ad-libbed, so

to speak. We're going to have to look for a window of opportunity and I'm going to have to take it in a split second, hence this piece of major ordnance, since I have no idea what kind of distance or angles I'll be dealing with. This baby kills at well over a mile, and I've got her zeroed down to the inch. These armor-piercing BMG rounds can punch through three inches of steel plate. If that snake in $5000 threads shows his head, it's coming off. Literally." Cat chuckled.

It was about this time that Linda Hirsch came lumbering into the operations room like some sweaty behemoth. She was wearing a flak jacket that increased her already impressive bulk, and toting an M-16 that looked tiny and toy-like in her ham-sized fists. A ridiculously tiny Portland Police Bureau baseball cap was perched on top of her round, frizzy head. She looked like a deranged cartoon character. "Chief, we've got a problem. They're going for the VP," reported Lainie grimly.

"You mean the VIP the feds are expecting?" demanded Hirsch.

"No, not the VIP, the VP, V-POTUS, the Vice President of the United States!" said Lainie. "It looks like he's the one dropping in from the sky for his photo op this week to give good cheer and encouragement to all the folks in Portland who are facing up to the terrorist scourge, blah, blah, blah. The Vice President, ma'am! We *have* to notify Special Agent Weinstein and the Secret Service! If we don't, no matter how this goes down, our asses are all going to be grass!"

"Fuck Elliott Weinstein!" screamed Hirsch in a rage. "Portland PB will save the Vice President ourselves, and we'll show up that little *putz* so bad no one in D.C. will say boo to us. What's happening with the *shiksa* and Lockhart?"

"They're headed for the Pearl District," said Lainie. "They're going to connect up with more NVA hitters along the way, and to try to infiltrate the crowd at Earth Day in Waterfront Park, it looks like, then wait for the Vice President to show and take a shot at him. Lockhart has changed his usual weapon, and he's now armed with a .50-caliber Barrett BMG rifle with a scope and armor-piercing ammunition. With a cannon like that, a marksman as skilled as Lockhart can do untold damage in a racially and culturally diverse crowd that doesn't bear thinking about. Never mind what he can do to us if we do get him cornered. If you're determined that we're going to do this alone, we need every officer we can get."

"Elliott will have all our RRTs down there anyway, circling and guarding the area," said Hirsch. "They're already in the area where they need to be. When we know more about where to catch the bastard I'll pull some of them

out. I'll override whatever orders Elliott has given them. What vehicle were you going to take out?"

"The Oak Harbor van is the only one with enough space for the troops and the gear," said Lainie. "It's down in the garage, and it's gassed up."

"Okay, let's roll!" ordered Hirsch.

Out on Powell Boulevard, just over the bridge, a large blue late-model Chevrolet pickup truck slid by Kicky's left. A hand waved out the window. "Okay, that's Thing One and Thing Two," said Wingo. "That's our first escort vehicle." Kicky was on the verge of saying something aloud along the lines of *blue Chevy, got it,* but she didn't. She knew that if she successfully completed this last mission for her handlers this might be it, that if she survived they might let her and Ellie and May go and let them all flee the Northwest into obscurity and some kind of new life. But something was stirring inside her, the beginnings of a deep and powerful self-loathing at what she was doing, at what she had done, and at what she was about to do. A dark green sedan of some kind, she couldn't see the make, also passed them. "That's Oscar and the CO," said Wingo. He pulled open his phone and spoke into it.

"Oscar!" said McCafferty excitedly, listening on headphones as the van rumbled through downtown, circling the Pearl district until the police knew where their quarry was headed. "Sounds like Oscar and Billy Jackson are also involved, in one of the other vehicles!"

"What vehicle?" demanded Hirsch.

"She hasn't said," replied McCafferty.

"What the fuck is the matter with her?" hollered Hirsch. "She must know she's on live?"

"Maybe she can't say," said Lainie. "You know, ma'am, it's not really a good idea for her to be constantly calling out all kinds of information vocally, especially in a critical situation like this. These goons are smart enough to understand what a wire is and how it works, and they'll get suspicious if she starts reeling off a guided tour monologue describing where she is and what she's doing. Don't worry, she'll let us know. She wants to see her little girl again. She'll come through for us."

In the Cadillac Escalade, Wingo closed his phone. "Okay, get onto I-5 North and when the Burnside Street exit comes up, take it," he told Kicky. "Once we're on the interstate, Oscar and Billy will fall in ahead of you and Thing One and Thing Two behind. They're the retrieval vehicle. If any shit starts, or I should say when we start it, they hang back and pick up any of us who have to bail when we're on the wing, provide covering fire, whatever has to be done. Oscar and the CO will scout ahead for us. Once we get into

downtown we're going to cruise the side streets just to the west and southwest overlooking Waterfront Park."

"You said there would be ten Volunteers?" asked Kicky. "Us three and Oscar and the Lieutenant and the two Things is only seven."

"Ace is already in town cruising around on a motorbike checking out the scene, and we've got a second boy-girl team coming into the area by MAX, mixing in with the Earth Day crowd, letting us know what's going on in there on the ground," said Wingo. "Couple of new kids, Tom and Becky. Normally we wouldn't use newbs on something like this, but we were caught on the hop, and these two have a lot of spirit. They'll hold up their end, no worries."

"I'm always on the lookout for good firing positions around town, and there's a couple of places I want to check out and see if they're still usable for today," explained Cat-Eyes from where he reclined in the back. "There's several places that will give me a pretty commanding view of the whole park, if we can get parked and stay there. Then when the time comes I can pop out the door and up onto the roof of this vehicle, or wherever it looks best, take as many shots as I can, and then we beat feet. We know the Vice President is coming in by helicopter to avoid all those narrow little streets in the Pearl and the open expanse of road along the river. The Secret Service boys are no fools, and they don't want to risk an ambush in a contained field of fire where they could get hit from several directions at once. I want to be in position when the copter comes down, and ready to pull the trigger the minute he steps clear of the doorway out onto the ground. With this weapon, after I tag the Veep I might even be able to take out the whole copter, smash a rotor gear housing or shoot the pilot through the port."

"There's one place in particular, Cat, you said?" prompted Wingo.

"Yes, I'll point it out to you. It's an alleyway, and once we see if it's clear, I'll have to ask Jodie to back in, but at the end of the alley there's a brick wall and a dumpster. If I can get up on top of that dumpster and rest the bipod on the wall, and get sighted in, I'll be able to nail anything that moves in Waterfront Park!" said Cat enthusiastically.

Kicky followed the dark sedan, which she could now see was a Pontiac Grand Prix, and she got off at the Burnside Street exit as per instruction. "We're getting into downtown," said Wingo. "This is going to get a little tricky now, Jodie. Just like the Secret Service, we don't want to get boxed in here. Rather than have us all bunched up, one behind the other, as we move through this congested area, we're going to take a leaf out of the enemy's urban patrolling manual and we're going to run parallel to one another, with a block between us. That way they can't catch all of us in one kill zone by

blocking off both ends of one of these short little Portland streets. I know you've never done this maneuver before, but Billy and the Things have, so just follow my directions."

"Got it," said Kicky calmly. *Billy said you were into me,* she thought to herself. *Now I am going to betray you to your death, so I guess I'll never know. I'm a piece of shit. On the day I was born God wiped snot off His nose, and it was me.* She didn't show it in her face or in her voice, but tension and shame and guilt were building up like rising waters inside her, uncontrollable and soon to overflow.

"Where are they now?" asked Linda Hirsch in the Oak Harbor van.

"Coming up 29th Avenue toward Yeon," said McCafferty. "If they're going to head back toward Waterfront Park, they're swinging wide around."

Hirsch got on her own command phone. "Captain Robinson, this is Chief Hirsch. This is a priority direct order to you, and you are to disregard any contradictory orders you get from federal law enforcement. You will detach two Rapid Response Teams, your own Delta One Team and Delta Two as well, from whatever that *schmendrick* Elliott Weinstein has you doing, and you will tell them to prepare for a major terrorist contact. Be advised that there are three vehicles containing terrorist gunmen coming into the downtown area, including the Jack of Diamonds in a Cadillac Escalade of unknown color, and two other vehicles description unknown. There are other terrorists in the area on foot, including at least two in the crowd at Waterfront Park and one on a motorbike who could be anywhere. Delta Two Team will go out Front Street, cross over Highway 30 and wait at the corner of Vaughn and Vista Street for my command to move in. Delta One will meet me at the intersection of Twelfth Avenue and Flanders Street, and both teams will move to intercept from those positions once we can extrapolate the terrorists' route. Do you copy all that?"

Linda Hirsch was unaware that Special Agent Elliott Weinstein was standing right beside police Captain Isaiah Robinson just outside the communications van in Waterfront Park, and had overheard her orders to the RRT commander. About to blow a gasket, Weinstein snatched the radio microphone from Robinson's shiny black hand and bellowed into it, "Negative, negative, God dammit, Linda, how the hell *dare* you try your damned Lone Ranger act with V-POTUS coming into the area? You know who they're after, and by God you are going to do this by the book and in conjunction with federal authority, you carpet-munching *shlumpf!*"

"Captain Robinson, did you copy all that?" repeated Hirsch, ignoring the enraged and spluttering Weinstein.

Robinson, a thick and muscle-bound black man in full SWAT gear with a pencil moustache, grabbed the mike back and said, "Copy, Chief. Delta One and Two are on their way." He slapped the microphone back into the cradle. "We gonna go bust a cap on some racist ass, Jew boy," he told Weinstein. "You want to bring yo' federal niggaz along fo' de ride, fine wid me, but you stay outta our way and let us show you how it's done." He turned away and started shouting orders to his crew. Weinstein stared after him and then bellowed for Farley.

Behind him, a bored cameraman from CNN saw him go running off. "Where the hell are the FBI and those cops going?" he wondered out loud to his field reporter, a neat and chic blonde Barbie doll named Cassie Ransome.

"No idea, but I'm tired of waiting here for something to happen," said Cassie. "These FBI SOBs get us out here and they won't even tell us what for. Top secret my ass! Nothing's going on here. Come on, let's follow them and see if we can get some footage of whatever it is!" The CNN crew jumped in their white van with a satellite dish on top, and took off into town in pursuit of the police vehicles.

"Get us to the intersection of Twelfth and Flanders!" Hirsch called up front to the driver of the van, Detective Luis Hermosa.

Back in the Escalade, Wingo said, "Okay, Jodie, hang a right on Fourteenth Avenue up here." He popped open his phone and dialed. "Okay, boss, from now on we're on conference. Ace, you there?"

"I'm here," he heard Ace say.

"Where you at?" asked Wingo. "No, don't tell me, I still don't like the idea of doing this in the clear. Just tell me, anything unusual going on?"

"They got what looks like all the Running Rats in the city down there in the zone, man, but up here looks clear so far," said Ace's voice. "No blocked-off streets or anything. I guess they plan on their little event being a surprise."

"Well, we'll see if we can give 'em a surprise of our own. Tom, you and Becky where you should be?"

"Yeah," came Eric Sellars' voice. Wingo could hear the sound of a crowd and music in the background. "Wall to wall goons down here, sniffer dogs and metal detectors all over, so I guess it's a good thing my lady and me are law-abiding citizens and we're not carrying anything we shouldn't be, just down here enjoying all the lovely diversity and grooving on Mother Earth. Wait a minute, looks like some of the bad boys are on the move. Two of those armored car things and some cop cars, leaving the area, no idea where to."

"Mmm, don't like the sound of that, but hang loose and stay on the horn," said Wingo. "Keep your voice down. You don't want Little Miss Organic and Moon Unit overhearing and diming you out. You copy that, boss?"

"Got it," came Billy Jackson's voice. "Ace, see if you can pick up those wandering rodents and tail them, wherever they're going."

"Roger that," said Ace.

"Damn!" muttered Jamal Jarvis as the van pulled over to the curb on Flanders Street and parked just past the Twelfth Avenue intersection. "I sure wish to hell we could hear more than one side of that conversation!"

"Hey, Lieutenant, two APCs, about five blue and whites and an FBI unmarked car following 'em just went tearing past me on Third Avenue," said Ace. "CNN news van following the cops. The feebs had their tinted windows down, and I saw the driver. I'm pretty sure it's that kike Weinstein. They're going somewhere fast. I'm on 'em."

"Damn!" said Jackson. "I'm not going to abort yet, until we know if we've been made. They may be just chasing their tails. But we split now, and we proceed with caution. We're turning right on Glisan. Thumper, you turn right on Flanders and you two thingummies on Everett. Proceed with caution. You guys see anything that looks hinky, you holler."

"Copy," said one of the Things.

"You got it, boss," said Jimmy Wingo. "Jodie, turn right up here on Flanders. Take it slow, watch the stop signs and lights, nice and easy like we're just out looking for somewhere to grab lunch."

"What's up, Jim?" asked Cat from the back.

"We got some Running Rats loose," said Wingo. "Billy wants us to keep our eyes open, but he won't abort."

"Damned right!" growled Cat. "I want to get that asshole's suit bloody."

I can't do this! Kicky's brain shouted at her. *I will become an evil person if I do this. I won't deserve Ellie if I get her back like this. The price is too high. If I do this, someday she will know that I saved her at the price of my own soul and with the blood of brave men, and she will despise me for it.*

"They're coming right to us!" said Lainie Martinez in the police truck.

"Delta One, where the hell are you?" Linda Hirsch screeched into the radio. "They're coming right at us!"

"ETA one minute, Chief," radioed back Robinson.

"We can't let them get past us!" shrieked Hirsch hysterically, opening the back of the moving van and jumping out. "We've got to stop them here!"

"Chief, it's lunch hour, the streets are full of people!" called Lainie desperately. The neighborhood was full of trendy little boutiques, fern bars, espresso stands and health food stores. A number of passers-by saw Chief Hirsch jumping up and down on the sidewalk, shouting and waving her M-16 around like a switch, and they started moving away rapidly. *"Dios mio,*

the goots will see her running around out there like a chicken with her head cut off, and they'll bolt!" cried Lainie in despair.

Andy McCafferty jumped out of the van. "I'm not wearing uniform," he told Lainie. "Give me that handset! Chief, please get back behind the van and wait for Delta One, so they don't see you. I'll go down the block and I'll wait until I see the Escalade coming, and when I get visual contact I'll call you. They mustn't see you!"

"Go!" ordered Hirsch with a wave of her hand. McCafferty stuffed the radio in his back pocket, pulled out his shirttail to cover his gun, and then ran down toward 13th Avenue.

"Dammit, Andy, you don't have any body armor!" shouted Lainie. "Hermosa, you got your Second Chance on? Cover McCafferty! Stay behind him but keep an eye on him." The Mexican detective, wearing sunglasses and a track suit, jumped out of the driver's seat of the van and followed McCafferty down the street. "Where the hell is Delta One?"

Kicky slid through the 13th Avenue intersection, and through the open driver's side window of the Escalade she saw Andy McCafferty standing on the left-hand side of the street, below the white-trimmed bay window of some gentrified red brick yuppie loft apartments. He stared at her, his face carefully blank, and he reached into his back pocket and pulled out a radio.

No, she thought suddenly, with pure and overpowering clarity. *No.*

There was an opening in the oncoming traffic in the left lane, and without any further thought, Kicky turned the wheel and hit the gas. The Escalade roared across the street, slammed into McCafferty, and crushed him like a bug against the apartment wall. He died instantly.

"What the fuck?" exclaimed Cat-Eyes Lockhart from where he reclined in the back seat.

"What the hell are you doing?" Wingo shouted at Kicky, stunned.

"COPS!" screamed Kicky at the top of her voice. *"Cops! It's a trap! They're all around us!"* She reversed the Escalade, hit the gas and roared back into the street tailgate first. Wingo looked up to see the armored personnel carrier for Delta One team turning into Flanders Street from Twelfth Avenue.

"Shit!" he shouted. He yelled into the phone, "They're onto us! Ambush on Flanders! Beat feet! Kicky, go down 13th and head back toward the interstate, not toward the river, so we can try to lose them! Cat, heads up, see if you can spot any copters overhead!"

"Everett's clear!" called out one of the Things. "I don't see anything. Can you get up on Everett? We'll block for you if they pursue."

Kicky peeled into the intersection in reverse, trying to turn the vehicle around, but she was against the light, and she slammed into a brown UPS delivery truck coming down 13th Avenue, and the heavy armored SUV knocked the top-heavy delivery vehicle over onto its side. The street was full of screaming people, and 13th Avenue was now blocked going both ways by lunch-hour traffic, cars that were simply abandoned and left standing by their drivers who jumped out and fled for cover. The overturned UPS truck blocked the way back down Flanders as well. Behind the brown obstacle one of the vehicles stuck in the jam was the white CNN van. They had lost the police convoy at a light and had been driving around trying to find them again. True to their craft, Cassie Ransome, her cameraman and her driver jumped out and ran toward the intersection where the noise was coming from. The three Volunteers were boxed in, and Wingo could see several heavily armed SWAT team members lumbering out of the APC. From up the street came the first rattle of M-16 fire, bullets slamming into the bulletproof glass of the windshield. "Cat, Kicky, bail! We have to get out of here on foot!" shouted Wingo, leaping out of the passenger side of the Escalade. He snapped out the folding stock on his Kalashnikov, covered behind the door of the SUV, took aim and began firing short, controlled bursts. "I'll keep their heads down!" he yelled. "You guys beat feet!"

"I'll do more than keep their damned heads down, I'll blow a few of 'em off!" Cat-Eyes Lockhart yelled back. He was out the back of the SUV and he swung himself up onto the roof of the vehicle in one smooth motion, snapped down the bipod on the .50-caliber Barrett, and sighted in. He pulled the trigger, flame vomited from the Barrett's muzzle, a mighty roar echoed from the buildings, and up the street a SWAT man went flying back through the air, his feet leaving the ground. Lainie Martinez and Jamal Jarvis had struggled into their body armor and were now out on the street. Lainie kneeled and fired her M-16 and Jarvis stood over her, blazing away with his. Chief Linda Hirsch was jumping up and down for a bit, then leveling her Armalite and firing a wild burst, then jumping up and down some more while she screamed dementedly in Yiddish. The street sounded like the inside of a garbage can or a metal locker that was being beaten with sticks by a troop of demented monkeys.

Kicky pulled out the .38 snub she had been given and was about to exit the passenger side door of the Escalade, when Detective Luis Hermosa leaped at her through the open window of the SUV, screaming obscenities in Spanish, with his Glock in his right hand, trying to shoot Wingo with the pistol while grabbing at Kicky with his left hand. Kicky jammed the .38

into him and fired, but the Mexican's Second Chance vest stopped the slug even at point blank range, although the impact made him scream with rage and pain. *"Puta blanca!"* he roared, clubbing at her with the barrel of the automatic, knocking the baseball cap off her head and the sunglasses off her face, holding her hair bunched in his fist and trying to bang her head against the steering wheel. He fired the Glock several times wildly into the seat and through the opposite window, while Kicky screamed and tried to get the .38 up high enough to shoot again, but the steering wheel was in the way and she couldn't think coherently.

Special Agent Elliott Weinstein pulled his unmarked FBI car up behind the Rapid Response Team's APC, parked in the 12th Avenue intersection, and started honking the horn. Farley had finally managed to persuade him that while driving into an NVA firefight it was not a good idea to have the car window with its bulletproofed tinted glass rolled down, but now Weinstein rolled the window down again and leaned out yelling, "Goddamit, what's going on! Get out of my way! Where is that bitch Linda Hirsch? Farley, can you see anything?"

"Uh, no," said Farley, who heard the gunshots and decided he was remarkably uncurious as to what was going on around the corner on Flanders Street. *Damn, I need a drink!* he thought, with a longing touch of his jacket where he kept the little flask he dared not bring out in Weinstein's presence.

"Well, get the hell out and see!" raved Weinstein.

"Uh, didn't Chief Hirsch say something about a terrorist on a motorbike?" asked Farley.

"Yeah. So?" demanded Weinstein. Farley pointed. Weinstein turned to his left and saw a Suzuki bike with a man in leather and denim on it, not two feet away from his face, wearing a closed helmet with the visor down.

"Package for you," said the rider. "Sign here, please." He reached over and flipped a hand grenade into the car; both FBI men could see the spoon pop and twirl away as the grenade rolled under the seat. The biker whirled and tore off back down the sidewalk, bypassing the backed-up traffic. Weinstein screamed like a woman and Farley bellowed mindlessly as both men clawed at their Bureau-mandated seatbelts, trying to get them unbuckled, but the grenade went off with a *whump,* the car leaped several feet into the air as the armored chassis neatly contained the force of the explosion mostly inside it, and then settled down into a smoldering piece of junk with crimson goo smeared all over the windshield and the interior. Elliott Weinstein's head was later found in the gutter across the street.

Back at the Escalade, Kicky was still wrestling frantically with the infuriated Hermosa, but finally she managed to jam the muzzle of the .38 between his frothing lips and clattering teeth and pull the trigger with a kind of mushy sound. Even with all the noise, she could still hear the splatter of his brains and blood as they hit the sidewalk. Hermosa's Glock dropped into her lap, and he slid down out of sight to the ground beside the driver's door. Kicky McGee never remembered thereafter what prompted her to do what she then did; it just seemed to happen, with no coherent thought on her part. Without hesitating for a fraction of a second, she leaned her left arm against the side of the driver's door, jammed the muzzle of the revolver into the flesh beneath her left armpit and pinned down the small metallic lump, the monitoring and tracking device that the FBI had inserted into her body. Then she pulled the trigger, smashing the device into tiny fragments and blowing several ounces of muscle tissue out of her own arm.

Wingo was concentrating on the enemy in front of him and didn't see what she had done, and Lockhart was on the roof. Kicky had read somewhere that gunshot wounds were numb at first, and then only started hurting later on. Not this one. Her arm felt like it had been ripped off at the socket, she screamed in agony, and from this point on, she was pretty much insane. She dropped the .38 and she floundered and flopped out the passenger side door, howling, grabbing up the Mexican detective's Glock pistol in her right hand along the way. She rolled out onto the street and heaved to her feet. The armored door of the SUV gave her some protection from the bullets that slapped all around her, into the door and into the asphalt.

Wingo had ducked around behind the Escalade for more cover while he slapped another magazine into the Kalashnikov, another of the taped-together clips. He slung the weapon, pulled a hand grenade off his belt, and then winding up like a baseball pitcher he hurled it up the street where it bounced off several car roofs and rolled down into the street, the blast hurling shrapnel and shaking the street. Then he did the same with a second grenade. The police all hit the ground or dove for cover. Wingo then recovered the Kalashnikov and started firing again. On the roof, Cat Lockhart also slammed a new magazine into the .50-cal rifle, rose calmly into a kneeling position oblivious to the police bullets whizzing around him like electrons, and resumed firing. Just then the CNN crew, who had been cowering behind the overturned UPS truck, decided that it was time to do their jobs.

They ran along Flanders Street and turned right into 13th Avenue, the cameraman braced his camera on top of a parked car, and Cassie Ransome started shouting a disjointed narration into her microphone, trying to explain

to the satellite-uplinked studio and worldwide audience what was happening in front of her on a Portland street. The next twenty seconds of film footage eventually won Cassie and the cameraman Pulitzer Prizes. The video clip was shown all over the world for weeks, it became an integral part of the visual history of the Northwest War of Independence, and is still shown today in virtually every documentary made on the subject. It requires a bit of explanation, though.

By this point in time, Cat Lockhart had already shot and killed four Rapid Response Team officers, including the negro Captain Isaiah Robinson, and what with the rain of .50-caliber slugs and Wingo's hand grenades, the rest were taking the better part of valor and covering down behind parked cars and behind any available cover, including Lainie Martinez and Jamal Jarvis. Linda Hirsch was hiding behind the Oak Harbor moving van, but every few seconds she would lean out, gibber, fire a one-handed burst with her M-16 that she held like a pistol, and vanish again. Lockhart had no idea who the fat babbling target was, but it annoyed him, and he was determined to hit it. The shot was hard, though, since from the intersection Flanders Street sloped slightly upward and to the right, with a lot of car rooftops and trees and other junk in the way. The pale babbling proboscidian blob never showed itself in exactly the same place twice, and then only for a second or two. The rest of the cops were firing blindly, raising their M-16s up over their heads, popping a few rounds on semi or a brief burst on full auto in the general direction of the intersection, not aiming and not hitting anything.

Kicky McGee was dazed, disoriented, and by now she was completely out of her mind with pain from her wound and from incandescent rage at the destruction of her whole life by these people. She staggered up the street, screaming wordlessly in a hoarse voice, her left arm and side soaked with bright red blood, her honey blonde hair streaming behind her. In her mindless rage she held the Glock pistol at arm's length in her right hand, firing it blindly in the general direction of her tormentors, hitting nothing. She got in Wingo's way, and he had to run out from behind the Escalade several feet, He hurled his last grenade, then raised his weapon to his shoulder and fired it in sustained bursts to try and cover Kicky, all the while shouting at her to get down, to get under cover. On the roof of the Escalade, Lockhart knelt and blasted away at Linda Hirsch and anything else he could get in his scope that looked like a cop. The wild shots from the police peppered everything, popping into car windows and the street and the walls. Lockhart ignored them and kept on calmly aiming and firing.

It was a confused scene, and actually pretty pointless and ineffectual. Nobody was hitting anything, and no one besides Lockhart was even aiming.

But it *looked* cool as hell on TV, and in America, that was what mattered. By sheer fortuitous accident, what the CNN camera caught for twenty seconds—and twenty seconds is a long sound byte on TV news—was a perfectly blocked shot of stunning dramatic impact. In the far center right of the screen Kicky seemed to stalk up the street. She was firing blindly, howling like an animal in an unthinking spasm of rage and madness, but what the world saw was a wounded Valkyrie screaming her war cry and charging the enemy machine guns that splattered in round strikes all around her. In the lower left, Jimmy Wingo hurled his grenade and then stood like a rock, Errol Flynn and Audie Murphy in beard and denim vest and shades, tattoos on bulging arm muscles clearly visible, black cowboy hat tilted back on his head, his Kalashnikov at shoulder height and hammering away, sending a gleaming shower of brass cartridge cases in a high fountain, reversing and reloading the taped magazines in one smooth and swift motion. High in the top center, Cat Lockhart knelt with his mighty rifle, flame spewing from the muzzle with each shot like a thunderbolt from Asgard.

For possibly ten of the twenty seconds this tableau held. Then there was the sound of an engine roaring and the camera swung left just as the blue Chevy pickup containing Thing One and Thing Two flew by, driving on the sidewalk, and screeched to a halt in the intersection. The shaggy Thing One jumped out of the passenger side, raised a Heckler and Koch submachine gun to his shoulder, and started hammering away in a second rattling fountain of empty cartridge cases. Cat Lockhart fired one last .50-caliber round, the one that smashed Linda Hirsch's skull to fragments like an exploding melon, and then he whirled and made a spectacular Zorro-like leap from the back of the Escalade into the flatbed of the Chevrolet. Jimmy Wingo ran forward, grabbed the berserk Kicky around her waist and lifted her over his shoulder, then ran back and tossed her into the back of the pickup like a sack of potatoes, before jumping in himself. Thing One leaped back into the cab and the blue Chevy then roared off down Flanders Street on the sidewalk, knocking over sandwich-board shop signs and sending an espresso cart flying. At 14th Avenue they were joined by the Grand Prix, and both vehicles floored it out along Highway 30.

There was no pursuit. Almost all the mobile police in the city were surrounding Waterfront Park and no one was available or willing to organize any response. No one had even bothered to radio Delta Two team or any other police and tell them what was going on. From the time Kicky McGee slammed the Escalade into Andy McCafferty until the time the blue Chevy pickup departed the area with all five Volunteers, exactly seventy seconds elapsed.

* * *

Jimmy wrapped his bandana around Kicky's arm in the back of a truck and managed to stanch the blood flow. They stopped briefly at a safe house along the way, where Jimmy and Jackson applied a field dressing and alcohol to Kicky's arm, and changed vehicles. "I've called Zack," Jackson told them. "He'll meet us up the road here, and he's bringing Doctor Feelgood." Oscar and Jackson took a Nissan while Jimmy, Kicky, and Lockhart piled into another SUV. Kicky was hurting and in shock, although not as much as she pretended to be. She simply decided it was better not to speak, not to think. She had no idea what was going to happen now, and she forced herself to simply blank out her mind. Jimmy held her close and kept the bandage tight. "Don't worry, it's not that bad," he assured her. "Doctor Feelgood will fix you right up. He was one of the best corpsmen in Iraq."

Ninety minutes later they reached a safe house in Rainier, on the edge of Third Battalion's turf, and they were met by Zack Hatfield and a team of his men, including a middle-aged man with a kindly face and a medical bag. "Bring her in and just lay her down on the sofa," he said, gesturing to Kicky. He looked over her injury. "Damn, you've got powder burns there. The son of a bitch must have been right on top of you," he remarked.

"He was," said Wingo. "Damned Mexican cop or fed of some kind, plainclothes. I saw him attacking her through the car window, but I couldn't fire for fear of hitting her. He was trying to strangle her or something."

"We were so close and it was so tight neither of us could aim our guns," said Kicky. "He just kept shooting. I finally stuck mine in his mouth and blew his fucking head off."

"Good for you. You're lucky," Dr. Feelgood told her. "Missed the artery and the bone, and Jim here seems to have done a good job of stopping the bleeding. You'll have a hole in your arm there with scar tissue, but you'll be okay." He started taking supplies out of his bag.

Hatfield and Lockhart shook hands. "Good to see you again, Cat," said Hatfield, who was wearing his trademark feathered hat, duster, and carrying the Winchester .30-30 rifle he had made his signature weapon. "Jesus, you were a wanted man before, but after this fracas today you're going to be hotter than molten lava! What the hell happened? Somebody said you were trying for the Vice President?"

"Yeah, we were, but the fuckers ambushed us and we had to bop our way out," said Lockhart in disgust.

"So I saw."

"You saw?" asked Cat in surprise.

"You were on live, my man. You're all over CNN and every other damned channel. I got to tell you, if that little gun bunny in there ever wants a transfer, you send her down our way," he said admiringly, nodding into the living room toward Kicky. "Looked like she was ready to take on the whole Portland police force single-handedly."

Wayne Hill came over to them. "I just spoke to the brigade commander," he told them. "He's on his way. He wants a post-mortem."

When Tommy Coyle arrived several hours later he spoke to Lockhart, Hill, and Wingo first. He wasted no time. "Talk to me, Cat," he said. "What the hell happened out there?"

"They ambushed us on Flanders Street, sir," said Lockhart. "The whole thing stinks. I think they knew we were coming."

"They knew, all right," said Hill grimly. He turned to Coyle. "With all due respect, sir, do you believe me now?"

"I guess I have to, Lieutenant," said Coyle heavily, his voice angry and bitter. "God *damn!* A rat in my command!"

"A rat?" said Wingo incredulously. "Bullshit!"

"There have been other incidents, Jim, and I've put together a very ugly pattern," Hill told him. "I can't see any other possibility, especially after today."

"Who do you suspect?" demanded Wingo roughly, angrily.

"Not you, don't worry. Not anybody who was on the tickle, actually. No one had the requisite knowledge beforehand. That's what I can't understand."

"Hell, the Jodie girl was last minute, and she didn't even know where she was going or what was going down until I explained it to her in the car on the way in," said Lockhart.

"Plus we all passed our bug scans," added Wingo.

"Yes," agreed Hill. "That's not definitive proof nowadays, since they've got all kinds of bugging gear and GPIs and whatnot that can pass a hand scanner, but on the other hand, I can't see an informer being stupid enough to go into such a trap himself along with the people he was betraying and risk getting himself killed, nor can I see a traitor conducting himself with the courage and gallantry that all of you displayed today. Who knew, what did they know, and when did they know it? I admit, for the moment, I'm stumped. But we've got a mouse in the house, gentlemen, make no mistake, and I'll get him."

"Cat, run the whole thing down for me from your viewpoint, from the beginning," ordered Coyle. Lockhart did so. Coyle rubbed his chin in thought.

Wingo went into the living room where Kicky sat on the couch, her arm bandaged, staring at the twentieth replay of the gun battle on Flanders Street on the television screen. She shook her head in wonder. "I can't believe I did that," she said to Jimmy. "I don't even remember doing it."

"You are the daughter of heroes," said Jimmy. "You just needed a little reminding, and you answered the call. The Commandant is here, and he wants to speak with you."

The big block-like figure of Coyle entered the room. Kicky had never seen him before, and she struggled to get to her feet with one arm. "No, please don't get up, comrade," Coyle said in a gentle voice. "I understand that it's thanks to you that we're not burying any of our own today. Please accept my congratulations and my admiration for a brave and effective action, all of you. It wasn't quite the splash we had hoped for, true, but the Vice President canceled his visit and ran back to Washington D.C. with his tail tucked between his legs, and you guys racked up an impressive body count, including a couple of senior FBI agents and the Chief of Police herself. Not to mention your photogenic little piece of street theater there." He nodded to the TV. "Damned good propaganda. Well done, all of you."

"Thank you, sir," said Kicky, still trying to accustom herself to the fact that for the first time she could speak to these men without being overheard by their enemies, that she was clean in every sense of the word.

"May I ask how you spotted the police ambush?" inquired the Commandant.

"Well, I knew that cop," said Kicky carefully. "His name is—was, McCafferty. He was a detective. I used to, uh, have a lot of run-ins with the cops, and I did some time in prison."

"Yes, ma'am, I know," said Coyle, politely refraining from mentioning just how much he knew, although Kicky was sure he knew everything.

"He was one of the bastards who sent me to Coffee Creek because of Lenny Gillis' fencing stolen stuff," said Kicky, knowing that with McCafferty dead her story would be difficult to confirm or deny. "Not the main one, but I knew him from when I was arrested that time. I saw him as we were driving down Flanders Street and he pulled a radio out of his pocket, and I—well, I can't really explain this, sir, but I just *knew.* That's all I can tell you. I just knew."

"Ma'am, I spent a lot of time in Iraq, too much time," said Coyle with a sigh. "So did Comrade Lockhart here. Some of us got to the point where we could smell the hadjis when they were around. It's a necessary combat survival instinct. Believe me, I understand."

"I just did the first thing that came to my mind," she ended lamely. "I ran his ass down."

Coyle held out his hand and shook Kicky's good hand. "We don't have any medals yet to give comrades like you, Volunteer McGee, so all I can do is say thank you. Someday a grateful free white nation will offer you more. We'll let you get some rest now." The men left her, but before he went out of the room Jimmy Wingo leaned over and kissed her gently on the lips.

When they had gone, she stared into the silently flickering television. Finally the vision of her daughter, that she could suppress no longer rose before her eyes. Kicky wondered if Ellie would ever see the film of that morning on Flanders Street, if she would ever know the identity of the bloody woman firing the pistol, and if that would be her lifelong image of her mother.

She closed her tear-filled eyes. *Goodbye, my little one,* she thought, suffering in terrible silence. *You are young, and you will forget me, but never will I forget you. Whatever new life they give you, be well. Be happy. Try to forgive me some day. Goodbye, my darling child.*

XVI

Things That Go Boom In The Night

Things without all remedy
Should be without regard.
What's done is done.

Macbeth—Act III, Scene 2

Zack Hatfield got his wish; Kicky McGee was assigned to Third Battalion at least temporarily, since it was felt to be a good idea to get her, Cat Lockhart, and Jimmy Wingo out of Portland for a while. She got to see a lot of the wild countryside up and down the North Coast, which was a new experience for a city girl like her, and to her surprise she began to feel a long dormant connection with nature and the outdoors that she had never experienced before. She made up her mind that if somehow the nightmare ever resolved itself and she was ever again free to do what she wanted, she would leave Portland, and come here to the rockbound coast and the deep, dark forests that rose above the sea.

Lockhart was sent on what amounted to a road tour. The NVA moved him into areas as far north as Bellingham, Washington, as far east as Montana, and on one occasion he did a memorable gig in Vancouver, British Columbia that gained him the signal honor of being declared Canada's Most Wanted Fugitive by the RCMP and having a special writ of outlawry passed against him by the Parliament in Ottawa, an archaic legal device that allowed anyone, police officer or otherwise, to shoot him on sight. Such an outlawry act had last been used in the Nineteenth Century, against the Indian *metis* rebels of Louis Riel. Wingo served as Lockhart's backup, and on his last tour in June,

Kicky went with the pair of them. She drove, stood lookout, and otherwise assisted the famed marksman, along with relays of local Volunteers in Spokane and Coeur d'Alene.

During this time Kicky and Jimmy Wingo became lovers, which in the NVA context meant sandwiching occasional sex into the daily roller coaster ride of life on the bounce. It was a natural development and helped her with her transition into her new life. Kicky forced herself to carry out a tremendous act of mental and emotional self discipline, dividing her life into two sections or compartments, Before and After Flanders Street. She never allowed these compartments to overlap in her consciousness, at least not when she could prevent it. Before Flanders Street was *before.* That was not the person she was today. Now was after, and she was someone else. Memories of Ellie she suppressed with swift brutality every time they surfaced. She knew perfectly well in the back of her mind that this was delusional, that there was still a very good chance that her role as a police informant would somehow come out, and that she would have to die for what she had done. She simply accepted this risk along with the same death she risked every day. In a fractured mutation from one of her old twelve-step programs when she had been trying to quit drugs, she schooled herself to live one day at a time, and she simply didn't think about the future. She became fatalistic, and accepted her destiny philosophically. Her life was now set on its permanent track, and she would see how it played out.

By mid-summer, Kicky and Jimmy Wingo were back in Portland, although Kicky's hair was now trimmed in bangs and dyed auburn. They were now a recognized couple, and the Army's policy was to keep such couples together wherever possible and allow them to work as a team. The Battle of Flanders Street was a memory, there were other and more recent bloody media events and debacles for the government and police, and they were now as safe in Portland as anywhere else. Kicky had no idea how Lainie Martinez and Jamal Jarvis had dealt with her sudden and dramatic defection. All she knew was that there had been no public announcement from the Portland Police Bureau about her or indeed the presence of any informant on Flanders Street. The whole thing had been played by the media as a heroic mission led in person by Chief Linda Hirsch to save the life of the Vice President of the United States. Kicky did hear that all the police involved in the shoot-out had received commendations and that Martinez and Jarvis had received Medals of Valor, as well as Hirsch and McCafferty, the latter two posthumously, of course. Beyond that she knew nothing of what the Portland cops were up to regarding her. Nor did she know that Oscar and Gary Bresler were still hunting her relentlessly.

One summer's evening Kicky took part in a special training session with Volunteers Jason Carmody, Eric Sellars, and Annette Ridgeway, a session that was in fact part of that Third Section mole hunt. They were taken to a warehouse unit in Beaverton for a lecture and hands-on instruction from Second Battalion explosives officer Lieutenant Vincent Pascarella. Eric looked over and saw four low racks of metal shelving about ten feet long laid about two feet apart so they served as sawhorses. Across the tops of the shelving units lay two heavy black cylinders about four feet long, made of what looked like corrugated steel pipe with odd brackets and wires sticking out of the lower end, and four or five longer, more slender tubes that appeared to be made of stainless steel, with blunted noses almost like torpedoes and triangular airfoils or wings about halfway down and again at the perforated base. By now Eric was out of the habit of asking questions, but Pascarella saw them all looking at the objects and volunteered an explanation. "Chug-chugs and whizz-bangs," he said.

"That's what I thought, sir, but which is which?" asked Eric. "I've never seen any of these before."

"The chug-chugs are the home-made mortars," said Pascarella, pointing at the black cylinders. "We made them 81-millimeter for consistency's sake, so we can use certain factory accessories like a bipod assembly with them and mount them on an M252 base plate if we ever get hold of one, but I wouldn't dare try to fire one of those with a proper military round in it. They'd blow up in our faces."

"I know the rockets are called whizz-bangs because of the sound they make," said Annette. "Well, according to CNN."

"That's pretty much it, yeah," agreed Vince. "They use a solid fuel propellant made by our Popular Science club that doesn't like to stay solid. The techs are still diddling with it, trying to stabilize it. We use these to loft a love tap or two over Uncle Slime's Bremer walls every now and then. I keep hoping we'll hit the executive john and blow some federal judge off the crapper, but so far the results have been mixed, to put it charitably. They're kind of like the Zeppelins in World War One. Good psychological weapons, and they can sure give some government clerk or secretary the heebie-jeebies about coming to work, but the problem is you can't hit the broad side of a barn with the damned things, and on entirely too many occasions the payload doesn't even detonate. Plus you have to find a place to set up, and you need at least a three-man crew to fire them, and then we generally end up with an E&E chase sequence. The risks are high and the results problematical. We have been able to force the feds to evacuate a lot of their high-rise buildings, because even these clumsy bozos can slam into a skyscraper window, but all

they've done is cordon off surrounding streets and set up their offices and gear in trailers down below the level of the Bremer walls. I keep hearing scuttlebutt that Quartermaster GHQ is trying to cop us some serious hardware from assorted international arms dealers, or else direct from Ivan the Bear himself, and we have a standing offer of $50,000 to any American military personnel who can make an M252 and a couple of dozen HE rounds fall off the back of a truck, but no luck so far."

"Uh, what exactly is a Bremer wall, Lieutenant?" asked Eric.

"Yeah, you're what, seventeen, eighteen? That one's from a bit before your time, I guess. Bremer walls are those big steel-reinforced concrete blocks with the sloping bases and topped with razor wire that the feds lift into place on cranes and use to surround their Green Zones, in the Middle East and now in the Northwest Homeland," Pascarella told him. "Named after Paul Bremer, the first American imperial viceroy in Iraq. Bremer was the ultimate FOBBIT, meaning he stayed in his burrow. Reportedly he never once left a Green Zone or other secured and air-conditioned area during his entire stay in Iraq. He gave his name to those concrete chunks that are now associated with the American empire, just like roads and viaducts are associated with Rome, and tea and cricket are still the rage in former British colonial possessions. Bremer walls are one of the reasons we need to use mortars or rockets as an explosive delivery vector, to try and get through them or over them, since we don't use suicide bombers. You guys pull up those chairs and listen up." The four young Volunteers did so.

"Okay, this and a few more sessions are going to constitute your cross-training in explosives," Pascarella told them. "You'll be told and shown what you may need to know as Volunteers in your line companies, and if you ever decide to go EOD you'll get some more intensive instruction. We won't be doing anything practical in here tonight, but some time over the next month or so, we will arrange a little trip for all of you down the mighty Columbia along Highway 30. There you will meet some comrades from Cap Hatfield's Wild Bunch, aka Third Battalion, whom Comrade Jodie here is already acquainted with. The Boys down there pretty much have the run of the woods, and they'll take you on a little camping trip out in the wilds of the Northwest forests where you will learn all kinds of things you never learned in Diversity 101 and multicultural sensitivity training in school. But tonight I'll give you the theory. I'll tell you why the NVA uses explosives, under what tactical circumstances, and how we go about it."

Pascarella sat down on one of the low steel shelving units. "Okay, first off, let me tell you what the NVA does *not* do with explosives. We are not

deranged Muslim fanatics who load up a vehicle with anything we can find that will detonate, and then drive up to some crowded public place and blow ourselves and a hundred others sky high. There are no suicide bombers in the NVA and never will be. We want you all to live, and after this is all over help build the Republic you're risking your lives for now. Nor are we dotty Provisional IRA from Belfast who blow up things just to hear the pretty bang, and who don't give a shit if they kill a busload of school kids or a family of tourists or some little old lady in a wheel chair in the process.

"The Northwest Volunteer Army never uses explosives purely as an anti-personnel weapon, for General Order Number Four enforcement against non-Whites who are illegally in the Republic or anything like that, except when we can get hand grenades and carefully target them in nigger juke joints or crack houses or Mexican cantinas, that kind of thing. But never actual bombs. There is simply too much chance of bad blowback in every sense of the word, too much chance that something could go wrong and we might kill or injure the very people we're fighting for. The potential for collateral damage through the poorly judged use of explosives is catastrophic, casualty-wise, politically, and propaganda-wise. When the time comes and you're planning your own tickles, *never try to do with a bomb what can be accomplished with a gun*. If you're after an economic or strategic target, always try to use arson instead of explosives if at all possible. You can take out the target just as effectively with a torch job, and any non-combatants in the area usually have more of a chance to get out and survive. So far the NVA has been lucky. There have been a few bad accidents, and after the war we're going to be paying some lifelong compensation to families, if they'll accept it from us. But at least we haven't had any horrors like some little toddler and her baby brother in a stroller being blown to smithereens or anything like that. Not yet, anyway, and hopefully we won't ever have anything like that, knock wood."

"Sir, what if the feds try some kind of fake NVA bombing and they deliberately murder a bunch of white children to make us look bad?" asked Eric.

"The thought has occurred to us, yes. That's called a black op, Volunteer, and you're right, these bastards in the United States government are perfectly capable of murderous treacherous crap like that," agreed Pascarella grimly. "I or any veteran who served in Iraq can tell you that. You guys who remember watching the news back then, did you ever wonder why the Iraqis and later on Iranians and Saudis and Egyptians seemed to just go around blowing each other up indiscriminately with no rhyme or reason? Well, put it this way—a

lot of those car bombs had 'made in USA' stamped all over them, or in some cases 'made in Israel.' I ought to know. I packed a few for those CIA and Mossad dogs myself, I am ashamed to say.

"Now, getting back to your question, troop, while I am not an intelligence or a political officer and you know the strong Army rule against spreading rumors, my understanding is that in one of the few bits of unofficial negotiation we have ever done with the other side, the NVA made it clear to the federal government of the United States that if any explosions went off in kindergartens or hospitals or nursing homes, and the media tried to claim that us evil white racists did it, then our moratorium on attacking commercial passenger liners, airports, and air traffic in the United States would end and we would start taking out jet liners, on the runways and in the air. We have the power to shut down air travel within the United States and in and out of the United States, guys, and you may wonder why we've never used it. That's why. So far the unwritten agreement of no CIA-style black ops, in exchange for no attacks on the airlines and airports, has held. No President of the United States in her right mind wants to shut down all air traffic in this country. Anyway, back to the subject at hand.

"The NVA uses explosives in three basic situations. First off, when there is an economic or strategic or propaganda-related target that has to be physically destroyed, sometimes loudly and visibly in order to set an example. This might be a factory or business that is owned by Jews, or that won't stop employing Third World illegals, or a business of some kind that is supplying goods or services to the enemy. It might be a bar or restaurant that refuses to ban military personnel or federal employees or non-whites. It might be an office building or other structure used by our assorted enemies, and we need to deny it to them and destroy their plant. You get the idea. The second instance in which we use bombing is against enemy armor and fortifications, like when we toss these primitive rockets and mortar shells here over the Bremer walls and razor wire and give Daddy a kiss. This is where the good old IED or Improvised Explosive Device, otherwise known as the Baghdad Banger, comes into its own. Like some other NVA guys who are vets, I have the unusual experience of having been on both ends of an IED, and between the Muslims and ourselves, we have refined them down to an art form. Through the use of IEDs we make enemy troop movements dangerous and difficult to plan and execute, and in some areas of the Northwest, we have succeeded in more or less driving the police and the military off the highways completely, forcing them to fall back on helicopters. If we ever succeed in obtaining any shoulder-fired missiles or some other way to bring those birds down, Uncle

Slime is going to be really fucked. I imagine that some of you guys are already familiar with the third way in which the NVA uses explosives. Anyone?"

Annette raised her hand. "Jesus, I feel like I'm teaching school here with you young kids," laughed Pascarella. "Well, I suppose I am. Okay, the girl with her hand up in the front and only row."

"Booby-traps!" said Annette.

"You got it," confirmed Pascarella. "Whenever it is physically possible, the NVA always booby-traps the scene of an operation before un-assing the area, any vehicles or other likely receptacles, the dead bodies of any enemies, so forth and so on. This has gummed up the police and the feds no end; sometimes it takes them a whole day to locate and disarm booby-traps, and that's a whole 'nother day you guys have to cover your tracks. Not to mention the dead and wounded the traps still inflict on the enemy, even at their most cautious. The most common booby traps are black powder pipe bombs or home-made stick grenades with trip-wire or spring-loaded dets, but I've heard of everything from hidden shotguns, to bear traps, to door handles wired with electricity, to poisoned beer, to weird concoctions in toilet bowls that react with the ammonia in urine and blow off important parts of federal personnel using them."

"Our crew blew a nigger's head off with a charge we left behind in a john with the seat closed," said Jason with smug satisfaction.

Pascarella chuckled. "Okay, now, as to the practical aspect of assembling and detonating ordnance. Every explosive device consists of three basic components. There is the main charge, the dynamite or Semtex or whatever will provide the main blast. There is a much smaller detonation charge, usually a commercially manufactured squib like this," and he held up a small copper tube about the size of a pencil stub. "This is what is called a blasting or a percussion cap, and there are a lot of different kinds, some with powder, some completely electrical, some with a tungsten filament like a light bulb. A detonator cap can also be improvised with chemical or liquid nitro gel in a bottle, a Molotov cocktail or something like that. A single ordinary Chinese firecracker in a stick of dynamite or TNT works beautifully. The cap explodes and thus detonates the main charge. Thirdly, you have an ignition or detonation system to blow the detonator cap, which can be something as simple as a black powder trail or a burning fuse of the kind you see in old movies, but usually it's something electric involving a battery or some other device that sends an electric spark into the blasting cap and explodes that, which then detonates the main charge. The key to blowing the enemy into smithereens and not yourselves is simple: you keep

these three components disconnected until the last possible minute. There are three kinds of detonation processes, with a few variations. Numero uno, there are *timed* detonation systems. This might be your basic old alarm clock with a battery attached or something more sophisticated and digital. A timed detonation is when the device is set either to explode *within* a certain time like five minutes, or else it's set to explode *at* a certain time like 3:15 p.m. when you believe your target will be within range."

"The ticking time bomb of metaphor," said Annette.

"What's a metaphor?" asked Kicky.

"Sorry, some of that preppie stuff seeped into my brain," said Annette apologetically. Annette was in awe of Kicky since the Battle of Flanders Street. Kicky was older than Annette, she was rumored to have been a hooker, she had tattoos and a child, she'd been in jail, and in Annette's rich-kid eyes she had an irresistible wrong-side-of-the-tracks chic, a weird kind of reverse snobbery that sometimes showed in Volunteers from the upper classes.

Pascarella ignored them. "Then there's remote-controlled detonation, which means you need your bombardier or at least a spotter observing the area where the bomb has been laid, and you have to wait for the enemy's convoy or APC or armored limo or other vehicle, and detonate when he's on top of the IED. We find that wireless phone mother boards and batteries work peachy keen for this purpose; you put the phone's number on speed dial and once you connect the battery and board to the detonator cap via a few wires and alligator clips, all you do is hit speed dial and kablooey. The Iraqis taught us that. We used to shoot them in if we caught them with a cell phone anywhere near an IED blast. Just pray to God some telemarketer doesn't call up trying to sell you a timeshare in some ski resort just as you're hooking on the clips."

"Has that ever happened?" asked Kicky curiously.

"Haven't had anybody killed, no, but every now and then an IED goes off prematurely for no reason anyone can figure out, and that may well be the cause, some junk call. Damned telemarketers!" admitted Pascarella. "The third type of detonation system is through a wire or cord, either an electric wire connected to a plunger battery or an actual military det cord, but we don't use that one much." Pascarella turned very serious. "Now, listen up, kids—sorry, comrades—because this is important. *Safety.* What are euphemistically called 'work accidents' with explosives will happen in one of two ways. First, you accidentally detonate the blasting cap while it is inserted or connected to the main charge, because you somehow get a closed circuit and a spark from the battery on your ignition device. This is the primary reason why you need to

keep your ignition system disconnected or disabled until the very last minute, until the ordnance is in place and the enemy is standing on top of it, if possible. There are also assorted safety precautions we use on remote-control devices, like turning off the phone you're going to use to blow the charge and actually taking the battery out to make damned good and sure. Never, *ever* insert a detonator cap into a charge that is connected to the ignition device by any kind of wire or fuse. Cap first, then the disconnected wire, then connect the ignition system, then put the battery back in and arm the ignition system when you are a safe distance away, not when you're still looking at the charge on your front seat.

"The second cause of premature detonation is when the main charge itself becomes unstable and is ignited by heat or pressure or static electricity. This is one reason why with one exception, the Portland EOD unit always tries to use properly manufactured commercial or military explosives, and not these weird concoctions that O.C. Oglevy's boys and some of our other more eccentric comrades like to cook up in the bathtub of some house trailer. The most serious EOD accident the Portland NVA ever had was when two very fine comrades, Volunteers Vladko Kirilov and Paul Strasser, were handling some home-made gelignite and as nearly as we can figure, the damned stuff had become unstable and started sweating nitroglycerine. Both were killed. Never forget, guys, this stuff is deadly dangerous, and if you disrespect it you will pay with your life and maybe the life of a comrade as well."

"What kind of explosives does the NVA use?" asked Jason.

"The most common explosives available to the NVA's EOD teams throughout the Homeland are good old fashioned dynamite, TNT, and black powder," explained Pascarella. "Dynamite and TNT are still as common as dirt. They're vital in construction, urban demolition besides the kind we do, and in mining. The federal government can't ban these explosives or control them; there's too much need for them in industries that make the soulless men in the business suits money. There is a special EOD commando unit that travels all over the United States pulling off burglaries and raids on mine compounds and construction sites, and carting off cases of dynamite and TNT by the dozen in specially made vehicles. The one exception I just mentioned is that we do make a lot of our own black powder in several covert powder mills, which is simple and reasonably safe so long as no moron lights up a cigarette. 10% sulphur, 75% sodium nitrate, and 15% charcoal is the most effective recipe, although there are variations. Mix it up carefully and you've got what Shakespeare called 'villainous saltpetre,' the stuff our ancestors used to take the whole world from the Indians and the Zulus. By the way, always

make sure any black powder you use is made and approved by the EOD unit. We had some kids a while back down in Eugene who were making their own and using potassium chlorate instead of sodium nitrate, to give it more kick, which was an incredibly stupid thing to do. Potassium chlorate is unstable as hell. It will go off if a fly lands on it, and one of the chemistry nerds blew two fingers off one hand. He was lucky he didn't lose his head.

"But the champagne of all insurrectionary explosives is still Semtex, which is now manufactured in a dozen countries as well as the Czech Republic where it was invented," the lieutenant continued. "While the federal government has succeeded in imposing all kinds of records-keeping, special handling regs, security measures, ethylene glycol and other chemical tagging and so forth on American manufacturers, the original Czech producers are still merrily exporting it all over the globe, and it's not that hard to get if you have the folding green to pay for it. Semtex is the charge of choice for big jobs when we can lay hands on it. It's just about the most potent stuff available for our purposes. A pound of it can take down a good-sized house, a briefcase full can decapitate an office building, and in the rare cases where we want to go that distance, a car trunk full of Semtex can send an entire city block to the moon. Gelignite, jellied nitroglycerine, is actually a bit more powerful, but it's not manufactured anymore and like I mentioned, the bathtub variety is dangerous to work with, so we don't fuck with it. When Quartermaster GHQ can get hold of Semtex, we parcel it out among the EOD units and we reserve it for special jobs. I mention that because you guys may be called upon to make some pickups or deliveries to Spokane or Seattle or Boise. If so, don't worry about it. It's quite stable so long as that detonator cap stays out of it and you don't hit it with a hammer or do anything to cause compression."

"How about C-4, sir?" asked Eric Sellars.

"When we can get it, it's great," said Pascarella. "However, the American military has become so paranoid about our bombing capability that they have actually moved all of the military stocks of C-4 out of the Homeland, and they've got it locked up tighter than the gold in Fort Knox in a number of special facilities across the rest of the empire. It practically takes a signed order from the President or the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to get the Army Corps of Engineers or the Green Berets issued with any C-4 for legitimate purposes, if you want to call Amurrica's purposes legitimate. We do still get hold of some, but it's actually a lot easier and simpler and more cost effective for us to load up on dynamite and TNT. Now—delivery. This is where you guys come in."

The young Volunteers leaned forward. "There are car and truck bombs, of course," Pascarella told them. "Sometimes that's the only way, when the attack is against, say, a major military convoy and your only possible ambush site is on a city street, or more often when it's some Amurrican bigwig in his armored limousine that we can't breach any other way. But we don't like doing that, because of the risk of unacceptable collateral damage. On a few occasions we've managed to get a car or a truck bomb close enough to crack a Bremer wall or wipe out a watchtower or something of that kind, and I suppose you heard about that helluva prison break last week at the Auburn detention facility up in Washington where Jock Graham's crew blew a hole in the fence with a truck bomb. But a vehicle bomb is a major operation that has to be looked at from all angles and approved by brigade command or higher. We do not want the streets of Northwest cities turned into Baghdad or the Gaza Strip. Our sharp-eyed lads in the sniper companies inflict more physical and psychological harm on the enemy than a hundred car bombs could do, and they do it surgically and with a *panache* that excites admiration among whites, not fear and loathing.

"Most bombing is specifically targeted against indoor installations, the object being to slip inside their defensive perimeters and hit them where they think they're safe. Have any of you been asked to deliver a package yet?"

"I have," said Kicky. "It was my first solo tickle. That faggot bookstore and sex shop downtown with the big cartoon character sign, Homer Erotica. The Red Baron himself made up my package. I was given a fake student ID, and I brought in a shoulder bag full of books on the poems of Sappho and the Joy of Lesbian Sex and all that crap. Each book was cut out, and it had a stick or two of dynamite inside, plus there were six more sticks sewed into the lining of the bag. I had a plastic cell phone loaded with some kind of gunk to serve as the detonator. They didn't have any dogs, and there was no metal in the bag so it passed the detector. The bugger boy just glanced inside the bag and put it behind the counter to make sure I didn't try to shoplift a dildo or something. Before he did I put the cell phone into the bag. I browsed the shelves for a few minutes, then slipped out the back, went down the street, and dialed the phone's number. Blowed up real good."

"Good job, comrade, and a typical day's work for our parcel post," responded Pascarella with a nod, impressed. "It is entirely likely that you other three will at one stage or other be asked to deliver a package. There is no mission in the Army that requires more courage, more cool-headedness, and more just plain balls, as well as the ability to think on your feet and be a better actor or actress than anyone in Hollywood, which this classy lady here

seems to have. Each one of these missions is unique, and I can't really prepare you for them except to say that you will be given full training in everything you are to carry, its risks and how to handle and use it. You will have to get into your target zone, most likely past armed guards and sniffer dogs and God knows what kind of electronic security gear. Some units in the NVA draw lots for package deliveries. I always ask for volunteers and I brief them personally beforehand to make sure they're up to it, mentally and emotionally. I have never been disappointed yet. Later on, when your respective companies are brought in on a major attack or ambush, especially if you end up with a flying column out in the countryside, you will almost certainly be involved in preparing and implanting and detonating IEDs, which can vary from a just plain big-ass box of dynamite to daisy chains of home-made Claymore mines. Over here I have some samples of the kinds of casings that we use for IEDs. If you guys will gather around this pallet here, I'll give you an idea of how we hook them up for detonation." The four of them surrounded the wooden pallet, and Pascarella's lesson went on.

* * *

As soon as the four young Volunteers' transport arrived and picked them up to take them home, Pascarella went over to a window and signaled with a flashlight. Then he walked over to one darkened office and knocked on the door. The door opened and Gary Bresler stepped out, a headset on his ears. "You saw and heard what you needed to?" asked Pascarella.

"Yeah," replied Bresler. "Didn't see or hear anything off key, though. Did you get any vibes you didn't like off any of them?"

Pascarella raised one of the roll-up doors and a large blue van without lights backed onto the dimly lit floor. Two men got out and opened the rear door, and they began loading the two mortars and the homemade rockets into specially prepared racks. "I think they're all four bright and dedicated young people, and whoever recruited them knows his job," replied the explosives officer. "That biker girl, Jodie, she was the chick on Flanders Street with Cat Lockhart that day, right? So she's already made her bones?"

"Yep," said Bresler. "Which doesn't mean diddly. You know as well as I do that a deep cover informant is quite capable of blowing away a couple of catamites in order to create their bona fides for the Army."

"Yeah, I know. Dammit, Gary, I'm a bomber, not a ferret! I don't like spying on my own people, and I don't like using my heavy weapons as bait in this little spy hunt of yours. As crappy as they are, those mortars and rockets

need to be dropping stuff on American noggins from above, not being driven all over Portland as props in this grim little charade."

"It has to be done, Vince," growled Bresler. "I have at least two more batches I want you to do for me, just like these last two. I'll tell you where to bring the stuff in a couple of days."

"I didn't say it didn't have to be done. I just said I don't like doing it."

"Jesus Christ, Vince, do you think *I* do?" demanded Bresler. Two more men walked in from the darkness outside, special Third Section operatives who had been brought down from Seattle. "Okay, Zeke, you guys all set up across the street?" asked Bresler.

"All set up, Lieutenant," said one of them, a young man named Ezekiel in a neat shirt and tie who looked like a Mormon missionary, which he had once been until he was tied to the garroting deaths of a Mexican police officer and several transvestite prostitutes in Twin Falls, Idaho. His companion was an older man dressed as a wino who was called Pops—what else? Pops' specialty was maudlin weeping and pissing in his pants when stopped by police and RRT patrols. The old man convinced his interrogator that he was a nothing but a pathetic drunken derelict, making him turn away in disgust so Pops could get an ice pick into his ear with the speed of a striking cobra, while his companions hidden in the darkness took out the rest of the patrol with silenced pistols and rifles.

"Okay, same drill as before," Bresler told the two Threesec men. "Stay under cover for at least two days, three if your boss will let you. 24-hour watch on this building, in relays. If our wrong 'un was one of those four, then those mortars and rockets should be a major coup for him or her and a serious temptation for the Mami and the Monkey to risk blowing their rat's cover in exchange for a big score and seeing their own faces on CNN. If there is any sign at all of any police interest in this building, not just a full-blown door-kicking raid but anything at all odd, strange cars prowling around, copters overhead, mysterious gas company inspectors or UPS deliveries to an empty building, stray pedestrians wandering around who seem to be out of place, you let me know. Hopefully, though, those four young people are all loyal Northwest Volunteers and you guys have got another long and fruitless stakeout ahead of you. Also, if you should spot Lainie Martinez and/or Jamal Jarvis scoping the area, if at all possible try to take at least one of them alive and in a condition to talk. No ice picks or nooses or other recreation until *after* I talk to them, okay?"

"For every thing, there is a season," agreed Zeke solemnly.

In fact, it occurred to Kicky as she rode back with Jimmy to their current safe house that if she had still been wearing her bug, this would have been

exactly the kind of thing that Martinez and Jarvis and the crazed Linda Hirsch would have gone for, and maybe gotten her killed in the process. She wondered again where they were and what they were doing, who they had told about her, and how long she had left before it all came apart. Then she stopped thinking about it, and returned to the present moment. She was getting good at that.

As it happened, she was in less danger than she feared. The Battle of Flanders Street had been a police cock-up of major magnitude, but the federal authorities who had stepped in and taken over the investigation were canny enough to understand that like doctors' mistakes, such cock-ups were best buried. After a full debriefing and due consideration, the new Special Agent In Charge of the Portland office, an iron-hard career man named Bob Wicker, had decided that this mistake needed to be buried deep. "Top Secret" stamps went on all the files and Operation Searchlight disappeared off the radar. It was obvious to him that Kicky McGee had flipped on her handlers, and equally obvious that this was not something the world needed to know all about. Because the Vice President was involved, the incident was now the subject of Congressional, Secret Service, and Justice Department investigations. These were pretty much *pro forma,* since everyone thought they knew it was a simple NVA assassination attempt thwarted by the valiant Linda Hirsch and Elliot Weinstein, based on some piece of last-minute information that neither of them were now in a position to divulge. Any mention of the presence of a police informer would reopen the investigations, raise all kinds of embarrassing questions about such events as the assassination of Ambassador Whitman and his Bantu bride, and poke sticks at a number of sleeping dogs that were best let lie.

Lainie Martinez met privately with Wicker in a lengthy session in his office, where she ran down the whole thing for him and made a persuasive case for making the best of a bad deal, which she culminated with a skillful act of fellatio on Wicker's office sofa. Wicker was convinced, and he and Lainie were now enjoying twice-weekly orgies of afternoon delight in covert safe apartments and hotel suites maintained by their respective departments around town. Wicker gave her and Jarvis warm written commendations. Not to be outdone, the governor of Oregon himself ordered Lainie and Jarvis promoted to Detective Lieutenant and approved their Medals of Valor. Since the beginning of Operation Searchlight, Lainie had taken the precaution of keeping a full hard copy set of relevant documents hidden away in a safe deposit box, just to make sure that she could in fact revive the whole episode if it proved necessary, and she had let Wicker know this,

but he understood perfectly her need for insurance, and it looked as if they would not be needed.

The one fly in the ointment was that May McGee and Mary Ellen McGee had disappeared. The head of the private contractor guard had been quite abashed when he told an outraged Lainie that their prisoners had given them the slip. "That old drunken biddy was still getting her beer ration," he told her. "We even upped her to a case per day. But she must have been pouring most of it down the sink or something when we weren't looking, because the night of that shoot-out you guys had on Flanders Street, before we could get any orders from you on how to proceed, she somehow got into the kid's room and got off the premises with her. We honest to God don't know how." The mercenary knew, of course. He had been banging his female sergeant in one of the other hotel rooms, but he decided that it was better to look merely stupid rather than outright ridiculous. Lainie was so enraged she even lost her English and cursed him in Spanish, but whatever May had planned, she had planned well, because she and Ellie vanished without a trace.

Lainie had landed on her feet, but Jarvis wasn't quite as pleased. One of Cat Lockhart's last bullets had brushed his nappy head and carried off his left ear. Lainie visited him in his hospital room and brought him up to speed. "Okay, it turned out to be a total fiasco," she admitted. "But Wicker is willing to be reasonable. True, the FBI has now appropriated all our work, and the kid's gone and so is our cut of any adoption bond. But you know, that might not be a bad thing in the long run, because it cleanly severs our connection with this whole mess. Look on the bright side, Jamal. We both made Loo, we can tack M.V. after our names, and now I've got an inside track with the feds that you can ride as well as me. Plus that 50-caliber slug was a few inches off, and you're still here. Hell, we're both still here, aren't we? Hirsch, and poor old Andy, and Isaiah Robinson, and some other guys who went out that day didn't make it. There is a silver lining to all this, you know."

"There's only one silver lining dis nigger wants to see," growled Jamal, touching his bandaged head. "Someday I wants to get my black hands on dat white bitch's throat."

"Oh, yes," said Lainie.

XVII

Taking Down Tinsel Town

No, no, they do but jest, poison in jest; no offence i' the world.

Hamlet—Act III, Scene 2

On a dark night in the following January, a high-level NVA conference convened in a private home in Westport, Oregon. Present were Red Morehouse, First Brigade Commandant Tommy Coyle with both of his urban battalion COs Bud Lawlor and Larry Donner, as well as Second Brigade Commandant Harry Hannon with his two battalion captains Mark Conway and Art McNeill. Lieutenant Wayne Hill and Lieutenant Charlie Randall represented the Third Section, with a nervous Captain Zack Hatfield and Lieutenant Charlie Washburn of Third Battalion acted as Mine Hosts. Once the men were all seated in the capacious living room of the safe house, and mugs of coffee or soft drinks distributed all around, Red opened the meeting. "Everything copacetic in the neighborhood, Zack?" he asked.

"We've got almost forty Volunteers outside and up and down the road, and patrolling the woods around and about," Hatfield told them, taking his seat and taking off his broad-brimmed hat. "I'm not taking any chances. We made a concealed stand up on that little bluff behind us, and we've got a specially mounted twin M-60 rig and a couple of crack riflemen with infrared night sights in case any helicopters try to buzz us, but with all due respect, sir, I think we need to get through whatever it is you need to get done, and then break this up. I'm not happy about having this many of our people in one place, especially this many senior officers. The Wild Bunch has pretty much put the fear of God into anybody who might be inclined to drop a dime on

us, but with this many bodies there's bound to be some kind of accidental observation the longer we stay here, if only from Eye In The Sky satellites with infrared heat sensors. They can always send a Predator drone out here just on spec. I know you well enough not to have to say this, but this had better be important enough to justify this kind of risk."

"It is," Morehouse assured him. "All right, let's get on with it, then. You all understand, I'm speaking for the Army Council now. I am going to be detailing a major strategic initiative, and the words top secret don't even begin to cover the security we have to maintain on this until we're ready to pop the top. First the bad news, and that is that I'm going to have to ask you guys for some of your best men, at least two dozen of them, maybe more, to be sent on detached duty for an undetermined amount of time. After a lot of consideration, the Portland brigades have been selected to put together a special active service unit for a series of highly sensitive and risky operations, the first extensive campaign the NVA has mounted outside the Northwest Homeland itself. The name of this unit will be Task Force Director's Cut. Its mission will be to neutralize one of the prime weapons that ZOG has in this war, which is the Hollywood movie, media, and entertainment industry, and to render that industry as useless to the enemy as we can possibly accomplish. Put bluntly, we are going down to Hollywood, and we are going to take the Dream Machine apart at the seams."

There was a low round of chuckles and approving grunts and comments. "Do we get to volunteer?" asked Conway. "I need to work on my tan."

"I'll need a cover job as a waiter or a soda jerk so I can be discovered by a big Jew producer," said Lawlor. "Full frontal nudity is no problem."

"I get dibs on wasting that obnoxious hebe Bert Steinfeld," said McNeill, naming a well-known Hollywood leading man of the Mosaic persuasion who claimed to be a karate black belt and former Green Beret, a claim disputed by the United States Army, and who specialized in tough-yet-sensitive cop roles where he and his black or female or gay sidekick beat up on wicked white racists of various kinds while laying on snappy witticisms and one-liners.

"That's one reason we're here, to start working out the nuts and bolts," said Morehouse. "Gentlemen, I don't have to tell you that ever since the invention of the motion picture over a century ago, the movie industry has been the most completely Jewish field of private enterprise in the world, with the exception of international banking and the stock exchange. Even today, Yiddish is considered to be Hollywood's second language. Literally so. It is spoken regularly on movie lots and sound sets, and in every office and casting department and boardroom. The senior executive office complex of

every major production studio contains a private synagogue or chapel called a *mincha,* with one or more rabbis attached, as well as special glatt kosher catering facilities and kitchens. Entire boards of directors in Hollywood and also at their parent companies in New York sometimes hold Jewish religious services prior to meetings. Every crucial, non-technical job on the business and creative end of any major movie is either held by a Jew or is in the power of a Jew, from the studio heads, the producers and the directors, down to the scriptwriters, the casting directors, the agents, the accountants, and anything to do with the money. Even in areas that seem to be controlled by Gentiles, you will find that somewhere along the line during the process, Jews have crucial input and veto power. This control by the Tribe is pervasive and complete, and it extends into television as well, with the exception of two of the major cable networks, which are heavily Jewish in their senior personnel but are owned by consortiums of super-wealthy Protestant evangelical Christians of the Israel-worshipping, neo-Zionist persuasion, major neocons and Republican party backers, who are in their own way even more poisonous in their evil than the Jews themselves, because they have no excuse for turning on their own blood.

"I do not need to tell you of the terrible and largely irreversible damage that Hollywood has done to the white race and to Western civilization over the past century. For four generations, the international bankers and the corrupt politicians have committed unspeakable crimes against humanity, especially the war after war after bloody war they have plunged our people into for Jewry's sake, but it is Hollywood and Hollywood's mutant bastard spawn television that has made the white people of America and the world swallow these atrocities and actually support them with enthusiasm. It is Hollywood that has spent the past 50 years pushing every conceivable kind of perversion of body and mind down the throats of white people. It is Hollywood that has turned the loathsome practice of homosexuality into something cute and trendy, the subject for silly jokes, when it is in fact a poison of the very soul. It is Hollywood that has turned white women as portrayed on film into either mindless sex objects, or else de-gendered, masculinized, man-hating neurotics. It is Hollywood that has poisoned the minds and broken the spirits of generation after generation of white children who are now beyond recovery, and turned them into whiggers. The bankers have stolen our money. The federal government of the United States has stolen our lives and our freedom and soaked the earth with Aryan blood, spilled to save a filthy race of Asiatic parasites. But Hollywood has stolen our peoples' minds and souls, and in some ways that makes Hollywood more evil to my mind even than the sinks

of iniquity centered in New York and Washington, D.C. Comrades, we will go down to southern California, we will grip this monster by the throat, and we will *cut its heart out!"* There was a cheer from around the table; the men found the project to their liking. "At this point I'll turn the floor over to Lieutenant Hill," said Morehouse.

"Thank you, Red, and isn't this a great audience in our studio tonight?" There was a chuckle from the assembled men. "I need to begin by explaining just what has precipitated this operation, which by the way, has been designated Operation We Are Not Amused," said Hill. There was more laughter. "Obviously, any revolutionary movement within North America has to deal with the Hollywood problem at some point or other, and it's always been on our back burner, even back in the pre-10/22 days of the old Party. But for the past several years, our main problem has been survival on the streets of our own land. Although we have taken on the printed and electronic local media here in the Pacific Northwest and largely neutralized them as an effective weapon for the occupiers, we haven't had the time and the manpower and the resources to go for the very root of the problem, that cesspool down in Los Angeles. That's changing now. It's pretty obvious that barring some catastrophic event, the NVA is here to stay as a permanent feature of Northwest life, and for us, to survive is eventually to win. The time has come for us to take our offensive for balance in the media right into the belly of the Beast.

"As odd as it may seem, in view of the rubbish they put on the tube about us every night, we've actually been surprised by just how relatively restrained the reaction of the Hollywood establishment has been to events in the Northwest. Restrained by their standards, anyway. The news programming originating outside the Northwest is pure government propaganda, of course, since they think we can't get at them in New York or Atlanta or Los Angeles. Especially the cable TV talking heads. We get the sarcastic needling jokes by the late night celebrity show hosts, and there have been a few television episodes in various series dealing with the main characters fighting wicked racism in the Northwest and heroically saving cute little black babies and kiddies in yarmulkes from the Satanic racist revolt during the Sixteen Days, that kind of moo, but all things considered, the treatment that we've gotten at Hollywood's hands hasn't been nearly as vile an outpouring of hysterical hatred and incitement as we might have expected."

"Yeah, I kind of noticed that myself," spoke up Donner. "They're just being snide and vicious, not full-bore screaming. Why do you think that is, Lieutenant?"

"A couple of subtle and complex reasons," said Hill seriously. "First, we need to realize that Hollywood is not a monolith. As in all empowered élites, there are a number of competing and antagonistic factions within the top echelons, bitter personal feuds and conflicts of interest, and all kinds of wheels within wheels. Mostly these factions are concerned with personal prestige and wealth, and the acquisition and use of what was, up until Coeur d'Alene, real power in this society, i.e. media power, money power, and political power emanating from La Cesspool Grande on the Potomac. There are a lot of people of power in Hollywood, men and women, Jewish and otherwise, who are genuinely opposed to President Clinton and her clique for a wide variety of reasons, some ideological, others personal. You will notice that the slant of some of these television shows that have in fact come out over the past two years about events in the Northwest have not been so much about how wicked and evil we are—that's taken as a given in the Hollywood ethos and our people are portrayed as simple stereotype villains—but how bumbling and incompetent and compromised Hillary and her government and her FBI are in the face of their increasingly obvious inability to do anything about us. There are also a lot of people in the industry who are really concerned that Hillary is going to throw the Constitution out the window and set up what amounts to a Presidency for Life."

"Word is she's going to put Chelsea in the Oval Office to warm her seat for her, while Mommy Dearest keeps on calling the shots," said Morehouse. "I don't know, though. Chelsea is so completely hopeless that I'm not sure the Sea Hag could get even this brain-dead electorate to swallow her."

"Sir, you're talking about a nation of people who actually re-elected George W. Bush in 2004, when everyone knew perfectly well that he had lied to the whole country to make up an excuse to invade Iraq and begin this horror show in the Middle East that hasn't left us since then," Hatfield reminded him. "There is no limit to the stupidity of the American electorate."

"Point taken, Cap," said Morehouse with a chuckle. "But Lieutenant Hill is correct in that so long as we don't start shooting *them,* there are empowered people in Hollywood who, although they would never come right out and say it, don't really mind having us around as a stick to beat Hillary with. They have fallen into the error of believing their own stereotypes about us. They don't take us seriously and in the insulated, incestuous and self-absorbed world of Hollywood, it's simply inconceivable to the empowered élite that we can win, so they don't see us as a long-term threat to their own wealth and position."

"But now we *are* about to start shooting them," Harry Hannon interjected.

"And that's another reason I think they've gone comparatively lightly on us since 10/22," said Morehouse. "I said that the Hollywood élite don't take us seriously as a long-term existential threat to their world, but remember, they live in a kind of money-fortified Green Zone down there, surrounded by criminals, junkies, black and Mexican and Vietnamese gang-bangers, and psychos of every stripe. Men with guns they can wrap their minds around. These people aren't fools, comrades, and like all Jews they have a very highly developed personal sense of danger awareness and an almost instinctive threat assessment. They understand that we don't like them or their filthy movies and boob tube, and that it wouldn't take much provocation for us to come down there out of our northern forests and take a crack at them."

"From the fury of the Northmen, good Lord deliver us?" said Hatfield.

"Exactly," said Hill, nodding in agreement. "They're taking precautions, against us and against their own environment, which ironically they have helped to create with their own crapulence. One of the biggest industries right now in Tinseltown is high-powered and discreet bodyguarding, personal, home, and corporate security. If you're an ex-cop or ex-FBI you can write your own ticket down there. The stars' homes have been fortified for years anyway, because of stalkers and gang-bangers and the general parade of lunatics that comes out under every southern California full moon, but now every studio and every lot and every office building in the industry is almost like Stalag Thirteen, surrounded by electrified fences and razor wire, with checkpoints and armies of hired goons patrolling the grounds, guard dogs, security clearances for various levels of employees, electronic surveillance everywhere, you name it."

"But it's not just simple fear that's made Hollywood go a little easy on us so far," Red Morehouse said. "I don't want to get metaphysical, but Hollywood has always been the American ruling establishment with its heart on its sleeve, and southern California has always taken point in the culture wars, openly and brazenly, so you can read them like a book. And I can sense a deep and definite malaise. The Jewish and liberal establishment down there is not just afraid, they're puzzled, disturbed, confused. They don't know what to make of us quite yet. They've never seen white men act like this before—hell, no one in living memory has seen white men act like this before. Comrades, even if we were all wiped out tomorrow, the NVA has managed to achieve one incredible accomplishment, something that for the entire twentieth century, no one ever thought was possible. We have reintroduced the gun into American politics, the ultimate fount of all law and political power."

Morehouse smiled and shook his head in admiration. "For the first time since the Civil War, the United States of America no longer has a credible monopoly of armed force, and that fact has thrown the whole ruling élite in this country for a loop, unbalanced them. Jews, Senators, judges, sheriffs, prison guards, lawyers, bureaucrats, corporate CEOs, asshole bosses, arrogant teachers and professors who destroy kids' lives for a politically incorrect remark, faggots and dykes who corrupt and seduce teenagers, liberal and neo-con talking heads on TV, federal house niggers who are used to Mau-Mauing the honkies and seeing us tremble, all of these people who were once cock of the walk are now having to adjust, to come to grips with the fact that they can no longer just do any damned thing they please. If a tyrant in a black robe or sitting behind some government desk or directing a movie camera fucks over white people, there is now at least some chance that he will be *shot* for it, that he will be punished, that he will be held responsible. You can't imagine how completely freaked out these arrogant ruling élitist sons of bitches are over this, and in Hollywood, where the Burger Kings, the Big Kikes, are neurotic as hell anyway under the best of conditions, we see signs that they are going quietly bonkers with paranoia. Those Hollywood Men of the Nose in their boardrooms and their jacuzzis and their limos, with their little twenty-room hideaways in Carmel and their reserved tables at the plushest restaurants, and their special trailers on set with the casting couches for blonde *shiksas,* know damned well that their turn is coming."

"Which is why they may have decided to strike the first blow," said Wayne Hill. "For reasons we have not been able to determine yet, the movie industry's hands-off and go-slow policy regarding the NVA over the past two years seems to have been abandoned. This appears to have occurred several months ago at a hush-hush weekend house party at the Beverly Hills mansion of Sid Glick, the head of Paradigm Studios, attended by over 50 people. The guest list included other studio czars, industry CEOs, independent producers, directors, screenwriters, and some major actors and actresses. All without exception were Jewish, and according to our sources down there, even the caterers, the masseurs, the cocaine dealers and the poolside prostitutes were all Jewish, provided by a specialty madam in Bel Air. Whatever was discussed that weekend by Sid Glick's swimming pool, and in his hot tub, and on his private handball court was not for *goyische* ears. The results of that meeting weren't long in coming."

Hill opened his briefcase and took out two large, bulky typescripts hand-bound in heavy cloth report covers. He handed them around the room. "About a month ago, Third Section came into possession of two highly classified

documents from the Dream Machine down there. Both of these are movie scripts. Each studio copy of these preliminary scripts is numbered, a number you will see that I have effaced in these photocopies. The first, the blue-bound one, is from World Artists, chairman of the board Manny Gelblum, Senior Vice President in Charge of Production Hyman Landauer, you get the idea. This script has the working title *Great White North,* written by two top-echelon Hollywood writers, Josh Horowitz and Andrea Franken, and it's being pushed through WA by the producer David Katz, with Arthur Bernstein slated to direct. This abortion is up to the slimiest Judaic standards, needless to say. It's the story of a wicked and evil NVA terrorist who discovers to his horror that he's really Jewish, and so he ends up returning to his Jewish roots and turning over his whole brigade to the feds, led by a sassy and charismatic black FBI agent with a lame white sidekick for comic relief, and of course his Strong Womyn supervisor. In the closing scene the rabbi places a yarmulke on this character's head in a prison synagogue while he's in chains in an orange jump suit, and he weeps for joy at having found peace at last as they take him away to the needle room to be executed."

"Oh, for God's sake!" snarled Larry Donner in disgust, throwing the script on the table.

"We'll take your word for it, Lieutenant," said Lawlor.

"You don't need to eat all of a bad egg to know it's rotten," said Hannon contemptuously. "The smell is enough."

"Yeah, well, if that one smells, this one in the brown cover reeks like the sewers of Calcutta," said Hill. "It's from Mammoth Productions, which is a subsidiary of Sid Glick's Paradigm and run by his brother Shlomo, but this one has Sid's fingerprints all over it. The working title is *Homeland,* and I won't even try to describe the plot to you. It is a compendium of every anti-racist, anti-Nazi, anti-white cinematic cliché since *To Kill A Mockingbird.* We are not just wicked and evil. We're ugly and fat, or else alcohol-skinny, usually covered with prison tattoos, we have black teeth and body odor and we fart and pick our noses, we're psychotic killers and craven cowards, we bomb babies, we're all closet queers of course, and needless to say we abuse white women—in fact, the flick opens with a group of so-called Volunteers gang-raping a beautiful blond white girl whom we suspect of being an informer and then cutting her up with a chain saw. Do you want me to go on?"

"We get the picture, Lieutenant," said Hatfield grimly.

"If we're all supposed to be queers, then how do we come to be gang-raping women?" asked McNeill sarcastically.

Morehouse raised his finger bookishly. *"A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.* Ralph Waldo Emerson."

"You need to understand that these are not just made-for-TV movies or B flicks that will hit the theaters for three weeks and then go to DVD," Hill told them. "These are going to be the biggest blockbusters Tinsel Town has put out in years. They have both been granted starting budgets of one hundred million dollars each. Virtually every speaking role in both movies will be played by a major or minor star. Some of these are only cameo roles or walk-ons, and they've got every once-famous has-been from the past twenty years lined up for the parts, even some old coots from the 80s and 90s they've dug up out of retirement or some nursing home. Mary Steenburgen is playing an old lady in a wheel chair, Ted Danson's doing a wino and Melissa Rivers is playing a Yiddishe grandmama, with a nice long shawl to conceal her colostomy bag. The opening titles will read like a Who's Who of Hollywood for the past quarter century; the casts alone will draw audiences since almost everybody's favorite star is bound to be in there somewhere. And get this—they're digging into the old archives and they're going to be including some gratuitous dream sequences and fantasy scenes and whatnot with old movie footage never before seen, outtakes from *Casablanca* and *Citizen Kane* and old Westerns, so they can legitimately give new credits to old stars like Bogart and Bacall, Charlton Heston, Orson Welles, John Wayne, Glenn Ford and Jimmy Stewart."

"Jesus, that's overkill!" exclaimed Lawlor.

"Yeah, but can you imagine what the playbill is going to look like?" Hill asked. "It's a blatant trick, but it will work. People will go see these damned things just to see Charlie Chaplin, Marilyn Monroe, Robert DeNiro and Brad Pitt do a scene together, and to watch all those hams falling all over the set trying to upstage one another. Needless to say, these pictures will be given the very best cameramen, sound men, grips, and crew in the industry, the most skillful cinematographers and set designers, top-notch special effects and fight coordinators, the zonks. They're already scouting Northwest-looking locations for outdoor shooting, in Colorado, around the Great Lakes and in New England. They have sense enough to stay away from the Homeland itself, of course, and they're doing their damnedest to keep it all hush-hush. They know how we're going to react. As if it was ever possible to keep any secret in that goldfish bowl down there! But this is what's coming down the pike, comrades, and if we don't put the hammer down on these shenanigans, then from now on it will be more and more of the same, lies, vilification, insults, contempt, world without end!"

"We're putting the hammer down, comrades," said Morehouse. "We've taken a hundred years of this shit from these people. *No more!* It ends now!"

"Who gets to be the hammer?" asked Tommy Coyle eagerly.

"Sorry, Tom," said Morehouse, genuinely commiserating. "You and Harry are too badly needed up here with your brigades, and that goes for you battalion commanders as well. I'm afraid the reason you are here is because we're going to need your help and your concurrence to cherry-pick your units. The actual hammering will be planned and organized by the Third Section, but the nails will be from Portland and the North Shore."

"Who ya gonna call? Jew-Busters!" laughed Charlie Washburn.

"But we don't want to just arbitrarily start snatching bodies right, left, and center for Task Force Director's Cut," Wayne Hill assured them. "We have a list of names and we want to go over every one of them with you beforehand."

"Who and what, exactly, will you need for this special team?" asked Hannon. "What kind of skill sets are you looking for?"

"For that I'll hand over the floor to a colleague of mine. I'm sure you've noticed that we have a comrade here tonight who hasn't said much so far," said Hill. "Gentleman, allow me to introduce Lieutenant Charlie Randall, one of our racial brothers from Down Under, who will serve as company commander for Task Force Director's Cut." Randall got up and stepped forward, and stood by the hearth, leaning on the mantelpiece.

"G'day, gents," said the young Australian. "Threesec chose me to ramrod this little shindig because you can tell I'm not from around these parts the first time I open me mouth, and of course because of me rugged good looks as well, which will make it credible that I'm an aspiring actor and give me an excuse for hanging around movie people and places at all odd hours. Not to mention that me life's vocation is manufacturing dead sheenies, a craft I've gotten bloody good at, if I do say so meself."

"I will be the XO, the planning and intelligence officer," Hill told them, "For the third member of the task force's Trouble Trio, I would like to ask Zack here for the services of Lieutenant Christina Ekstrom as quartermaster. I heard she had to go under a while back."

"Yeah, she's been helping her dad out, and she's as knowledgeable on guns as he is," said Zack. "But before that she was our eyes and ears in local law enforcement for almost two years. I think she could do with a change of scene. The FBI have a real case of the ass for her because of the first tickle she helped us with, and they want her almost as bad as they want me. She's a good choice."

"We want to bring in at least six or eight other female comrades so we can make up boy-girl teams for the large amount of surveillance we'll need to do," said Hill. "Established couples would be best if you can spare them.

I also want Lieutenant Vincent Pascarella and two Volunteers of Pascarella's choosing from First Brigade EOD. I really want the Red Baron himself, but I was told flat out by the Army Council that he's too badly needed here and the risk of losing him would be too great, so I can't have him. We're going to be making some noise down there, and we might even pop a chug-chug or two."

Coyle nodded. "Okay, you got Pascarella and two EODs."

"Then from Second Brigade, I'd like to take Johnny Featherstone along for torch work. I hear he's good at it."

"Yeah, he uses some goop one of our techie nerds made up that burns hot enough to melt steel, and he knows just where to place it and how much," agreed Hannon. "When Johnny flicks his Bic, you can put what's left of the joint in a teacup. Okay, you got him."

"Now, dollars to donuts here's where you comrades are going to go downright mulish on us," said Randall, with a friendly grin. "We want at least four of your best snipers, including Cat-Eyes Lockhart himself."

"I kind of saw that one coming," admitted Coyle. "To be honest, I've been worried about Cat. Things are getting really hot for him in Portland again. His face is on TV every night and on every damned wall and telephone pole. They want him so bad they're slavering, and his DT bounty is the only million-dollar reward in the NVA for a non-officer. He seems to have some kind of magical ability to move almost openly in the city without being spotted, but that kind of luck can't hold forever. As much as I hate to lose Cat and his body count, I actually think it would be a good idea for him to go on the road again for a while outside Portland, until the heat here cools down a bit. You got him."

"We need at least four good full auto men for watch-dogging and for spray jobs where necessary," continued Randall. "Machine-gunners who can actually hit what they aim at and not just play John Wayne on the sands of Iwo Jima. Two from each brigade."

"Jimmy Wingo," said Coyle reluctantly. "Ace Biedermann to back him up."

"Mike Gauss," said Hannon. "And, uh, let's see—Willis Nixon."

"Machine Gun Mike? Good on him, mate," said Randall happily. "As a sweetener, you can tell them they'll be given two M-60s, a PKM, and an HK-11, with plenty of belts and ammo, and they can pick and train their own crews once we get down there."

"You plan on playin' Rambo down there, Lieutenant?" asked Conway, intrigued.

"We plan on rattling those Hebrews' cages but good," said Randall firmly. "Now, I mentioned we need at least six or eight gun bunnies, couples are fine, but bear in mind we're dealing with Jews here, and so we're going to need at least a few of those girls to serve as Loreleis and set honey traps. This will usually require the Sheilas to pose as aspiring actresses. As male chauvinist and crude as this may sound, they're going to have to be built and look good enough to be Loreleis and starlets in Hollywood, where there's a ten on every corner. Our girls have to stand out enough to attract some randy kike across a crowded cocktail party, you know wot I mean. You need to square that with them before they sign on. Let me know who's willing."

"Mmmm, we got that really sweet looking preppy girl in A Company, Becky, but her father's a major knob and she's too well known in society circles under her real name," said Bud Lawlor. "She might run into someone who knows her at the wrong moment. Kicky McGee would fill the bill, if you can target a kike who likes 'em blue-collar and tattooed. She's uh, experienced. No disrespect to the comrade, she's a cool hand and she's gutsy. She's carried some packages, she's driven for Cat Lockhart, and we all saw her in action on Flanders Street."

"Any of her tattoos racial?" asked Randall. "Any Confederate flags or Swastikas, or anything that might give the game away?"

"No, not racist, just Celtic biker kind of stuff, some flowers and barbed wire and witchy motifs. She's got a couple of leather and denim outfits she looks hot as a two dollar pistol in."

"She hooked up?" asked Randall.

"She and Jimmy Wingo have a thing going," Lawlor told them. "That's another reason I thought of her."

"She's in, then," decided Randall. "Maybe she can lead Sammy Steinberg into a close encounter with Jimmy's M-60."

"What will be your plan of attack, Lieutenant Randall?" asked Hatfield.

"The main strategic objective here is to neutralize the Hollywood movie and television apparatus as an effective weapon of enemy propaganda," said Randall. "It is now such a weapon because of the Jewish control of these industries. We have to get the Jews' hands off the levers of power and creative control down there as much as possible, not only by terminating individual hebes, but by establishing a credible deterrent sufficient to prevent those reptiles from producing dingo doo like those things there." Randall pointed to the scripts on the coffee table. "They have to know that even to contemplate producing an anti-NVA movie or television episode means bloody near certain death. We won't be so much going after movie stars or actors themselves

as we will be taking down the Jews who actually decide what movies and shows are made, and what their contents will be—studio heads, producers, directors, and screenwriters, and the money men. We have several objectives. First, to physically prevent these Jews from doing the dirty. A dead Jew can't make an anti-white movie. Secondly, to create a psychological disincentive to make propaganda movies and telly for the Americans, since live Jews and liberals don't wish to become dead ones. Finally, and this is a long-term goal, we want to demonstrate to the extensive Gentile community in the movie and television world down there that Jewish control of their industry, their money, their speech, and their creative talents is *not* some kind of perpetual, God-ordained inevitability. We want to show them and the whole world that Jewish power can be *broken,* right in the heart of their own oldest and most cherished empire in this country."

"Gentile Hollywood people have been conditioned all their lives to a second-class status in their own world, in their work, and in their thoughts and their public utterances," said Red Morehouse. "To them the Jewish control of their existence seems to be a law of nature, an immutable fact of life. Anyone who dares to stand up against it, or who makes a drunken slip like even the biggest stars like Max Garrett sometimes do, is crushed. But no one who has to live under Jewish rule likes it, and no one who is confronted on a daily basis with Jews in the flesh likes them as individuals. In a way, we're trying to show the stars and the genuine film artists down there the same thing we're trying to show our own people here in the Homeland—that *it is possible to resist,* and that the enemy is not invincible."

"Which brings us to our own debut," said Randall with an evil chuckle. "Gents, I am sure you've all seen the great blood and gore flicks of the past. *Halloween. Friday the Thirteenth. Texas Chainsaw Massacre. Prom Night. Black Christmas.* Well, the Northwest Volunteer Army is going to add another memorable date to the calendar of Hollywood horror. The one that will beat all those other nights of horror all to hell and gone, the goriest splatterfest of them all." He leered and leaned forward as he hoarsely stage-whispered:

"Oscar Night!"

XVIII

All The World's A Stage

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts.

As You Like It—Act II, Scene 7

It took several weeks to collect all the personnel of Task Force Director's Cut, move them down to the Los Angeles area, and get them settled into a series of safe houses and apartments, along with a carefully selected complement of weapons, ammunition and supplies. Pascarella and his bomb crew set up their own separate EOD unit in a rented garage in Seal Beach. The Annual Award Presentation Ceremony of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which was the actual, formal name of Oscar night, traditionally took place in late February or sometimes in March. This year the awards ceremony was scheduled for a Monday in early March, which gave the Volunteers only a few more weeks to plan and implement their attack, or else they would be forced to wait another year.

The NVA was assisted immeasurably by one of the operatives of the Army's Third Section who lived and worked in the film community, a mild-mannered and opaque man referred to, on the rare occasions when it was necessary to refer to him at all, as "The Talented Mr. Ripley." This was the code name for Barry Brewer, a Hollywood talent agent who had chosen his own *nom de guerre*. ("Talent agent, talented, get it?" he explained to the few who were in on his secret.) Brewer looked like a podiatrist or an accountant, slim and middle-aged

and slightly pallid, but he was a lifelong Tinseltowner with celluloid in his blood who had never worked anywhere else or thought of working anywhere else. He knew the town and the people and the industry like the back of his hand. He had built up a lifetime of connections in high and low places, which he placed at the disposal of the NVA when his slow-burning hatred of the Jews and what they had done simply snapped one day, and in a moment of cosmic clarity, Barry Brewer knew what he had to do. He picked up the telephone and made a call to a detective agency in Vancouver, British Columbia, and asked to speak to a private dick he'd used on some background checks and other petty stuff, a man whom he had reason to believe harbored politically incorrect thoughts. In this belief Brewer was correct. Through a long and convoluted chain of events Brewer was eventually brought into contact with Wayne Hill, and the rest, as they say, became history.

Brewer was hooked into the Hollywood scene on every level; he knew everyone from the security guard on the parking lot gate at Tri-Star, to every independent producer on contract with 21st Century Fox, to the makeup artists at CBS television, and he could get a call returned by almost anybody in town except for the biggest studio heads and the first-string stars and celebrities. But except for a small number of people in the industry who really were in the know, he was never thought of as a connected guy. Being a Gentile, Brewer was peripheral as far as Big Hollywood went, but in one sense that was an advantage, because it enabled him to stay well below the radar. Non-Jews in his line of work were considered such minor players that they were almost invisible. No one gossiped about Barry, no paparazzi followed him, no reporters for the industry rags or the tabloids hounded him for quotes or inside info. Not being Jewish or gay, it was simply assumed that he *had* no inside info to give. The result was that he was able to accomplish a whole range of difficult logistic and supply-related tasks for the NVA without so much as making a ripple in the cesspool, including putting up a whole crew of the Army's heaviest hitters all around town.

The command post was a penthouse apartment in Culver City. On the last day in February, a strategy session was convened for the team's staff with Lieutenant Wayne Hill and Lieutenant Charlie Randall presiding, and The Talented Mr. Ripley present. It was agreed that while Brewer needed to keep his identity as secret as possible, since he formed the team's base of local support in Los Angeles he needed to be known at least by sight to the leadership cadre. They had no idea how long any of them were going to last, and all of them needed to be able to hook up with Mr. Ripley in case of urgent need. The secondary leadership group consisted of Volunteer Jesse

"Cat-Eyes" Lockhart, Volunteer Lee Washburn, Quartermaster Lt. Christina Ekstrom, and Volunteer Jimmy Wingo.

"This will be the most significant mass assault on a Zionist target that the Northwest Volunteer Army has yet attempted," said Hill. "It will also send an indelible message to the enemy and to the world, one that Hollywood is particularly able to understand. Do you remember the famous scene in *The Godfather* where the big Jew movie producer wakes up in the dawn, in his big mansion and his big bed with the silk sheets, and he looks over and he sees the severed head of his million-dollar race horse lying next to him in a bloody mess, and he screams and screams and screams and screams as the camera fades? That is the effect we are looking for in every sense of the word."

"I remember the producer caved in and gave the Godfather what he wanted," said Christina, sitting on the couch. She was wearing her usual long-sleeved blouse to conceal her negroid-inflicted scars.

"Exactly. And why?" asked Hill. "The big kike, the Burger King, caved because he suddenly understood that he was dealing with people to whom his power, his money, his influence and his personal viciousness meant nothing. For possibly the first time in his life, the big Jew was dealing with men who weren't afraid of him and all he could command, and who would accept nothing less from him than total compliance and submission. That is the message we want to send, not only to the big Jews who rule Hollywood, but also to the whole world. *The power of these people is at an end.* This tickle is going to be our equivalent of a big bloody horse's head in the Jews' beds. But there is more to the message we are sending even than that. We want all of white America to see, and to think: If ZOG cannot protect the cream of Hollywood's élite, then they can't protect anybody. If ZOG can't protect the powerful Jews of Hollywood, then maybe it's time we got onto the winning side. That is why it is imperative that we hit the Oscar ceremony itself, live and on camera."

"Right, thanks to The Talented Mr. Ripley here, we have been able to score a few intelligence coups," said Randall. "The primary organization responsible for security will be the Centurion Group, which also handled the last several Oscar shows. Mr. Ripley has been able to recruit an informant on the inside who has so far proven reliable, on the condition that after the fireworks we take him on as a Volunteer and take him Home with us. We have been able to get a very good assessment of the terrain and what we will be up against by way of enemy armed forces and security measures. I'll let Rip here run all this down for you. Oscar and I have taken the guided tour of the target area, but Chris and Cat and Lee haven't yet. I want every Volunteer to do so within the next few days."

Hill nodded. "That's essential. The Kodak Theater management kindly provides these tours for a mere ten dollars a head, from 10:30 to 2:30 every day, with tours departing every half hour. Go in pairs, one pair for each tour. I know there's a risk they'll ID some of us from security tapes later, but this is a major operation, and I want everyone as prepared as possible. Everyone needs to have a chance to look over our killing ground."

"I'll organize it," said Christina.

"For the sake of these comrades who haven't had the tour yet, though, could you go over the theater itself, Mr. Ripley?" asked Hill.

"Certainly, Lieutenant. We have a bit of luck in that this year's Oscars will be almost a carbon copy of last year's, with one exception, which I will get into in due course," said Brewer. "The awards ceremony will be held in the Kodak Theater in the Hollywood and Highland Center, which as you can guess from the name is situated on the corner of Hollywood Boulevard and Highland Avenue. This is an eleven-acre complex in the center of Hollywood itself, built to look like an old movie set, specifically the set from D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance,* which I find ironic in view of the monumental example of intolerance we are about to set." There was laughter around the room. "I understand that they were actually able to run down and buy up a lot of surviving bits and pieces from that hundred year-old set, by the way. The Center is mostly a yuppie shopping mall catering to the wealthy upper crust and also, of course, to hordes of tourists and movie fans. In addition to all the usual boutiques and fern bars, upscale restaurants and souvenir knick-knack and junk shops, which don't concern us except as possible obstacles, the Center also contains Grauman's Chinese Theater and the sidewalk with all the stars' footprints, the Kodak Theater, and the Hollywood Royale Hotel, the last two of which do concern us.

"First, the theater itself," Brewer went on. "It seats a little over 3,400 people, and the whole layout is as plush as it gets, deep carpet and large padded seats with velvet plum upholstery, snazzy fountain in the lobby, several cocktail bars and restaurants, so forth and so on. Could one of you hit the lights, please? Thank you." Brewer turned on an overhead projector that threw a huge diagram of the theater onto one pale cream wall of the apartment, and indicated various parts of it with a pointer. "The main entrance is here, on Hollywood Boulevard, set back from the street. There is a small plaza in front of the main entrance, which is where the long stretch limos all pull up and the big stars do their glamour walk for the television cameras and paparazzi, up the roped-off red carpet and into the building. I'm sure you've all seen this on the tube, the men in tuxes and all kinds of outlandish getups, the women

wearing designer gowns that cost more than a white working family earns in several years, glittering with jewels and thousand-dollar hair dos.

"The actual show always starts at 5:30 PM Pacific time, so that East Coast viewers can turn on their TVs at 8:30 and catch the whole show before they have to get to bed so they can get up for work the next morning. The parade of arriving celebrity arrogance starts at about three o'clock in the afternoon, as does the media coverage. This means that the LAPD starts blocking off the streets around the Center at about two thirty, so the stars won't have to worry about traffic jams and the limos will have plenty of parking. Top celebs and studio executives, etcetera get to have their limos parked along Hollywood Boulevard during the show, so they'll be readily available afterwards, if the celebs in question decide not to attend the Governor's Ball, which always follows every awards ceremony. A lot of the losers don't, because they're so pissed off they didn't win an Oscar. The overflow parks in the lot next to the Hollywood Royale hotel, off Highland Avenue, which lot will also have been cleared especially for the occasion. Bear this in mind; it means that from about two o'clock onward, the entire exterior area around the Center for at least three or four blocks around will be crawling with cops, directing traffic and looking out for gate-crashers and the assorted L.A. lowlife which this event always draws like shit draws flies. Once inside the theater building itself, the lobby actually consists of five separate levels. There is a sweeping red-carpeted staircase, with cherry wood balustrades in case anyone is interested, that sweeps up to each level, here. There's a series of doors, here, here, here and down along here, which lead out onto the balcony seats and also into the private box seats."

"Any chance we could gain access to a private box or two?" asked Hill keenly. "They look like they'd make good firing posts."

"Tricky," replied Brewer. "They're kept locked by the management, and each box holder has a swipe card that admits him and his guests. Not to mention the fact that they're visible to people in other boxes and up on the catwalk."

"Is there some kind of management or security master swipe card our lad in Centurion could get hold of to get us in?" asked Randall.

"Yes, but there is another problem there. The doors are alarmed and every time they are opened, the opening is recorded in the security control room, along with the identity of the card used," said Brewer.

"We need to keep the private boxes in mind as firing positions, though," said Cat. "I'm looking at these photos you pulled off the internet, and they'd definitely be ideal. Get me and Ron Kolchak into one, or better yet two of

them along one side, and we can not only rake the seats but we can pick off the big knobs in the private boxes opposite."

"Mr. Ripley, what else is in this lobby area?" asked Lee. "Any service or emergency exit stairs that we could maybe use to get up and over the audience?"

"The walls of the ground floor of the lobby and the mezzanine as well are covered with backlit glass plaques containing lists of past Oscar winners, niches with assorted Oscar memorabilia, posters from award-winning flicks, etcetera. This is called the Awards Walk. To answer your question, yes, there are access stairs that run the entire height of the building from sub-basement to roof, but they will all be alarmed on the night, and there will be cameras in the stairwells, and needless to say, on the night the lobby is going to be crawling with both uniformed and plainclothes police and security people, as well as completely covered by closed-circuit TV surveillance," Brewer replied.

Hill frowned. "Our action won't be in the lobby, but there will probably be a lot of things going on to distract the guards, drunks and crowds and such, plus they'll be watching for pickpockets and so on. Where is the security control room and the central camera monitoring point located?"

"Here, ground floor, down this short corridor off the lobby," said Brewer, pointing. "The hallway is sealed off from the lobby by a discreet steel door that requires a code to open, but if you want to get in there, there are several access stairwells going up into the corridors above that are used by the security personnel themselves to get around. Most of the camera observation will be on the lobby itself, the plaza outside, and the other entrances such as the side doors and the basement. They won't be watching the auditorium itself that closely. Remember, they're looking for lone gatecrashers, mostly. Paparazzi, a whole long list of stalkers to the stars they'll have photos and files on, so forth and so on."

Hill nodded. "I'd like to work out a plan so there is no need for any NVA people ever actually to enter the lobby itself, or to enter or exit through the main entrance. Too many cameras, too many people around, and too many things that might go wrong. Inside the main auditorium will be our kill zone."

Brewer nodded. "As you can see in these photographs, the theater itself is laid out as a kind of looped oval structure that looks like a tiara, with sound-reflective ribs running down to the floor all around the chamber to provide for the best possible acoustics. The ceiling is riddled with a spider-web of catwalks and grid work and platforms for spotlights and other lighting, but they're up quite high and the access to these catwalks is guarded so no

weirdos can get up in there and throw stuff down or piss on the audience, which happened once some years ago."

"If we can neutralize the sentries, could the catwalks be our guys' firing positions?" asked Christina.

"That's mighty high up, Chris. We'd be firing down at too sharp an angle for the best accuracy, almost straight down in some cases, it looks like," said Lockhart.

"Plus there would be a problem extracting them from that high a position in all the hullabaloo," said Hill. "We need to get the shooters down a bit lower and give them a bit flatter angle, not to mention get them a bit closer to the targets and closer to their E & E exits."

"Right, one good bit of news regarding the layout in the auditorium," said Brewer with a satisfied smile. "This should make the job a lot easier. I need to give you a little background first, though. In most prior Oscar ceremonies, the celebrities, in which category I include not only the nominees themselves but the presenters, co-hosts, producers, directors, and a raft of the biggest studio executives, were placed in this smaller auditorium here, behind the main stage." Brewer pointed on the schematic. "It's kind of a practice room for the orchestra, and it's soundproofed. By long tradition, this was called the Green Room, and it was a kind of a waiting room, party room, and cabaret for celebs to hang out in, clown around, schmooze, gossip, etcetera. They've got couches and armchairs, the management sets up a bar, and they've got big screen TVs to watch the show on. The original idea was that the big shots should be required to spend their big night being gawped at by the unwashed multitudes as little as possible, and should not be required to sit through all the boring preliminaries like Best Foreign Film and Best Animation and Best Documentary and all that. Although the television audience doesn't see it, in most Oscar ceremonies the big stars and suits and their bejeweled and designer gown bedecked consorts don't actually come out and sit in their reserved seats on the front row until the Big Five awards come up—Best Picture, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Director, and Best Screenplay. Also, sometimes Best Supporting Actor and Actress, depending on who's been nominated, who's hot that year, who's spatting with whom and who's buggering whom, you get the idea.

Brewer leaned forward. "However, comrades, this year things are going to be different. There won't be a Green Room, and a lot of the celebs are really in a snit about it."

"What happened?" asked Christina.

"The fact is that this town and its celebrity denizens are getting even more coarse and out of control every year, if that's possible," Brewer explained.

"A lot of the so-called hot stars of today are like most young white people, overgrown adolescents who don't quite seem ever to have come back from spring break in Florida or Cancun, and who behave accordingly. Add way too much money, way too much ego, booze and cocaine and designer drugs into the mix, and it gets really risky letting some of these bozos in front of a live mike and a camera. I'm sure you catch enough TV or news to know that in the past few years there have been a number of bizarre incidents at the Academy Awards?"

"I caught it when Brooke Barbour flashed her tits last year," said Randall.

"Yeah, and then that sterling Affikin-Amurkin Darnell Washington came out on stage coked out of his gourd, gabbled like a fool into the mike for five minutes of non-stop gibberish, and pantomimed wiping his ass with the envelope for Best Director when it was handed to him," laughed Lee Washburn.

"Oh, last year was a hoot," said Brewer with a chuckle. "In addition to those two incidents, Jennifer Alison got into a screaming match in the Green Room with that damned half-breed Antonia Jardine over the husband-stealing thing, and Jen knocked her winding with a right hook. Toni had a noticeable shiner just coming out when she accepted Best Actress. Paul Warren was so drunk he could barely stand up, and he couldn't even read the teleprompter to present Best Screenplay. Manny Weinstein was so razzed and hyper on his little blue pills that his acceptance speech for Special Recognition for service to Israel consisted of a long rant accusing his neighbor in Malibu of being an anti-Semite and Arab spy. I think the guy was Polish and he was an accountant or something, but Homeland Security arrested him anyway the next day. Some paparazzi with a video cam got into the Green Room men's room and found two nominated directors performing a deviate sexual act in one of the stalls, and managed to get out of the building with the disc even with a security guard's bullet in his leg. That footage ended up on the internet, of course. And finally, Brittany Malloy was so nervous about her Best Supporting Actress nomination that when she hit the Green Room she knocked back most of a bottle of Bacardi. Then when she didn't win, she ran up into the catwalks, and somehow she got over the stage, screaming she was going to kill herself. The guards tried to catch her, and then she decided it was funny, so as the guards chased her around the catwalks she started taking off her clothes. The last part of the broadcast had this deranged cackling laughter floating down from above, as well as this rain of female apparel down to her black lace panties drifting down onto the stage while the awards were being

presented, and the winners making their acceptance speeches. Yeah, last year was pretty surreal."

"Bet the ratings were good, though," suggested Hill.

"The best in ten years," agreed Brewer. "Barbour flashed her rack early enough in the proceedings for the word to get around, and people started changing the channel to the Academy Awards. But the Academy and the studio heads have decided they've had enough of these doped and drunken shenanigans coming out of the Green Room, and this year they're giving their egotistical protégés a rap on the knuckles in an effort to get them to stay sober long enough to accept their victory or defeat with becoming grace, and not make complete horse's asses out of themselves. This year, they've had the management of the Kodak remove the first twelve rows of seats in front of the orchestra pit, and they've set up a kind of sidewalk café arrangement where the nominated and the celebrated can sit at these nice big round tables and be served by waiters with posh and civilized refreshments like little ladies and gents. They can sip champagne and nosh on shrimp salad and caviar and Brie and such, while they sit through the opening dance number and applaud the earlier awards while pretending to give a damn, which is part of their punishment. The theory is that while they're in view of the audience and the television crews they won't do lines of coke, knock back vodka like a Russian lumberjack, belt one another in the kisser or perform Levantine deviations on the tablecloth. Hopefully not, anyway."

"What you're saying is that all the serious glitterati will be sitting right out in the open, exposed to our gunfire?" said Cat-Eyes Lockhart.

"You got it," said Brewer, grinning back at him merrily. "Fortune does indeed favor the brave, it would seem."

"Now, you said you'd gotten hold of the enemy security procedure manual?" asked Hill.

"Our man at Centurion came through," said Brewer with a nod. "He was able to get onto the Oscar night detail, so we'll have at least one inside man. Didn't take too much doing, since the Motion Picture Academy is Centurion's biggest client and the annual awards their biggest moneymaker. They're canceling all vacations and putting everybody, his kid brother, and his dog on duty at the Kodak."

"Well, let's see if we can lose 'em this big contract next year," chuckled Randall.

"Our guy was able to photocopy the Centurion operations plan, at some risk to himself, and e-fax it to one of our secure computers. I printed out

four copies, and we can make more if needed," said Brewer, handing Hill a binder notebook with about sixty pages in it.

"Pardon me as a Nervous Nellie, but that e-mail address can't be traced back to you, can it?" asked Hill anxiously.

"No, not unless I was under physical surveillance and seen going into this place, which I am positive I wasn't," Brewer told him. "I'm sure if the feds or the L.A. blues had the slightest whiff of suspicion about me, I would have disappeared or at least been picked up and grilled before this."

"Okay. But we need this guy in Centurion and we need you, so make sure you both stay as clean as you can. Keep contact to a minimum, I'm sure you can figure out the drill. Right, let's take a look," said Hill. He rapidly turned the pages. "Jesus! Seventy Centurion rent-a-cops, ten LAPD uniforms, ten plainclothes renters, five plainclothes city dicks, plus over a hundred LAPD outside for traffic control and perimeter security! That's almost two hundred armed men!"

"Not to mention a passel of impeccably-suited private bodyguards and goons in the entourages of the stars and the big cheeses, all packing legal and heavy with full permits," said Brewer. "You boys can expect some return fire."

"Metal detectors, okay, that I would expect," said Hill.

"On every single entrance to the theater down to the basement, without exception, upstairs, downstairs, all around the town," added Brewer.

"Sniffer dogs! Shit!" exclaimed Hill.

"Both drug and explosive," said Brewer. "The theater will be swept from top to bottom twice, with dogs and electronic sensors, once in the morning and once half an hour before curtain. And to top it all off, closed-circuit TV and fiber-optic surveillance over every square inch of the interior. You're lucky they're not expecting trouble."

"Could've fooled me," grunted Charlie Randall.

"No, really, you have to remember that this is Los Angeles, and for Los Angeles this is normal," said Brewer. "At the top you've got some of the wealthiest and most powerful Beautiful People in the world, men and women who make and spend millions every day and who live in a world and in a way that is simply beyond the comprehension of the rest of humanity. But this élite exists in a massive cesspool of some of the most grinding poverty and the dirtiest, most criminal people on earth. It's like someone built the Taj Mahal right in the middle of the Calcutta city dump. These glitterati live and move and work within this shitpit of a city every day, and they have gotten the mechanics of protecting themselves, their possessions, and their lifestyle

down to a fine art. All this security will be on the lookout for gang-bangers, pickpockets and sneak thieves, muggers, serial rapists out to do Debbie, crazed fans stalking the objects of their obsession, weirded-out fanatics who want to seize the microphone on stage and tell everybody that the space aliens are coming to take us all away to our new home in the Crab Nebula, and above all else, those hated paparazzi who make their parasitic living off these celebrities. You have to realize that we will not be the only people who are trying to sneak into the Kodak Theater on the night; those guards will have their hands full with the everyday madness of life in this place, believe me."

Hill sighed. "Well, we've got our work cut out for us, then. The problem of attacking a position like this can be divided into three parts. The first part is breaching the enemy security perimeter, either by stealth or by force."

"You mean we just get as close as we can to the doors, and then we come in smoking?" asked Christina.

"We could do something like that, yes," agreed Hill. "But there are several problems with that approach. First off, we want a quality bag, not just quantity. We're not out to shoot down security guards and hangers-on in the lobby. I want this to be as surgical as we can make it, and take out as many major influentials as we can, crippling the Dream Machine by decapitating its leadership and management. I don't just want all these glitterati shitting in their pants when they hear machine guns as their bodyguards are hustling them out the emergency exits, I want them on the floor bleeding. A second objection is that it's a sloppy way to do things, and it will *look* sloppy to the public. I want everyone impressed and stunned by our planning and our stealth and our steely nerve as we creep up on these creeps. And what kind of casualties can we ourselves plan on for a frontal assault like that? 30 percent? 50 percent? More? We have twenty-four of the finest men and women in the NVA down here, and more coming. They are coming here to do a job, to cripple this deadly weapon and knock it out of ZOG's hand, and if we waste the lives of our bravest and best in some kind of wild kamikaze charge we're not only betraying their trust, we are compromising our mission."

"I agree," said Randall with a nod. "I'm jealous of every drop of white blood that gets spilled in this war. Not one Volunteer life lost unnecessarily is acceptable. Not only is it wrong, it's dangerous. The enemy can trade us a hundred lives to one and still come out on top, and we need to remember that."

"So we need to find some way to get in there and get our gunners in place by stealth, then open up when we can maximize the damage," said Christina.

"You got it," said Hill.

"You're determined to use guns and not a bomb?" asked Brewer.

"Yes, for psychological and practical reasons," said Hill. "A bomb big enough to bring down the house, literally, would have to be very carefully placed in advance, in just the right spot, and we probably can't do that under these conditions. We'd have almost no chance of getting a charge that big through the security, properly placed, and primed in the half hour between the sniffer dog check and the opening curtain. There are going to be too many cameras and too many people wandering around all over the building. We need to find some way to get our men in place, and then once they're set, we need to go ahead and open up. The longer we wait, the more chance there is that someone will see something on a security camera or somebody will stumble on one of the firing positions and see guns and masks."

"How many men would you suggest I take inside?" asked Randall.

"Yourself and six others," said Hill. "Two riflemen, two grenadiers, and two full-auto cover men. I would suggest two teams of a rifle, a grenade man, and a machine gunner each, with yourself floating where needed."

"Our man inside Centurion says he's also ready to help if the opportunity arises," put in The Talented Mr. Ripley. "There's nothing like guarding these people to make a normal man hate their guts."

"Cat, you long ago got the envelope for Best Sniper," said Hill. "Who do you nominate for Best Supporting Marksman in a Ballistic Role?"

"Ron Kolchak," said Lockhart without hesitation.

"Gauss and Jimmy here for the machine gunners," suggested Randall.

"Agreed," said Hill. "That leaves grenadiers. After they've thrown their grenades, they will cover the snipers and support the machine gun men with short arms of some kind, an Uzi or a Tek-9, something like that."

"I'd like to go, sir," said Christina.

"No," said Hill. "You're doing too important a job for the Task Force, Chris. We need you where you are."

"It's no reflection at all on your courage, comrade," Randall told her. "No one who knows where you've been for the past two years would ever question that. But you have to understand that there's every chance that some or all of us may not be coming back from this one, and that includes me. You're part of our Trouble Trio, and we can't risk losing any more than one of us at once. Losing two, or God forbid even three of us would cripple the task force. The Volunteers are scattered all over this huge area and don't even know how to locate or communicate with the other teams. That's why neither you nor I nor Lieutenant Hill can go on any combat missions together."

"Chris, if you want to make your bones in the traditional way, I'll make sure it happens while we're down here," Hill assured her. "You have my word. Lee, do you want one of the grenadier slots?"

"Yes, sir," replied Washburn. "Thank you."

"One more," said Randall.

"Kicky McGee," said Christina. "This is a historic hit, and I'd like for us Volunteer girls to have at least some token estrogen involved. Besides, you might need a couple for something. That okay with you, Jim?"

"It's not up to me, but Kick's good for it," agreed Wingo.

"Okay, she's in," said Hill.

"Uh, you still haven't told us how you plan on getting this team inside and into position, Lieutenant," Brewer reminded him gently.

"So I haven't," agreed Hill. He studied the map. "I'd like to know exactly where they're going first, and then let's try to figure out how to get them there. The second of those three parts of the problem I mentioned is getting close enough to terminate the target or targets. The third part, since we're not suicidal Muslims with a yearning to die for Allah, is to extract our people and get them to safety once the hit is made and we've done the most damage we can possibly do." Hill studied the photographs of the huge theater for a minute or so, using a magnifying glass. "Cat, look at these photos. Leaving aside for the moment the question of security patrols and cameras, what do you think about seeing if we can somehow get you and Ron either up on the stage itself, concealed in some sets or props or something, or on the catwalks over the stage so you can fire down through the curtains? I know you said the catwalks were too high and at a bad angle, but they may be the best we can do by way of getting you into position."

"Mmm, very doubtful, sir," said Lockhart. "There would be all kinds of spotlights and footlights and overheads shining in our eyes, and we'd be well illuminated for the enemy to shoot back at us. We need to be on either side of the main kill zone, with the lights overhead or aimed toward the stage and our main target areas, this front area here in front of the orchestra pit where Mr. Ripley says the big knobs are going to have their little swanky tables set up."

"Damn! If only we could get into a couple of those private boxes!" muttered Randall.

"Mmm, I don't know about that. Look at them, Charlie," said Hill, pointing to the boxes in several of the internet photos. "And remember when we saw them on the guided tour? Yeah, they'd be great stands if no one were shooting back at us, but in order for the snipers to aim properly they'd have

to lean over the edge and expose themselves. Ripley's right; there are going to be enough guns down there in the hall so you can expect some return fire. But the catwalks over the audience, the scaffolding on which the lights are mounted, are too high up and a bad angle, plus the extraction problem."

"That leaves the projection booths," said Brewer. "Set into the north and south walls respectively. Here and here." He pointed them out.

"What, exactly, are those for?" asked Hill. "Projecting what?"

"You ever seen the Oscars when they run movie clips of the starring performances?" asked Brewer. "This is where those clips come from. There is a live feed to the television broadcast cable, so the millions at home can see it, but these booths also simultaneously project the clips for Best Actor nominees or whatever onto two screens in the theater so the live audience can see them in a stereo-type effect, one screen lowered down on each side of the proscenium, here and here. The booths are accessible by short little hallways, almost alcoves, that run off the main third floor corridors, here and here. The problem is that each door has an armed guard stationed outside as well as a security camera in the little hallway—the management long ago guessed that somebody might want to get in and tamper with the show's film clips. If our guys can get inside, the view over the auditorium will give the sharpshooters an excellent command of the main kill zone where the celebs will be sitting, and they also should be able to pop anybody in the private boxes who sticks his head up above the edge. When the third floor occupants of the boxes come running out to get away after the shooting starts, then the machine gunner in the hall should be able to drop them."

"Okay, once the guys take out the sentries with a silenced piece, how do they get into the booths?" asked Randall.

"The guard will have a swipe card in a black leatherette case in his belt, to gain him admittance to the booth in case of need," said Hill, looking at the appropriate page on the photocopied Centurion Group procedural orders. "They get the card off his belt and swipe it. There will be a single projectionist inside the booth, and he or she has to be silenced, quickly. The armed guards we can't take a chance on, but if the projectionist inside is white, I'd rather they not be killed, just cuffed and their mouths taped. What are these booths like inside?"

"Small, but not too cramped," said Brewer. "The guys will have to move the projection camera back out of the aperture, but it rolls on a kind of track set into the floor. The grenade throwers will have room for a good wind-up. The aperture is about six feet long and three feet high, so the shooters should have a good pan and even a little cover from any return fire. The distance

down to the front row tables where the main targets will be sitting will be something over a hundred feet, and about a twenty-five degree angle. They should be able to get a lot of hits. The stage itself is big as hell, one hundred and thirteen feet wide and sixty feet deep, and the main podium will be maybe seventy yards from the projection booths."

"We can clear the stage," said Cat.

"Uh, guys, aren't we forgetting something?" asked Christina. "What about the security cams in both the little hallways, and also in the main corridor? We're going to have to get into the building and move through it, transporting weapons, not only observed by mobs of people and with guards stationed at every door, but also under surveillance from a central security camera system in the control room."

"We have to find some way to take out the whole security camera system at once," said Hill, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

"Which will immediately alert any security supervisor with the intelligence of grapes that something is going down," pointed out Brewer.

"Yes, but he won't know what," said Hill. "What's the first thing people do when a computer or electronic thingummy of any kind goes on the fritz? They tap it, shake it, re-boot it, run diagnostic tests, and try to figure out whether or not it's working properly. My guess is that whoever is running the security control room won't immediately start screaming that the sky is falling when his cameras go out. He's going to push buttons and click switches, ask his technician to test the system and waste how many precious seconds before he decides to go on full alert? Twenty? Thirty? Sixty? You can do a lot in sixty seconds if you're fast and you know where you're going and what to do when you get there.

"Right, the basic plan is as follows: We get the seven-Volunteer team inside the Kodak, conceal them temporarily, yank all security cameras, although as yet we don't know how we're going to do that, and then before the guards can react, we sprint for these two projection booths, take down the guards, get inside the booths, get set up, and on Charlie's signal Cat fires the opening shot and takes down the biggest kike he can sight in on. Then we do the old Shock and Awe trick. The Mad Minute should actually last between thirty and forty-five seconds. By the time the security commander knows for certain that it's not just his cameras blowing a fuse and something really is happening, the guns are going off and there's no more concealment required. The grenadiers will throw two grenades each, and keep one in reserve for the E & E. The first grenades will go as soon as the firing starts, then another two after thirty seconds. The full auto men will cover the corridors outside the projection

booths and keep them clear of enemies, cack any ZOG goons who try to gain entry to the corridor and any glitterati who pop out of the private boxes into the halls. Then the grenadiers and the full auto men start popping smoke bombs, filling the theater with smoke and creating mass confusion, maybe even popping the sprinkler system just for shits and giggles, while our team gets out the way they came in."

"Which will be . . . ?" prompted Christina.

"That's the skeleton for us to build on guys, and yes, I know it has a couple of gaping holes," admitted Hill. "The two biggest ones being how do we take out the cameras and, yes, ma'am," he looked at Christina, "how the hell do we get in there to begin with?" Hill sighed. "Something about the air down here must put people in mind of movies all the time. I'm thinking now about the first *Star Wars,* when Luke Skywalker and his rebel space fighters were attacking the Death Star. That's kind of what we're doing now. Luke found a single small, vulnerable entry point, a waste disposal duct or something, that he could shoot a missile through right into the core of the Death Star. That's what we need to find."

"Oh, I know where that is," said Brewer.

"Eh?" said Charlie.

Brewer pointed to the map. "You can't see the basement levels on this schematic, but right below the back of the stage, here, just below the old Green Room, there is a more or less secret entrance into the Kodak Theater. It's an underground tunnel or walkway that leads to the lobby of the Hollywood Royale hotel about four hundred yards away at the northeast corner of the Hollywood and Highland Center complex. There's no security guards or cameras either in the tunnel itself, or on either end."

"You *knew* about this?" demanded Randall incredulously. "And us sitting here beating our brains out all this time, trying to find a point of entry?"

Brewer grinned at him. "A good movie always has surprise twists. Seriously, it's semi-secret, largely a matter of Hollywood gossip and rumor, and before I said anything I had to make sure that this passageway really did exist, and then see if it could be accessible and usable for us. This subterranean corridor has been there for some years. I don't know when it was first built. The why is a little more complex and bizarre. You remember what I told you about all those hijinks in the Green Room in past shows? Well, there are times during an Academy Awards show when, for the purposes of the celebrities and the studio executives, a surreptitious entry or exit from the ceremonies, sometimes willing and sometimes unwilling, is desirable. Mostly just to avoid media and paparazzi, of course. But also, a star may have become completely drunk or

stoned or hysterical over losing an award, and gone completely out of control, and he or she has to be removed from the premises and taken away to get cleaned up and calmed down, but discreetly, not in front of the audience or the massed media and paparazzi. Brittany Malloy's little high-wire striptease at last year's awards is a good example. She was wrapped in some cop's jacket and taken out by this underground exit and straight into a waiting ambulance, thence to Betty Ford, which is kind of the movie studios' private Bastille for stars they want to keep around for a while because they're still bankable at the box office, but who need some straightening out. Put it this way, not everybody who is sent to Betty Ford actually has an addiction problem. Sometimes they're kind of doing time. The Burger Kings kept poor old Max Garrett in there for six months after he asked that cop who pulled him over down in Malibu if he was a Jew, and fined him millions of dollars, which he had to pay before they'd let him out. Otherwise they would have had a shrink commit him to a real looney bin with rubber walls."

"Unbelievable," said Lee Washburn, shaking his head.

"Sometimes police or medical assistance may be required backstage and the big studio moguls like Sid Glick may decide not to bother the regular Awards Show security or medical personnel and handle whatever the problem is on the QT, with everyone coming and going below ground. That passage is also intended, ironically, as an emergency escape route for the stars and the big cheeses if any bad acts break out in the auditorium, a fire or some looney tune movie fan with a gun, something like that. That's why the passage comes out near the Green Room, which is where most of the high weirdness has taken place up until this year. It's actually possible that when the shooting stops, our guys and some of these hebes may be heading toward the same exit. Glick and the BKs have always decreed that this secret tunnel *not* be covered by guards or cameras, because of the potential for embarrassment and blackmail."

"Okay, that means if we can get our assault team into the Hollywood Royale hotel, we can get them into the Kodak unobserved?" asked Christina.

"Mmmm, maybe," said Brewer. "There is a definite protocol involving the use of this underground corridor. It's locked down on both the hotel and theater ends, and can only be opened with one of those damned swipe cards. The Hollywood Royale management has a master, and so do Sid Glick and a few of the Burger Kings, and temporary time-coded copies are issued every Oscar night to anyone whom the BKs think might need one, or who can wheedle one out of the hotel manager. Our guys will probably end up having to carry about three of those cards per team, to open various doors."

"So how do we get one?" asked Hill.

"Here's where the plot thickens," said Brewer. "This year, some of the stars and lesser species who miss their Green Room have clubbed together, and in a kind of spiteful thumbing of their plastic surgery-enhanced noses at the studio execs, they have pooled some of their ample spare change and rented two whole floors of the Hollywood Royale for two nights, the night before and the night of the Awards Ceremony and the Governor's Ball, which is held in the Kodak's 40,000 square-foot ballroom. They have allegedly scammed a master copy of the key card for the underground tunnel from somebody at the hotel for a staggering sum, and had copies made, but only for the glitterati élite. The plan is to have their own series of little private parties and orgies running in the background at the Royale while everyone is all nice and smiling and polite at the main functions. All the while, everyone will be slipping out through the tunnel to these party rooms at the Royale for a snort of coke or a shot of smack or a quick dipping of the wick in some receptacle or other, or else just to flip the bird to anyone who dares to try and control these people's behavior even for a single night."

"So all we need is to scam our own copy of one of these swipe cards off a real live movie star," sighed Hill glumly. "I don't suppose you've recruited any Oscar nominees into the Third Section's intelligence apparatus, have you, Mr. Ripley?" Brewer said nothing, but smiled genially at them all.

"'Strewth, you haven't, have you?" said Randall, looking up at Brewer sharply. "I mean, not really?"

"I'm a talent agent, remember?" replied Brewer. "That's what I do."

"You're kidding!" said Hill, staring at him.

"I think before we proceed any further, guys, we need to adjourn the meeting for a bit and I need to take Lieutenants Hill and Randall to meet the jewel in Third Section's crown," said Brewer. "Gentlemen, we're going to Beverly Hills."

XIX

A Star Is Suborned

My resolution's plac'd, and I have nothing
Of woman in me. Now from head to foot
I am marble-constant.

Antony and Cleopatra—Act V, Scene 2

Brewer made a call on his cell phone, spoke briefly with the person on the other end, and an hour later he drove the two officers to Beverly Hills in his late-model Lexus. Their destination was not the expected huge mansion with a swimming pool and a tennis court. Instead, Brewer pulled into a block of four upmarket but understated condos in the Spanish colonial style, circling a cobblestoned central courtyard with a fountain, discreetly set back in a small cul-de-sac off Beverly Boulevard. Brewer asked the pair of them to get down low in the rear seat as he punched a code into the box in the flower bed at driver height, and the wrought-iron electronic security gate slowly opened. "Cameras in the courtyard?" asked Hill.

"Yes. I'm her agent and so I have legitimate business here," said The Talented One. "If I park in this space here beside this cedar tree, there's a blind spot that goes all the way up to the front door. That's why I had you both sit in the rear seat, so you can exit from the rear driver's side. Keep your hats and shades on, though, just in case."

On the way there, Brewer had filled them in on the source he had referred to as the jewel in Third Section's crown, and so they evinced no surprise when the door to one of the downstairs condos was opened by a short, voluptuously built young blonde woman in her mid-twenties wearing jeans, sandals, and

a pastel blouse. They stepped inside the apartment into a cedar-lined foyer, and the young woman stood by and waited in silence while Brewer took out a metal detector. She lifted her arms while he ran it quickly over her body. Brewer took out another electronic metered device that looked like a cell phone but wasn't, and he disappeared into the rest of the apartment, scanning each room for listening devices in a practiced routine. While he did so, the woman pantomimed drinking motions with her hand and arched her eyebrows questioningly at the two other men. Hill leaned over and whispered softly, "Coffee would be fine for me, ma'am, and something cold is usually what my friend likes. Non-alcoholic."

She whispered back, so low no listening device could overhear her if any were present. "Yes, I know. General Order Number Ten." She beckoned them into the living room, which was simply yet tastefully furnished with two plush velvet sofas and several leather armchairs, a dining nook and a large open kitchen off to one side. A patio opened out onto a lush green garden of flowers and ferns. She gestured for them to sit down while she went into the kitchen and took a full pot out of the coffee maker and poured two cups, then opened up the refrigerator and took out a large plastic bottle of ginger ale and another of cola, holding them up for Randall. He pointed to the ginger ale, and she filled a large tumbler and added ice cubes. She then put the kettle on the stove, took out a large plain white mug, and put a bag of herbal tea into it.

In the meantime Hill and Randall took the liberty of examining the bookshelves that lined the wall of the living rooms, containing not only books but an extensive collection of music CDs and movie DVDs. Hill always did this whenever he had the chance, since nothing helped better in his assessment of someone's character than learning what that person read and watched and listened to. The woman's literary taste ran toward the classics of drama, and weighty novels such as no one actually read anymore. The plays ran from the Elizabethan and Restoration dramatists such as Dryden, Webster, Ben Jonson, and of course the complete works of Shakespeare, on to the nineteenth century masters such as Chekhov, Strindberg, Ibsen, and Gilbert and Sullivan, with a couple of slim volumes of Eugene O'Neill, a tag end of modernity.

There were writers such as Dickens, Hawthorne, Trollope, Wilkie Collins, Thomas Hardy, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Balzac. Hill was delighted to see collections of Jules Verne and Arthur Conan Doyle's historicals as well, his boyhood favorites. Her poetry library boasted Walt Whitman, Tennyson, and T.S. Eliot, but verged closely enough on political incorrectness so that Hill wondered why it hadn't gotten her into trouble, since she also owned

the legal but frowned-upon works of Rudyard Kipling and Ezra Pound. He was further surprised to see the outright banned works of the Australian poet laureate Henry Lawson, published by one of the pre-10/22 covert Party imprints, which might well have gotten her arrested if anyone had noticed it, knew who the hell Henry Lawson was, and denounced her to Homeland Security. The conspicuous absence of anything gay, lesbian, multicultural, and psychobabble-ish was almost as telling a point in her favor as was what *was* there. Her musical tastes were wide-ranging. There were CDs of Wagner, Mozart, Verdi, Tchaikovsky, Handel, numerous operas, Gregorian chants, the motets of Gesualdo, Celtic music collections, Russian chorals, Doc Watson and Appalachian shape-note singing. Randall looked at Hill oddly, both of them sharing an unspoken thought: a young white female with this kind of taste and education was almost completely unknown in their experience, so what the hell did they have here? Her digital movie collection was the only thing that dated from the 21st Century, or indeed most of the 20th. Of course that included all of her own films and television episodes.

Brewer came into the room. "The place reads clean," he informed Hill and Randall.

"It's not that we don't trust you, Miss Collingwood," began Hill with some diffidence, but she cut him off as she handed him his coffee and Randall the glass of ginger ale.

"Of course you don't trust me!" she said with a merry laugh. "You'd be crazy to trust anybody. Barry sweeps me with that thing every time we meet. I'm not a spy, but you don't know that, and if they ever suspected me they're quite capable of breaking in and bugging my apartment and my car and planting something on me. I understand, and I don't mind."

"Henry Lawson?" asked Charlie Randall, holding up the volume.

She blushed. "I really need to put that away where no one can see it. It's illegal. But I keep coming back to it, for some reason. I did *Thunder Down Under* on location in the Northern Territory. You know, the movie about the NASCAR driver running drugs out of Darwin? It wasn't one of my best, but I absolutely fell in love with the country."

Randall opened the book and found a passage, and quoted sadly,

"*I have seen so long in the land I love*
What the land I love might be,
Where the Darling rises from Queensland rains
And the floods run into the sea.

And it is our fate that we'll wake too late
To the truth that we were blind,
With a foreign foe at our harbour gate
And a blazing drought behind!"

"Hard to believe that was written well over a century ago," Randall sighed. "Lawson had it too right, mate. Not knocking the Northwest Homeland, but it's my own land I'd be fighting for if our people had listened to Lawson, or even possessed two brain cells to rub together."

"We win here, we'll win elsewhere later on," Hill assured him. "But we have to win somewhere first, to capture some patch of land where we can raise a couple of generations of white kids in cleanliness and sanity and knowledge of who they are. The first battle always had to be here, I think, right in the belly of the Beast."

The young woman went back into the kitchen, poured her own tea and came back out with the teacup in one hand and the second coffee in the other, which she handed to Brewer. "Barry likes his black, but do you want cream or sugar, Mister . . . ?"

"You can call me Oscar," said Hill. "And this is, ah . . ." He suddenly remembered he didn't know what name Randall wanted to use for this contact.

"Mick Dundee," said the Australian cheerily.

"You're Crocodile Dundee, huh?" said the actress, with a quick sidelong glance and a wry downturn of her mouth. That quirky little facial expression had driven millions of adolescent boys into a lovesick frenzy for four years when, in her teens, she had played the eldest daughter in a television sitcom that was insipid even by Fox Network standards, but which had been carried to the top ratings every year by her beauty, skill and camera presence alone.

"I occasionally morph into the Mad Max Road Warrior," Randall admitted. "When I'm not reciting poetry."

"Jesus, I'll bet you really do, don't you?" she asked softly, staring at him. "Wow! Sorry, but you guys are the first other, uh, well, the first other ones I've met besides Barry."

"I'm not sure Erica really believed until now there were any others," said Brewer.

"Oh, the TV occasionally reminds me." Then she looked at Hill. "What did you decide on the cream and sugar?"

"Black's fine with me, ma'am," said Hill.

They sat down. Erica Collingwood curled up on the sofa and looked at Brewer. "I gather something important has come up?" she said, sipping her herbal tea.

"Yes," said Brewer. "Erica has been of great help to me by way of collecting and passing on information," he told the other two. "There are some things that can be learned only by someone who has access to the creative as opposed to the purely business side of the industry, and someone who has entrée into every part of every studio, which I don't have. Erica doesn't have mega-star status, by any means, but she is sufficiently famous so that she can pretty much go anywhere in Hollywood and no one questions her presence there." He turned to her. "Now we need your help for what we term active service, Erica. I am sure you know what that means. You must have known that this day would come. I am going to ask you straight out whether you are willing to help us in a specific operation, which I warn you could lead to your own exposure and your own destruction. I need you to decide right now how deep into this you want to get."

"You want me to help you actually kill people," she stated calmly.

"Yes, ma'am," said Hill.

"It's Erica, not ma'am," she replied. "Suppose I do want to back out? What are you going to do, kill me?" She sounded as if she found the possibility mildly interesting, but not in any way threatening or fearful.

"No," said Hill. "We're not gangsters. You've proven to be a friend of ours, and we don't kill our friends if they feel they can't do us a favor. You're not an actual Volunteer, you're what we call an asset, and that means that you have at least some choice as to how deep your involvement becomes. We've found it's better to evaluate people as assets for as long a time as possible before actually bringing them into the Army and placing them under military discipline. We have to make sure that every Volunteer is fully committed, and is willing to carry out any task assigned to them before we place them on active service."

"If you say no, Erica, then we'll walk out of here and you will never hear from these gentlemen again, or me," said Brewer. "You'll have to find another agent, of course, but I'm not worried about your ratting me out. I trust your personal honor and integrity." This was frankly bullshit. They had already settled in the car that if Erica Collingwood did panic or go neurotic on them, Brewer and his operation would have to be shut down and the Hollywood agent would have to disappear for an extended vacation in an unknown location, but the prize was big enough to justify that risk.

Her reply was calm. "I've been wondering when you would ask me something like this, Barry, and for a time I wondered what my answer would

be. I went to see Chase last week, and when I left, I knew. The answer is yes. I will do whatever you want me to do."

"Including help us to kill a lot of people, some of whom for all we know may be your friends?" asked Charlie.

"I don't have any friends in this town who are likely to be on any hit list you guys have drawn up," she replied. "I long ago learned it's not a good idea to get too down with people who are in the same business I am, because they really *are* gangsters, morally if not of the machine gun in the violin case kind. If the Beautiful People think you might be standing in their way for anything they want, or sometimes just out of plain nutty malice, your so-called best friends will knife you in the back in a heartbeat. I am ready to do whatever you need done."

"Why?" asked Randall bluntly. "You seem to have everything this society has to offer. Why would you bite the hand that feeds you?"

"You want Speech A, B, C, or D?" asked Erica. "I could tell you how I am sick and tired of seeing people of my skin color, and especially women of my hair and skin color, degraded and insulted and humiliated and turned into figures of fun or mindless sex objects, or Barbie doll megaphones spouting politically correct drivel, in every movie and every TV show that comes out of this toilet. I could tell you that I have reached the point where I have had it with being kept forever in the second rank of actresses, denied the kind of major film roles and creative opportunities that my talent and abilities damned well entitle me to, because I refuse to perform assorted sexual perversions on the bodies of the Jews who wield the power in Hollywood like a good *shiksa* is supposed to. I could tell you how I refuse to live any longer in fear, hiding behind a cordon of barred windows and locks and security systems, locked into the upscale parts of town where there's still some police and private security presence, quietly terrified every time I set foot on the street anywhere in Los Angeles because I'm white and female and a target for any black or brown mugger or rapist or killer who decides he wants to get him some white meat tonight. I could tell you how I spent my childhood in Seattle and I am really enthralled at the idea of what the city could be like when all the Vietnamese gangs and the Mexicans and the nigger crack addicts are cleared out of it. And all of those things would be true, as far as they went."

"Who's Chase?" asked Randall.

"My real reason for being involved with you," she said with a sigh, looking up at them. "This is going to sound like melodrama straight off the afternoon soaps, but Chase Clayburn is the only man I have ever truly loved."

"Chase Clayburn the actor?" asked Hill. "Yes, ma'am, sorry, Erica. I know what happened to him. It was in the media."

"But you don't know *how* it happened," said Erica steadily. "Two years ago, I was up for the female lead in the Arthur Bernstein film version of *The Clintons.* I was going to play Hillary, believe it or not. They wanted a younger actress because the script started when she was younger than I am, and it's hell of a lot easier to age a young actress than make one Hillary's age look twenty-three again. The makeup artists would age me through the film until I looked like the hag she is now as President. They were even going to put in the controversial bit where she gets her ear cut off by the Mafia, which she has always denied."

"My boss at Third Section actually has an interesting story to tell about that," chuckled Hill. "He was there when it happened." [See *Slow Coming Dark,* by the same author.]

"Really?" asked Brewer curiously.

"So he says," said Hill. "But go on please, Erica."

"I had just announced my engagement to Chase, we were living together in this apartment and everything was really great between us, and I was just about to get the biggest part of my life. My then agent, Manny Skar, tells me I have Hillary nailed down. I go in for the final interview with Sid Glick and Arthur Bernstein, the director. It's supposed to be a working script review and concept session with the producer, director, and other lead cast members. I get up to the office at Paradigm and I don't see anybody else there. Then Manny shows up, and I get clued in on the one final little requirement for me to get the part. I think you can guess what it was."

"Yeah, I get it," Randall concurred in a sour, angry voice.

"What got me was the casual way Manny Skar brought it up, like it was no big deal, and he assumed the knowledge on my part that in Hollywood it really *wasn't* a big deal, that it happens all the time," Erica went on. She waved her hands vaguely, almost stifled by rage at the memory. "He told me that it had been brought to Sid and Arthur's attention that I hadn't paid my dues yet. Those were his very words, and that's the term that's most often used for this kind of transaction in Hollywood. It was just the *way* Manny was telling me all this, like it was some kind of routine legal or financial clause in a contract he was explaining to me. He simply assumed that I knew the score, which I admit I did, and now that my turn had come I would go ahead and go into that office, let Sid and Arthur lock the door, prostitute myself to those two kikes in whatever kinky way they had in mind, and then we'd all go on with the picture as if nothing had happened."

"Let me guess," said Hill sympathetically. "You blew up in a rage and you used the forbidden J word?"

"Oh, no," said Erica, shaking her head. "I didn't lose it that bad! If I had used the J word I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't even be doing dinner theater in Scottsdale, Arizona for audiences of dribbling retirees. I'd be back in Seattle working in an insurance company cubicle, if I was lucky, and a Laundromat if I wasn't. I kept my head. I simply explained to Manny calmly and with poise, that I was engaged to be married and I didn't feel it was appropriate to deceive my fiancé even as a matter of business, and I was sure that Mr. Glick and Mr. Bernstein would be able to find someone who could play the role of Hillary Clinton as well as I could. All very frigidly polite, but I know Manny picked up on the hostile vibe. Then I walked out. I knew Hillary was gone for me, but I crossed my fingers and hoped they wouldn't be pissed off enough to retaliate further. Boy, did I get that one wrong!" She shook her head sadly. "Well, Lana Palomo won Best Actress at last year's Oscars for her portrayal of Hillary, and as a punishment for my uppity refusal to let him use me like a whore, Sid Glick made a phone call to a contact of his in Washington, D.C. Chase's draft exemption was revoked ten days later, by order of none other than President Hillary Clinton, just in case I missed the point Sid was trying to make. Chase thought it was a mistake of some kind, until three days after that, when his induction notice arrived, hand-delivered by two MPs to make sure he reported immediately to Fort Lewis for basic training. The shortened three-week cannon fodder version, of course. This man I wanted to spend the rest of my life with was literally dragged out of my arms, here in this room, and shanghaied off to Iran in a matter of weeks, and not one lawyer I spoke with would touch the case with a ten-foot pole. The word was out. You know what happened after that."

"I remember what the TV news said," said Hill with a nod. "IED on his first patrol in Shiraz, I believe?"

"Yes. Two other soldiers were killed, and Chase came back home a paraplegic. He exists in a mechanical wheelchair with a respirator operating his lungs, in a hundred-year-old VA hospital that is like something out of an opium-eater's nightmare. I keep trying to buy him out of there and get him into a real hospital, but the word is still out and they keep citing all kinds of arcane military regulations to keep him in VA. He can barely talk. Every time I go to see him in that little piece of hell, he begs me not to come again, not to look at him like that, and I promise him I won't, but I always go again anyway." She looked up at them, her eyes glistening with tears. "You asked me why I am willing to help the NVA, Mr. Dundee. It's not that I don't believe

in what you're doing. I do. I'm a Northwesterner myself and I want to see it a free and clean and white country. I have seen this filthy world from the top, and I know better than most that it has to die if humanity is to live. But mostly it's just plain revenge. Those Jew bastards hurt me so badly I want to die, and I don't care if I do die, so long as I make them suffer beforehand."

"Thank you for telling us this, Erica," said Hill.

"And for the record, love, there ain't a bloody thing wrong with revenge!" said Charlie. "Crikey, revenge is one of the NVA's best selling points! We're the only outfit around that deals in revenge for white people. It's a major recruiting incentive."

"What do you want me to do, Barry?" she said, wiping her eyes and turning to Brewer, all business again.

"We need you to get in with that party hearty crowd who are renting the top floors of the Hollywood Royale for the Awards ceremony," said Brewer. "We need you to get your own private party suite. Everyone will take it that you're signaling that your days of mourning for Chase are over, and you want to indulge in a nice earthy little pre-Awards orgy of your own. We need you to get the electronic key cards to every door in the hotel you can get, every elevator, and also to the Trap Door that leads into the Kodak Theater. We have a machine that will copy them, and so when the cops and feds come looking for the originals, they'll still be in your purse. Then we need you to get seven Northwest Volunteers into the hotel, with their weapons and equipment. On the night we need you to get them into the Kodak via the Trap Door, and possibly help with their escape."

"My God!" she breathed, stunned. *"You're going to hit the Oscars!"*

"You might say we're going to give them the red carpet treatment," said Randall with a low chuckle. "All their carpets will be red after we're done."

"People are going to die, and you are going to be responsible," said Hill. "You might die as well, from bullets on the night or lying on a gurney with a needle in some secret Homeland Security prison. Yes or no, Erica? Last chance."

"I'm in," she said. "You're going to cut this town's heart out, and I want to be part of it!"

"Got it in one," agreed Randall.

"Thank you, comrade," said Hill.

"So can you do it?" asked Brewer.

"Yeah, I think so. I was yakking with Jane Gerasimo about that very thing this morning on the phone, and she tells me both floors are booked solid by the usual brie and buggery crowd of celebs, but maybe I could get

a suite one floor below that, if I call up and really schmooze the manager!" said Erica excitedly.

"That would be even better, more out of sight and out of mind, but you let me do the schmoozing," said Brewer. "I'm your agent, remember? That's what you pay me for. I'm supposed to handle your indiscretions as well as your career, and it will look unusual if you make the arrangements yourself and not me. I'll check you in the day before, and cop the key cards for the room and the elevator for you, but the Trap Door isn't officially supposed to exist, and you'll have to get that one for us. If Janey doesn't have one you can borrow, you'll have to get hold of one somewhere else. I understand a couple of C-notes to the maître d' are customary."

"When and how should we enter the hotel?" asked Charlie. "What's their security like?"

"Let's take a look," said Brewer, opening his briefcase and pulling out his copy of the Centurion Security operations documents. "Centurion has the Royale contract as well, and as soon as I thought about the Trap Door as a point of entry I had our guy pull the plans for that one as well. It's normally tight, and it will be tighter on Oscar night, with all those glitterati around, as you can see," said Brewer, pointing out the relevant pages to them. "Roving rent-a-cops and house dicks, closed circuit TV cameras on the entrances and in all the hallways, of course, and in the elevators. Plus there will be all the party hearty crew themselves running around the corridors. The entrance to the Trap Door on the hotel side is in the laundry room in the sub-basement, here. That's the point where the team will have to converge. From the laundry room there is a door leading directly out into the underground garage, for your exit. On the up side, no sniffer dogs on duty in the hotel. I'm sure the management doesn't want to embarrass some of Hollywood's biggest stars by being barked and pawed at by rude hounds who smell the party favors in their handbags and their suitcases."

"How the hell are we supposed to move around in there with cameras everywhere?" asked Randall in exasperation. "Once we get in and hole up somewhere, in this lady's hotel suite or wherever, how do we get down to the entrance to this Trap Door with our weapons? And then get back out again after we present our own Best Dead Jew awards? Not to mention the fact that the cameras will record our faces for the FBI and Homeland Security later on?"

"Mmmm, simple," said Erica. "You wear masks! No, don't look at me like that, I'm serious! Look, Janey Gerasimo went the other party planners one better. She and her father, Charlton Bates the director, rented the penthouse,

the Presidential Suite, and she was badgering me to spend the whole two days there. She's been my self-appointed bestest buddy ever since Chase was crippled. She and Chase were an item before I came on the scene. We're supposed to be sharing our grief and all that crap. Actually, I think she just wants to watch me suffer and twist the knife when she can. Suppose I can talk her into throwing a two-day *costume party* in the Presidential Suite? Then there will be all kinds of people wandering up and down the halls in various stages of drunk and stoned and stupid, and all wearing masks!"

"That will work," admitted Hill.

"Right, how do we get into the hotel?" asked Charlie Randall.

Hill scanned page after page of the stolen security document. "Damn! I thought about sneaking in early, disguised as a food or linen or toilet paper delivery or something, but they're all on a schedule and there are cameras on the loading dock in this service alley behind the hotel, plus that leaves the issue of what to do about the real deliveries that are scheduled. Are all of these side doors alarmed in the security control room?"

"Unfortunately, yes," said Brewer.

"Okay, we'll have to slip the assault team into the hotel one by one throughout the day, disguised as guests or reporters or assorted hangers-on," decided Randall. "It's going to be a big day, the hotel will be full of people and action, and it's not like they're going to make every single person coming in the front door sign in. All seven of us can find our way up to Miss Collingwood's suite. But what about the guns and the other gear?"

"I'll tell Janey I'll handle the party arrangements," said Erica. "I'll order up a whole bunch of extra costumes and masks and booze and cute napkins and balloons and such folderol, and ask for the stuff to be delivered early in the morning. I'll check in the night before and let the management know I'm expecting multiple deliveries, so it will be on the schedule. I'll be so anxious for my party to turn out right I'll be down on the hotel receiving dock nice and early, so when a couple of you guys deliver some big boxes on handcarts, mixed in with all the other party junk I'll be bringing in, I will be there and make sure you get in without any hassle. I'll do my ditzy Valley Girl character from *Encino High.* Those Mexicans and niggers—God, it feels so good to be able to say nigger with you guys!—anyway, the dudes who work down there will all be so star-struck at my presence and busy looking at my tits that they won't see your faces as you go into the service elevator. You get off at my floor, and go into my suite like delivery men. The cameras will see you coming in and they'll see you coming out without your boxes, and your weapons are in the building. The actual hit squad

wanders in casually over the day at, say, one-hour intervals. Make sure your people actually knock on the door and are let in; if security sees all these strange people using swipe cards they might get curious. At whatever time you decide to move the team into the Kodak, then you go out into the halls wearing evening dress and masks like you're going up to the party. You'll have to find some way to conceal your guns from the cameras, but is this an idea you can work from?"

"You're a bloody natural at this, Erica!" said Randall, impressed.

"I left Seattle for Hollywood since I was fourteen," she told him. "Intrigue and conspiracy are the air we breathe here. Beverly Hills High could have taught the Borgias a thing or two, let me tell you. I will have to be mainly up in the Presidential Suite pretending to party most of the day, but once I check in and get the key card to the Trap Door, we'll have to arrange some way for me to get it to one of you guys to be copied."

"I'll do that for you," said Brewer. "I'm your agent, so people won't think anything of seeing us together."

"What about the security discs in the control room?" asked Randall. "You know after the balloon goes up, it won't take a bloody genius to figure out how we got in and out, and the FBI and Homeland Security will be going over the digital memory from those cameras with a fine-toothed comb. They'll recognize at least a few of us from HFP, and they'll want to know what we were doing in Erica Collingwood's hotel suite."

"HFP?" asked Erica.

"Holographic Facial Profiling," said Hill. "The feds have got it down to a science as exact as fingerprinting. They can actually HFP and identify someone from a satellite photo taken from space, now, if the angle is right." Hill drummed his fingers. "Okay, we're going to have to either assemble a second team to stage an EOD attack on the Hollywood Royale security control room, or else you'll have to do it yourselves, Mick, as you beat your retreat. Something powerful, Semtex or something that strong, to make sure the digital memory tracks on their machines are destroyed."

"Lot of possible collateral damage," said Brewer. "Plus the bomb might not destroy the recordings we want."

"Or . . . hmmm," Hill mused. "Barry, can you get some kind of schematic for that control room that would identify just what button we would have to push in order to release that graphite recording disc unit from the console, so we could simply *steal* the video files instead of leveling the building to try and destroy them, and maybe not succeeding at that?"

"I'll get our guy on it," said Barry.

"We've got a brave little lady here, and I'd rather not do the deed and then run out on her leaving a big red arrow pointing right at her for ZOG," said Randall.

"Well, there's a way to get around that and keep my ass covered," said Erica. "You start shooting right about halfway through the awards ceremonies, at the moment when Marty Rudin and Nat Turner Thomas step up to the stage to collect the award for Best Screenplay."

"Uh, those are the two interracial bugger boys, are they not?" asked Randall.

"Oh, yeah," said Brewer. "They still brag about the fact that theirs was California's first official gay marriage."

"Nice targets to start on, but why them?" asked Randall.

"Because I'm the presenter for Best Screenplay," said Erica. "This is at the behest of Sid Glick and Artie Bernstein, supposedly by way of acknowledging my beauty and my talent and all that crap, but as with everything else in this town, nothing is what it seems. I know damned well what those two hebes are saying to me, and they know I know it and they're laughing up their sleeves about it. This uppity *shiksa* is never going to win an Oscar of her own, and this is their way of rubbing it in, by graciously allowing me on the stage to present an award I will never receive. It's an old Hollywood way of twisting the knife, kind of an always a bridesmaid, never a bride kind of thing. Some poor actors and actresses who have blotted their copybooks with the studio Jews get asked back year after year as presenters, and the poor wretches accept year after year because they can't stand being on the sidelines and excluded from the magic. Well, I may never win an Oscar on film, but damn if I won't win one this year, onstage, and I'm going to cover my ass at the same time. After all, who would suspect the beautiful young ingénue who was standing right in the line of fire when the shooting started, and whose shock and horror will be replayed hundreds of thousands of times over the next month and forever after? I'm going to play this role live, before millions of people, and I'm going to appear on the news cameras afterwards with blood all over my Prada evening gown and deliver the performance of my life."

"But no one will ever know, Erica," pointed out Barry Brewer gently. "Not until they write the history books many, many years from now."

"I will know," she said with a smile. "That will be enough."

"Bugger that!" said Charlie Randall succinctly. "Truth is, you *will* be in the line of fire! Erica, there aren't just going to be guns, there will be explosives as well, hand grenades, not to mention return fire from the rent-a-cops and the real cops and the private bodyguards as well. It's going to be a madhouse,

bullets will be whizzing around like popcorn in a popper, and none of us can guarantee your safety for a single second. The blood on that Prada evening gown you mentioned could be your own."

"I understand that," she said evenly. "Look, guys, this is going to sound very strange, and I know the last thing I need is to convince you that I'm some kind of suicidal nut case. I'm not. But I see it like this: I am going to be in a large part responsible for what happens to all those people on that night. I am doing this because I feel in my very soul that it's right, but what if I'm wrong? I need to accept responsibility for that decision, and be willing to take the consequences. That means I need to throw my name into the Grim Reaper's wheel of death along with theirs, and yours, and take at least some of the same chances that you are taking. I'm kind of surprised to learn that I'm capable of committing murder, but I do have a problem with hiding in some hotel room while you take all the risk, and in not being present when something I have helped to set in motion goes down. You might say I'm giving God a chance to let me know in no uncertain terms whether or not I've fucked up. Chase didn't want to be where he was and he didn't deserve what happened to him, but he drew the shitty end of the stick anyway. I'm putting myself where he was by my own choice, because one way or another, the scales need to be balanced on Oscar night. God, you probably think I've lost it!" she sighed.

"No," said Charlie Randall, shaking his head. "It makes sense, and it's noble and honorable. Just not very sensible. Look, Erica, the best thing you can do for Chase and for yourself is to be a good soldier, and after the war is over build a Republic for our people that will be a home and a shield against the filth we're going up against in a few nights' time. A good soldier is brave, but not foolhardy or stupid. I think you're crossing the line here."

"It would be an ideal cover if the feds come sniffing around her," Brewer had to concede, reluctance in his voice. "Everybody would at least know exactly where she was and what she was doing when all hell broke loose."

"The awards ceremonies run on a closer timetable than any railroad," said Erica quietly. "The ceremonies start at 5:30, and Best Screenplay is scheduled for 6:48 to 6:53 P.M. Have your men in place at 6:48 and pull the damned trigger, and let's just hope those two faggots don't decide to show up in drag, so you can at least tell your gunners not to shoot anybody on stage who's wearing an evening gown."

XX

Setting The Scene

The king himself is rode forth to view their battle.

King Henry V—Act IV, Scene 3

"Can she stand up?" asked Hill as they drove away from Erica Collingwood's apartment. "If there's any doubt in your mind, Barry, now is the time to talk about it."

"I think so," said Brewer. "In any case, she's the only hope we have of pulling this off from the inside. I can do some of it myself, but you have to realize that I'm a marginal player in the industry. My clients mostly end up doing bit parts on soaps and sitcoms, and my clout barely registers as a burp on the Hollywood Richter scale. I could probably cop that crucial key card to the Trap Door if I had to. Enough money to one of the Royale's staff should do the trick. But in the subsequent investigation my presence on the scene would stand out like a cow in church to anyone familiar with the pecking order, and you can bet the FBI and the LAPD will be giving this a full court press. Nor could I get seven armed people into the hotel and conceal them for some hours until it's time to move. We've got to have Erica's help."

"Until we get some indication otherwise, we'll have to assume that Erica will hold up her end," said Randall practically. "We still have to work out the exact details of getting our team out of her hotel suite and into their firing positions undetected. I'm worried about all those security cameras in the Kodak, since we have to assume that all the monitors in the security control room will be manned and there will be multiple observers keeping track of everything that goes on in every corridor and accessible area during the

ceremonies. Like you said earlier, we most likely won't be the only people trying to sneak in and crash the Oscars on the night. We need to find some way to take out the camera system for at least a minute or two while our people get into the building, make their way up to those projection booths, get inside and get covered down on the target area. We don't want the shooting to start prematurely before we actually have the glitterati themselves in sight."

"I've got Volunteer Kellerman working on the info we've been able to get on the security console set-up and the wiring in the control room, but he hasn't been able to come up with anything yet," said Hill.

"Looking at floor plans and diagrams is all very well and good, but I need to *see* where the tickle's going to go down," said Randall decisively. "There's no other way. I've got to get into that theater at night and have a prowl 'round. Preferably in the wee hours of the morning when there's no one about. I think Cat-Eyes needs to come with me as well, so he can eyeball the firing positions and the kill zone. That chintzy guided tour the theater management gives the tourists won't cut it. I also need to meet that Centurion guard who's going to be our man on the inside so at least one of us who will be inside on the night knows who the hell he is and what he looks like, we can sort out what he'll be doing on the night, and hopefully we won't shoot our own bloke. You need to set that up for me, Rip. We can go in as maintenance men or cleaning crew or something like that."

"It will take a couple of days to get you fake badges and swipe cards made," said Brewer.

"Yeah, and we're cutting it fine as it is," said Randall. "All the more need for speed."

"I'll try to set it up for tomorrow night, but it might have to be the night after," said Brewer. "Our guy's only a sergeant, and he has to be really careful in what he does and what he accesses. Centurion spies on their own people to make sure they're not being naughty."

It was in fact two nights later at eight o'clock in the evening that Charlie Randall and Cat-Eyes Lockhart appeared at the rear alley service entrance to the Kodak Theater. They were driving a stolen and sanitized van that had been re-sprayed with the logo of California Cool, a legitimate heating and air conditioning company in the Valley, and they were dressed in greasy coveralls marked "The Cool Dudes" with filthy baseball caps on their heads. They carried long, battered metal tool boxes, each containing a top tray of tools and electrical fixtures, with Uzi submachine guns and extra magazines stowed in the bottom of each box, as well as light handguns concealed in the tool belts around their waists. From their shirt pocket flaps dangled

official-looking Kodak Theater contractor badges and around their necks hung working contractor key swipe cards, all false but which hopefully they wouldn't actually have to use, lest the computer in the control room detect something hinky about them.

They were admitted at the service entrance door by Centurion shift sergeant Sterling Farrell, a thickset man in his early forties in the white shirt, visored cap, and black trousers of the company. Farrell bore a tattoo on his muscular right forearm of a bayonet piercing a turbaned serpent with the beard of an imam. The bayonet was wielded in the talons of an American bald eagle with wings rampant and the number "101" over the whole design. The greetings were short. Lockhart looked at the tattoo. "101st Airborne?" he asked.

"Screaming Eagles, *hoo-rah!"* Farrell confirmed. "Sterling Farrell, ex-staff sergeant. Baghdad, Tikrit, Shiraz, Tehran, Cairo and Gaza. Are you Dundee or Jones tonight? Not that there's any point in your using a handle, since your picture's all over Fox News every week."

"Guess not. Jesse Lockhart," said Cat, holding out his hand. "Baghdad, Tikrit, Ramadi, Shiraz, Damascus and Khartoum."

"Yeah, I know," said Farrell, shaking his hand. "You wouldn't remember me, but I saw you work once in Tikrit."

"This is Crocodile Dundee," said Lockhart. "You'll know why we call him that when he opens his mouth."

"How much time have we got, mate?" asked Randall.

"I'm officially on lunch now," said Farrell. "That's half an hour, but I can stretch it out a bit before I have to get back to checking in on my rounds."

"We took the day tour," said Randall. "We saw the lobby and all the movie junk, and the inside of the theater itself, and they let us up on stage briefly, and that's about it. Tonight we want to scope the backstage areas and the upper levels and corridors, and get as close to the security control room as we dare." From upstairs they could hear the sound of voices, mostly Spanish, as well as banging and thumping and hammering and the sound of a radio or CD deck playing salsa music. "Sounds like you've got a full house tonight," commented Randall.

"Yeah, that's why I suggested to Ripley that you come on second shift and not at two in the morning," said Farrell. "You're more likely to go unnoticed when there's a lot of workmen and set-up crew in the building. They knock off at eleven, and in the early hours you'd be out of place. There are cameras everywhere. I'll point them out to you as we go. The control room only has two officers in it right now. One of them's a Sheba who spends all her time

yakking on her cell phone when she thinks I'm not around, and the other one's a big Indio from down in Yucatan who seems to barely speak English. He may be smarter than he looks, but if he is, he hides it well. They'll see us, but they will just assume I'm escorting some contractors around the building while you work on the ventilation or something. After the big night, though, the FBI and DHS will go over all the digitals with a microscope, and they'll spot us together, which is why I need to do a Houdini act ASAP after the blowout."

"Don't worry, mate, we'll have you on your way to Portland before the smoke clears away," Randall promised him. "What exactly are they building out there in the theater?"

"They're knocking together the pre-fab platform at the rear of the seating area that will hold all the television cameras and crew and gear for the live coverage, and also the side platforms that will hold additional cameras, boom mikes, and so on. Let's go, then," said Farrell. "We'll be taking the stairs. There are cameras in all the elevators, and they might get a close-up that might interest somebody. What, exactly, do you want to see?" he asked as they mounted one flight and came out behind the stage. The banging and sawing was louder now, coming from the theater outside.

"Let's start this private tour at the old Green Room," suggested Randall. "I want to orient myself starting from the entrance to the so-called secret passage that ain't so bloody secret, the famous Trap Door."

Farrell led them around the rear of the stage, where a wide and cavernous bay with a linoleum floor was stacked high with props, furniture, speakers, music stands, chairs, and other impedimenta. He pointed to the left. "That door there is a passageway under the stage itself, that leads into the orchestra pit," he said.

"Can we get a dekko?" asked Randall.

"Wait a bit, until the camera moves away," said Farrell, nodding up at the silvery metallic box with the red light on the wall, which was fanning the area. "That's the only one in this backstage area, which is a bit of luck," he said. "If you can keep your eye on it, and you can see when it hits the far left traverse and starts to swing back, there is an interval of about fifteen seconds when the far right of the backstage is out of vision, and vice versa. There's usually enough junk piled up back here so someone who is nimble enough to dodge around and go to ground and hide when the camera swings onto them would be able to get across the entire floor here unseen. That the kind of thing you guys are looking for?"

"The very thing," replied Randall. The camera slowly swung away.

"Now," said Farrell. They moved quickly over to the door beneath the rear of the stage. Farrell shoved on the bar, the door opened, and they entered a small passageway with a linoleum-tiled floor and painted cinderblock walls, illuminated by dim fluorescent lighting.

"No lock on the door?" asked Lockhart with interest.

"No alarms either, now," said Farrell. "They removed the lock on this side some years ago because the orchestra musicians and stagehands were constantly going back and forth, losing their key cards, and the alarm register was on a printout, so we'd use up a whole roll of paper almost during one rehearsal with all the swiping and alarm records. The employees and musicians were constantly complaining about having to swipe in on both ends, and so the company compromised and removed the lock and the alarm on this door to quit their bitching, and also to save some paper and records keeping in the control room. But the far end door, the one that actually goes into the orchestra pit, will be keycard-locked during the ceremony to prevent assorted weirdos from getting into the theater area and jumping in front of the cameras, although that end will not be alarmed. Want to get a look-see into the orchestra pit?"

"Mmm, don't think that will be necessary," said Randall. "The plan doesn't call for any Volunteer actually to enter the theater seating area or the lobby except possibly myself, when we figure out how to take down those cameras."

"That's going to be a problem," admitted Farrell. "They won't even let me into the control room while the show's running, even if I could figure out some way to explain being off my post. The control room is sealed from five-thirty on, when we go live. Nobody gets in or out except Marvin Hagerman, the company VP who will actually be running the show. I am damned if I can see any way to do it other than just plain smash into the control room and trash the place and everybody in it."

"Mmm, well, we'll keep that as a last resort," said Randall. "Let's also leave that part of our tour for last. Where will you be on the night?"

"In charge of the main entrance detail, the metal detectors, and so forth. Usually it's a pretty good gig because you get to see all the celebs come in, although VIPs needless to say aren't put through the metal detector. Pity we can't get one of the stars to bring in some guns or explosives." Lockhart and Randall looked at one another, but said nothing. "If you can work the front door in somehow, I'm your man, or if you need me somewhere else, I can try to make up some reason to switch off posts, or get somewhere I need to be, but it would be a bit iffy," said the guard sergeant.

"Got it," said Randall. "In the meantime, it strikes me that this passageway here would be an ideal jumping-off point for when I yell lights, camera, action. You've worked an actual Oscar night here before?"

"The last three," said Farrell. "I was one of the guys who managed to drag Brittany Malloy's butt-naked ass off the catwalk last year and stop her from jumping off. FYI, she wears falsies and she's got needle tracks on her arm. I was also one of the guys who taped her mouth and dragged her through the Trap Door to the Royale, so I'm familiar with the Trap Door on both ends."

"Any Centurion people have the swipe card for it?" asked Randall.

"There is one in the security control room, but it's under lock and key in the arms locker, and it's inserted in a slot that's alarmed if someone tries to take it out," said Farrell. "Only the shift commander has authorization to remove it. I don't have occasion to use it in the normal course of my job, I'm not senior enough to get into the arms locker, and I don't see any way I could extract it without getting caught."

"What else is in the arms locker?" asked Lockhart.

"Five fully automatic M-16s with special BATFE permits, one thousand rounds of ammunition, eight sonic stun grenades, a tranquilizer rifle and three darts," said Farrell.

"A *tranquilizer* gun?" asked Randall in astonishment.

"That's for use when somebody has to be taken down, but they're too valuable to the studios to shoot or tase," said Farrell. "Usually some big star who's stoned or drunk out of their mind, to the point where they're completely out of control. We would have used it on the Malloy chick last year, but we were scared she'd fall off the catwalk and upstage the Best Picture presentation in every sense of the term. Her bra and panties raining down on stage was bad enough. If you've seen enough, let's go." Farrell peeped out of the door and watched the camera. "Now." They moved swiftly across the floor and made it through an archway into a carpeted corridor before the camera swung around and caught them. "Okay, that's the Green Room, or was up until this year," said Farrell, pointing to two large double oaken doors. "It's locked, and the doors are alarmed. It will be locked on the night as well, to make sure the celebs don't sneak in there and start doing bad acts, but stay out front and be seen to behave like the studios want 'em to. There are no cameras in this hallway, though, which was to make sure the big shots could show their butts in privacy when there was a Green Room. The Trap Door is here." He led them down a short side corridor and showed them the steel door, with a blinking red electronic box of black steel. "There's the swipe lock."

"It's locked now?" asked Lockhart.

"Yes," said Farrell.

"Right," said Randall. "So let's assume we've got our team this far, and we're inside the building. Show me how to get from here back to that orchestra pit passageway unobserved." Farrell retraced their steps back to the open archway that gave into backstage.

"The camera is right above this entrance," he said. "All you have to do is lean out a bit and look up, and since you're directly under the camera, you won't be seen. And . . . now!" They easily made it back to the passage under the stage and inside the corridor before the camera swung back.

"That was no problem, but what if there are people back here on the night who see our guys?" asked Lockhart.

"There shouldn't be," said Farrell. "One of our security procedures is that during the actual ceremonies, after the opening number, this area is off limits. The dressing rooms for the dancers and revue talent are one floor down in the basement, and they're soundproofed. We don't let anybody get this close to the stage during the ceremonies themselves, and if we see any gate-crashers or drunks on the cameras we come back here and hustle them out before they can do anything that disrupts things, or start yelling obscenities that can be heard onstage, or anything like that."

"No guards back here?" asked Randall.

"There will be a man on the catwalks, but he will be watching the stage and the audience, and also the access doors up there to make sure we don't have any more Brittany Malloy incidents," said Farrell. "He won't be looking down here at all and could only see the back part of backstage anyway, even if he leaned over. Make sure you stick close along the rear curtain here, and he won't be able to see you even if he's looking this way."

"If there's anyone down here, and they see the team gaining entry, then they're SOL. That's what silencers are for," said Randall grimly. "Now we need to do a walk up to the third floor corridor and those projection booths. Which way?"

"Stairwells on either side of the backstage," said Farrell. "Remember, the theater itself is in an oval shape, and the corridors leading from each of those stairwells to the projection booths are pretty much identical on both sides of the building, north and south. Okay, camera's to the left, now." They left the corridor. "I need to warn you that there are cameras in the stairwells and in the corridors, and we're going to be seen. Like I said, those two mopes in the control room probably won't take any notice since I'm with you, but you need to kind of act like air conditioning mechanics if we meet anybody."

They met no one. They got to the third floor, turned right down the plum-carpeted hall, and reached the short side corridor leading to the north wall projection booth. "Can I get inside this booth?" asked Lockhart as they ducked down the hall.

"I figured you might want to, and so I disarmed the locks and alarms on both of them before you guys came in tonight," said Farrell.

"Good man!" said Randall approvingly. Farrell opened the door and they entered a larger room than they had expected.

"The projector is in the retracted position now," said Farrell, pointing to a massive machine on a wheeled caisson. "On the night it will be forward and the lens sticking out that bay there. You'll have to move it back."

"Mmmm, maybe not," said Cat. "Actually, I think I can take the right side and my partner the left, and it will serve as extra cover against return fire coming from the theater floor." He peeped cautiously down onto the floor and saw a gang of Mexican laborers setting up the tables in the VIP area right in front of the orchestra pit. "Oh, this is going to be choice!" said Lockhart enthusiastically. "Beautiful! The other rifleman and myself are going to have to use open sights, because we'll be breaking down our weapons to get them inside the hotel, and the telescopic sights would lose zero and throw our aim off, but at this range we won't need them. Kentucky windage is all we'll need. That's what, maybe a hundred feet to the near edge of the kill zone and two hundred to the far side, a hundred and thirty or forty feet to the stage itself? Good angle, high enough for visibility but not so sharp as to make us lean forward and out and expose ourselves unduly, like we'd have to if we were in those private boxes. Good clear shot at most of the south wall boxes as well, and Ron will have the same vantage point over there for the boxes on the north wall."

"One guard sitting outside the door of each booth?" queried Randall.

"Right. And one projectionist inside," Farrell told them.

"Cat, the main surprise requirement is for you guys to get up here fast enough once I yell go, before anyone can call those guards on their radio and let them know something's hitting the fan, giving them time to draw their weapons and maybe alert the audience and get our targets to start dropping down or moving or taking evasive action," Randall pointed out. "That's why we can't afford to have the fire teams seen on the closed-circuit monitors."

"Some good news, though," said Farrell. "They've changed procedure a bit and those key cards I gave you will now work on the projection booths. You won't have to take one off the guard, dead or otherwise. By the way, according to the assignment sheet there will be niggers on both doors. One of

them is just a fat lazy slob whose weapon probably isn't even in firing order. The other is a big Haitian with filed teeth who's a violent psychopath, and whom Centurion usually uses for intimidation type jobs and head knocking. They didn't dare deny him work on Oscar night and the overtime and the bonus that goes with it, since he's just the type that might go and shoot up the head office, but they're trying to keep him out of sight and away from the celebs in case he breaks bad. Neither of them will be missed. I said your key cards will work, but that's unless something spooks the contract supervisor or the client before then, some last minute threat or warning from the cops or DHS, and they change all the encryption and issue new cards, in which case we're up shit creek," he concluded.

"Cross your fingers on that, mate," said Randall. "So far we haven't picked up on so much as a whisper that they even know the NVA is in town."

Farrell nodded. "If they had, you'd better believe they would be going batshit right now. They'd either cancel the Awards ceremonies or seal this place up so tight a fly couldn't get in."

"Right. I'm starting to get the germ of an idea here," said Randall. "The plans you scammed for us show some kind of heating and A/C access area behind the control room. Can we get down there now?"

Farrell led them out the door, turned right, then down the hall and into another stairwell. Three floors down there was another hallway, where Farrell turned left. "No need to avoid the cameras," he said. "This place we're going is called the first floor interstitial area, and there's all kinds of ducts and air pumps in there. There's four of them in the building to control the ventilation system. It won't look unusual for air conditioning mechanics to be going in there."

Inside the interstitial the floors were unpolished planks, the walls were padded with pink fiberglass insulation, and there was a steady roar from the tangled skein of large square aluminum ducts. "No cameras?" asked Lockhart.

"Nope," said Farrell. "Just in the corridor outside."

"Good," said Randall.

"But I think I know what you're looking for, Digger, and it's not in here," said Farrell. "You're hoping for a circuit box of some kind, right? No such luck. The electrical system for the control room doesn't come in here at all. It's hooked into the main comm and power cables in a junction box under the floor of the control room itself. Believe me, I've had my eye out for any way we could cut a cable or a circuit breaker or something, once we figured out which one to cut, and disable some or all of those cameras. But it's not in here. Just the air ducts."

"Right, just the air ducts," agreed Randall. He looked over on the wall where a series of blueprints were mounted on a corkboard for the convenience of the building engineers and A/C mechanics. "Mighty nice of 'em to leave this out here for us, eh?" He studied the schematic for several minutes. "So, what it boils down to is this. We can't figure out any way to disable the security camera system either completely or partially. There's no cable we can conveniently cut, at least none we know where to find. The individual cameras are set so high and inaccessible that disabling each one separately would be too slow and cumbersome, and would tip the guards off too early that something was up, and they'd be reacting before our blokes can get into position. That about sum it up?"

"That's it," agreed Lockhart.

"So if we can't take out the cameras themselves, we take out the blokes watching 'em on the telly," said Randall. He moved along one wall and found one of the air ducts, a big one about four feet square. He checked a number plate bolted into the sheeting, then went back to the blueprint on the wall and checked that. He went back to the duct and leaned over to examine an intake grill about eighteen by twenty-four inches. "Simple Phillips head screws. Right, that's how we do it. If that plan over there is accurate, this duct feeds air conditioning into the security control room. I get in here, and you six get into place in the jumping-off point in that little passage below the stage by 6:48 PM. I unscrew this plate, pop two or three CS tear gas grenades inside, and within a matter of seconds every Centurion guard in the control room will be bolting through the door. Do they have any gas masks inside, Comrade Farrell?"

"There are three or four, I think, in the arms locker," said Farrell. "To which only the site supervisor has the necessary access code on his swipe card, which on the night will be that operations VP I mentioned. You say 6:48?"

"Or thereabouts," said Randall. "During the Best Screenplay presentation. We start our move when the presentation gets going, take out the guards, get into the booth and cover down, and as the faggots begin their acceptance speech, we start blasting."

"How do you know who's going to win?" asked Farrell curiously.

"Apparently these two bugger boys are going to get it because there's an affirmative action quota for queers and it's their turn this year," said Randall. "According to our source, it's pretty common knowledge. But who ever wins, that's the presentation where we re-write the script in red ink."

"Okay, so if Hagerman is in the control room then, just before 6:48 I'll find some excuse to call him out to the front entrance," said Farrell. "When

your gas hits, the only man who can get into the locker with not only the gas masks but the heavy weapons will be out of the control room. They'll have to beat feet out of there. Some of the gas will seep out into the lobby and into the restaurant and bar, and raise hell with all the various paparazzi, drivers and bits and pieces of entourage who hang out there during the ceremonies because they can't get a seat. There will be so much confusion they won't know what's going on until the shooting starts. The doors to the theater itself are closed during the presentations, and they're soundproofed so people in the audience can hear the opera or whatever is playing without interference. By the time any gas gets into the theater area or anyone notices anything going on behind them in the lobby, you guys should already have begun your hebe harvest."

"Hell, I'll toss a couple more canisters into the lobby just for devilment on the way out," said Randall.

* * *

On the day before the Oscars, for the first time, Task Force Director's Cut was all gathered in one place, a large private home with a green lawn and hissing sprinklers on 20th Street in Santa Monica. It was very risky, and some of the crew were on sentry duty and would be briefed later by their team leaders, but this was the most important operation that the Northwest Volunteer Army had undertaken to date. Every single man or woman was being utilized in some capacity or other, and every one of them had to be brought into the big picture. The only people missing were the local contacts who would participate, i.e. Barry Brewer, Sterling Farrell, and Erica Collingwood. They had no need to meet the entire Portland task force, and the task force had no need to meet them.

They were all gathered in the large living room. "Before we begin, I think we need to congratulate Quartermaster Lieutenant Ekstrom on her first active service operation," said Hill with a smile, standing up in front of them. There was a scattering of cheers and applause.

"Stealing a police car is active service?" asked Christina.

"If you risk getting shot at, it's active service," said Hill. "Are both the squad cars hidden away somewhere safe?"

"Yes, in that private garage I showed you," said Christina. "Volunteers McReady and Gearhiser do good paint work, and they have re-detailed both squad cars already, to change the numbers. You can't tell the difference. I want to add a vote of thanks to the absent but very Talented indeed Mr. Ripley. In

addition to all our luxury accommodation, well, luxury compared to what we're used to, he's been fantastic about getting me everything I need, mostly from the prop and costume rooms of the movie studios themselves, if you can believe it. We've got two Los Angeles cop uniforms complete with belts and accessories, those A/C mechanic outfits Mick and Cat used the other night, six tuxes for the rest of the team, you name it. He even offered to try and dig up a formal evening gown with some kind of long sleeves and high back to hide Kicky's tattoos if she wanted to go in that way." There was laughter.

"Which would mean me having to run around and fight in high heels. I don't think so," said Kicky.

"I'll run the operation down for you from beginning to end," said Hill. "Hit the lights please, somebody." The lights dimmed and one overhead projector cast a floor plan of the Kodak Theater onto the wall, while a second showed the plan of the Hollywood Royale hotel. "The actual infiltration of the theater and the assault will be carried out by seven personnel. Red fire team will consist of Volunteers Lockhart, Wingo, and McGee. Gold team will consist of Volunteers Kolchak, Gauss, and Washburn. Lieutenant Randall will be in command as assault group leader, with Third Section assets also on the inside. You have been briefed on the general situation, so that you know we intend to conceal ourselves prior to the attack right in the middle of the enemy, on the fourteenth floor of a hotel full of partying movie stars, possibly the most unusual camouflage ever attempted in the history of warfare since the Trojan Horse. We thought that our contact was going to be compelled to obtain a suite on a floor below the two that have been reserved for the Hollywood celebrities, but I have been informed that we will in fact have access to a suite that is on the lower of those two party floors. I will not release the room number except to the personnel who will need to know. But we should be able to move out of the Hollywood Royale and into the Kodak completely undetected, since the security cameras have been turned off on those floors to prevent the recording for posterity of these high-toned people's gross behavior, with the subsequent risk of sale of compromising clips to tabloid newspapers, blackmail, etc. As always, comrades, the gods favor us. I've noticed that happens a lot since we decided to quit running around street corners holding signs and wearing silly costumes, and took up the gun."

"Amen," spoke up one of the Volunteers. "Never doubt that He is with us. Or They, as some of us prefer."

Hill smiled. "The suite has now been obtained and occupied, and some of our material already deposited there, including certain crucial electronic key cards. The assault group's entry to the hotel will begin at eight o'clock

tomorrow morning on the receiving dock of the Hollywood Royale hotel, when Comrades Bishop and Valdemar will appear in the guise of delivery drivers bringing in some boxes for a party to be held in the penthouse. Those boxes will contain the weapons, ammunition, and equipment that will be needed for the assault. You've got that covered, Chris?"

"Mr. Ripley again," said Christina. "LA Lightning Delivery van, two sets of coveralls, hand trucks and all."

"Good," said Hill. "Comrades Bishop and Valdemar will be met at the loading dock by a person who is a Third Section asset, and they will be assisted past the check-in and into the service elevator. They will deposit their boxes in the hotel suite, and then they will be clearly seen by the security cameras to leave the same way they came."

"What person, sir?" asked Sue Valdemar.

"Right, let's deal with that subject, for you inside people," said Hill. "There will be someone in the hotel, and in the theater later during the ceremonies, who is shaping up to be a vitally important asset to the cause of Northwest independence in this matter, and who will continue to be invaluable in the future. If you have ever watched much TV or seen many movies, the chances are that you will recognize this person. Or think you do, because as far as we are concerned this person does not exist. He or she was *never there*, and you will forget that you ever saw him, or her. You will not mention his or her name, not to your comrades, not among yourselves, not to anyone else, not until long after the war when military secrecy regulations are repealed. This person is risking their life and everything they have in the world, in order to help our new country come into being, and he or she has a lot more to lose than most. It would be tragic and heartbreaking if he or she perished because somebody got star-struck and couldn't keep their lip zipped. I repeat, he or she *does not exist.* Even under torture, if it comes to that, this person was *never there.* Are we all clear on this?"

"I never met this person, yet already I don't remember them," said Lockhart.

Hill nodded. "Good. Now, once the weapons are in place, the infiltration of the Hollywood Royale hotel will begin shortly thereafter. Each team member will enter the hotel separately. You will be dressed as civilians, reporters and fans and bit actor types, and you'll go in at roughly one-hour intervals, unarmed in the event you have to pass through any metal detectors. The hotel is going to be full of people having various things to do with the Academy Awards, so you should be able to pass unnoticed. Lieutenant Randall will go first.

"You will make your way without exciting any suspicion to the hotel suite number you will be given. You will also be given a code knock. Once inside the rooms, you will collect your weapons, change into tuxedos, including Comrade McGee, which will be of some benefit to her since if she wears male attire, the enemy may not realize afterward that they're looking for at least one female suspect. You will be given party masks so that if you have to go out into the hall, people will assume you're doped and drunken celebrities and entourage headed up to the penthouse for the main orgy. A word of advice on the tuxes: make sure you are wearing good, well broken-in black men's shoes. Kick, you need to get a pair of black running shoes or something you can live with in there with the morning delivery, or wear them when you enter the hotel. You guys are going to have to be running and maybe climbing, and you don't want to be doing that in new, hard patent leather shoes that will blister your feet and distract you. While in the hotel room, you will also assemble your web belts. This belt will hold a radio and a throwaway cell phone. The cell phone is for emergency contact with the outside, at numbers you will have already pre-programmed into the phone. The teams will actually communicate with each other and with Lieutenant Randall using the radios, not the phones. The belts will also contain two each hand grenades, one gas mask, one smoke grenade each, and a holstered automatic with a silencer, mostly .22s but a few .380s as well. You guys can sort out who gets what handgun when you're getting ready to roll."

Charlie Randall took up the thread. "We intend to strike during the acceptance speech for Best Screenplay, which starts at approximately 6:48 p.m. I am informed these ceremonies run on rails to make sure all the sponsored advertising gets in, and we can pretty much assume that everything will be on time. This means that allowing several minutes for the presenter's reading the nominations, we open fire at about 6:51. We're in luck again; the schedule calls for no film clips from the nominated movies to be shown for Best Screenplay, so we'll be able to get into the projection booths without interrupting anything in progress. At 6:30 p.m. sharp I myself will leave the hotel suite, dressed as an air conditioning maintenance bloke like I was the other night. I will enter the private elevator and take it to the hotel garage level. I will then enter the corridor leading to the Kodak Theater with an electronic key card that will have been provided for me. Volunteers Lockhart and Kolchak will also have one of these cards. Let's hope it works, or the whole mission is an abort. I will enter the theater, and I will make my way along a route that I have determined with one of our inside assets to be the best and least likely to be surveilled. If I am challenged, I will eliminate the challenger with a silenced pistol. I will

enter the interstitial area here, and take up my position," he indicated with a cursor on the diagram. "In the meantime, at 6:40 p.m., the rest of the team will depart the hotel suite, having first donned latex surgical gloves. Your faces will be concealed in party masks and you will be wearing your web belts, and you will be carrying your heavy weapons in canvas gym-type bags that we will provide. You will take the same route and enter the Kodak theater."

"And there are *no cameras at all* along this underground route, you say?" asked Machine Gun Mike Gauss incredulously.

"Not until you reach the open archway door into the backstage bay and storage area," confirmed Randall.

"It's ironic that we are taking advantage of a deliberate lapse in security on the part of the enemy, which was created so as to allow these most privileged members of the American ruling élite to commit acts of revolting perversion and debauchery unimpeded by any observation or censure," said Hill with a chuckle. "There are no security cameras or guards in these corridors and elevators here and in the Kodak in order to save the stars from the consequences of their behavior, an immunity that they have enjoyed for generations. Now tomorrow night, some of them are going to pay for that immunity with their lives. Poetic justice, I'd say."

"I'll go over with you how to get past the one rotating camera and into the jumping-off area, which is the mouth of this corridor under the stage leading to the orchestra pit, here," said Randall, pointing with his cursor. "The fire teams will need to get into the jumping off point, get your heavy weapons out of the bags, assembled, and locked and loaded, and all the extra ammo pouches and gas mask carriers onto your web belts."

"Oh, and each of you will have been issued a standard dark blue wool ski mask," said Hill. "When you get under cover in the orchestra pit passageway, in addition to getting all your weapons together, I want you to take off the party masks and stow them, and put on the ski masks. I don't want this historic hit to be carried out by Volunteers wearing the faces of Bozo the Clown, Beavis and Butthead or Bill Clinton, or any nonsense like that. I want those security digitals to show proper terrorist ski masks, okay? I know that sounds silly, but we don't want the public to see images from the cameras of our Volunteers dressed like clowns or Dracula. That's the kind of thing that sticks in people's minds. Once you get everything out of the bags, fold them up and put them all into one bag, the big duffel. And remember that on your way out you must stop briefly and *pick that bag up* and take it with you. We don't want the FBI finding it and getting fingerprints and hair and whatnot off the party masks."

"Right, I figure about two minutes for all of that once you get undercover in the corridor entryway," picked up Randall again. "I need to hear from you when you are in place and ready to move out. I will already have removed the intake vent grill from the air conditioning duct. I will be watching the progress of the ceremonies on my hand-held phone with the wireless TV. When I hear that you lads and lassie are in place, and the Best Screenplay presenter is making her opening spiel, I will put on my own gas mask and pop three CS grenades into the intake vent. I give it thirty seconds before everybody's out of that control room, blind and puking. We also have the promise of some kind of diversion in the lobby from one of our Threesec people, so hopefully no one will notice anything in the theater itself. Three canisters is a lot of gas, and there may be some blowback through the air vents. Do not put on your gas mask unless you feel the gas actually starting to hit you. Hopefully we'll be out of there before it really starts to permeate through the building, which will further hinder enemy recovery and first investigatory efforts as well. Thirty seconds after I pop the gas, Cat, I'm going to yell on the radio for you to go, and then you *go, go, go!"* said Randall. "There shouldn't be anyone in the control room left to see you. The two fire teams will leave the jumping-off place and move on the double up the stairs to the third floor, pop the guards with silenced pistols, get into the projection booths, disable the projectionists however indicated by their race, and assume firing position. The full auto cover men, Comrades Wingo and Gauss, will position outside at the mouth of the little hall that leads to each booth, and will cut down anyone who comes down the main corridor, thus protecting the other two Volunteers in their team while they take out the targets. Cat, you get to open the festivities, and I've already indicated when. Try to take both those bugger boys down with your first shots."

"It's done. They're outta here," said Lockhart.

"We want a Mad Minute of Shock and Awe," said Hill. "The maddest ever, because remember, this is going to be on live nationwide TV. Cat, you and Ron will both fire twenty well-aimed rounds apiece, and remember, after those two initial faggots for camera effect, you're going for the Burger Kings, the Big Kikes. Mark your targets, put a round in them as close to dead center as you can in all the chaos, and then try for another. It's going to be hard, I know, like firing into a tornado and trying to hit a specific straw. One round per target unless you know you've got a really big sheeny in your sights, like Sid Glick or Allen Adler or Hymie Hirschfeld. The grenadiers will throw both their grenades, one each as soon as the firing begins, and a second after approximately thirty seconds. They will also open fire on full automatic,

into what will almost certainly be a screaming vortex of sheer madness, concentrating on the VIP circle in front of the orchestra pit. There will be no innocent parties down there. Anyone who rates a seat in that section is Hollywood up to their eyeballs, and guilty as sin. Ideally not one glitterati pig or bitch who sits down at one of those little Parisian café tables to pose for us unwashed masses in all their *haute couture* glory should make it out of that theater alive. But especially not Jews. Bear in mind what all this is in aid of, comrades. Hollywood is possibly *the* greatest weapon the Jews have against our race, maybe even more powerful and dangerous in some ways than their control of the federal government and of international banking. Hollywood is the biggest leg of that unholy tripod, and we have to knock it out from under them."

"Oh, and by the way, could you also see if you can spare a few bursts for the private boxes you'll see across the way?" asked Randall. "You snipers too, make sure you take a look up there and see if you can spot some of our main targets who will be swanning themselves, especially studio execs."

"Ron will be a little slower to fire than me, because he packs an M-24, which is bolt action and has only a ten-round magazine capacity," pointed out Lockhart. "He'll have to reload. But we all get the idea. Okay, now, the big point we've all been wondering about. Extraction. Once our Mad Minute is up, how do we get the hell *out* of there?"

"Same way you came in, only a lot faster and with a lot less stealth," said Hill. "Back down the stairs, making sure you pick up that duffle bag with all the other folded bags and masks and bits and pieces in it on the way out, back into the Trap Door, at the double, and anybody who gets in your way or shoots at you gets knocked out of the way. Once you get out through the Royale end, you do not go back up into the hotel, you go through the underground garage along the far wall, down low behind the parked cars, which should keep you out of range of the cameras in the Royale security control room. At the Highland Avenue entrance you will be met by Volunteers Eckert and Pilefski, each wearing the uniform of a Los Angeles police officer and each driving a brand spanking new LAPD squad car, courtesy of Ace and Christina's hotwiring ability. Red team goes in one car, Gold team goes in the second, they hit the sirens and you're outta there."

"What about Comrade Dundee, sir?" asked Kicky.

"I will follow, but I have to make a little detour," explained Charlie. "I have to get back into the Royale, get into their security control room, and pop out the hard drive containing their digital recordings of the day's activities in the hotel, so that the feds will hopefully have some difficulty in figuring

out how we pulled it all off. I have my own E&E route planned from there. Well, mates, that's the skeleton of it. There's still a lot of detail to be fleshed out, but any questions so far?"

"Worst case scenario, Oscar," spoke up Lockhart. "Suppose something goes wrong after we get in, and it's obvious before we can get into position and make our coordinated move that they're onto us?"

"If that's the case, or if you do not get the go signal from me by the time the Best Screenplay presentation ends . . . what's next, Oscar?" Randall asked Hill.

"Best Director," said Hill.

"If you don't hear from me by the time Best Director starts, then assume I am either dead or captured. Then you go up and out onto the stage from behind the curtain, waste whoever is up there at the podium, then drop down, take what cover you can behind sets or props or whatever, and start blasting away into the VIP section and the private boxes from the stage itself," Randall told them. "It's a bloody sloppy way to do this, you'll have footlights and spotlights in your eyes, and you'll be all lit up and good targets for the enemy, but if something does go south, I'll be damned if I am exiting stage left without taking some of these effete Hollywood bastards with me, and I presume that all of you feel the same. If we get trapped, then we go down fighting. I know I don't have to ask if you're all up for that. You wouldn't have been chosen for this mission if you weren't."

"One comment," said Hill. "I'm sure that at some time all of you must have seen bootleg copies of *Braveheart* even after it was banned, along with *The Passion* and all Mel Gibson's other work. You remember the final scene as the Scottish hero dies crying out *Freedom!* In that worst-case scenario, if God forbid it should occur, try to make sure as you go down that these Jew motherfuckers hear you shout *Freedom!* I want them to understand what they're up against."

XXI

Must-See TV

It was great pity, so it was,
This villainous saltpetre should be digged
Out of the bowels of the harmless earth,
Which many a good tall fellow had destroyed . . .

King Henry IV—Act I, Scene 3

At 8:30 on the morning of the Academy Awards ceremony, Charlie Randall was in the safe apartment the NVA had chosen as the assembly area. He got a call on one of his cell phones from Volunteer Ken Bishop. "Hello, Mr. Dundee? We have the three bags of wallaby feed you ordered. Do you want them delivered?"

"No, I'll pick them up meself," said Randall. "Cheers, mate." He hung up the phone. "All three boxes are in the hotel," he told the others around him, all of them casually and nattily dressed in the height of Southern California fashion, down to the cool shades and the Blackberries on their belts. "Right, I will go in first. It will take me about half an hour to get down there, allowing for traffic. As soon as I call in the all clear, the rest of you follow at sixty-minute intervals. You will each be assigned a driver of the opposite sex, who will drop you off a block from the hotel, and from there you will proceed on foot. Lieutenant Ekstrom, make sure they alternate the vehicles each time, so we don't have just one car or SUV going back and forth. The street CCTV cameras might pick that up and someone at police headquarters might notice the same vehicle going in and out of the area. If you see anything, anything at all, that looks or feels wrong on the way in, abort your entry and

let Oscar know immediately. He will contact me. Do not attempt to contact me yourselves until you are in the hotel suite."

"I'll be your driver, sir," spoke up Volunteer Jeannie Holdstoft. "You're in luck. It's a nice sunny day and since you're the CO, you rate the Jag, so we can go with the top down."

Half an hour later Randall eased into the Royale with a camera slung over his neck and a press identification badge from a major Australian newspaper dangling to his lapel. The lobby was crowded with milling people, tourists, movie flacks and publicists, bellhops and hotel employees, media and fans. He had no difficulty in strolling into an elevator and making it to the fourteenth floor. He checked the security cameras in the hall to make sure the little red light was off, and then knocked three times quickly on the door of 1401 and then twice, more slowly. Erica Collingwood opened the door. She was wearing a dark brown leather skirt, sandals, and a white silk blouse with several top buttons undone. Randall stepped inside, and without saying anything to her he walked through the four-room suite and kitchenette, holding his electronic bug-sweeper high. The suite showed clean. Three large cardboard cases lay on the floor in one corner. Randall went over to one of them, opened it with a pocket knife, and while Erica watched in fascination he drew out a Ruger .22 automatic and a silencer, which he screwed onto the muzzle of the pistol, and then an interior clip holster, which he slipped onto his belt at the small of his back, holstering the gun and pulling his shirttail over it. He then opened his cell phone and dialed. Christina Ekstrom answered. "Thank you for calling the Los Angeles County Humane Society," she said politely. "How may I direct your call?"

"Do you have any wombats?" asked Randall. "I'm looking to adopt about three of them."

"Uh, no, sir, I'm afraid we don't have any wombats at the moment," said Christina. "Could I interest you in a nice Cat? We have one here who is looking for a good home."

"Is he litter-trained?" asked Randall. Christina couldn't resist giggling. Randall hung up. "Right. I just confirmed I'm here safe, and all three boxes are here. The next man is on his way. How did it go this morning?"

"My performance was a success," said Erica, suddenly remembering to button up her blouse. "I was right. Those spics and the one white guy had their minds on me and their eyes glued to my rack. We could have brought in a couple of tanks, and they wouldn't have noticed."

"I didn't have to go through any metal detectors on my way in," said Randall. "Crikey, that's a change from Seattle or Portland! Up there you have

to go through a metal detector and a couple of checkpoints every time you go to the bog in a first class hotel like this. We've pulled off too many naughties in such places. How are you holding up, Erica?"

"More nervous than even when I did my first serious screen test at age twelve, but don't worry, it's just stage fright," she assured him. "I won't flake on you. I'm up for this, all the way."

"Good on yez," said Randall.

"Now what?" asked Erica.

"We wait. The next man should be here in about an hour. The whole team should be in by mid-afternoon. Anything going on here I need to know about? I didn't see any drunken movie stars in the corridor."

"Oh, none of the real heavies ever get up much before noon," said Erica.

"You're up," said Randall.

"Yeah, well, I had to go on at eight, remember?" she said with a smile. "You ever want to become an actor, the key to winning any director's heart is when you've got a six o'clock call, you're there at six, in makeup, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and ready to go dramatic on his ass. I've gotten parts before, edged out a lot bigger named actresses than me, purely because I take my craft seriously. The directors know that when I'm on set I'm all business, and I make those six o'clock calls, sober, straight, not groggy or hung over, and ready to roll camera."

"Someday you'll be the biggest star in the Homeland," Randall promised.

"Will we win?" she asked him bluntly.

"We've got a fighting chance, yes," he told her. "We could still blow it. It could all come unglued. They can't defeat us, although we might yet defeat ourselves with some stupid mistake. But the United States will never be the same. No matter what happens to us, tonight or from now on, we have written indelibly into the history books that at least some white men finally revolted after a century of oppression and insult, and that our race did not go gentle into that good night. We've shattered so many politically correct myths over the past two years I can't even count 'em. And I'll tell you this much, Erica. We may not have the power to remake the world in our image, or even to grab back the small part of it we're demanding of these bastards. But we can make bloody well sure they can't create *their* Brave New World either, that big consumer plantation where a small gang of Jews and science nerds and white poofters in business suits sit on the veranda and sip their mint juleps, fucking everything that moves and grazing in the grass, while all the rest of the world consists of coffee-colored peons toiling in their factories and offices,

spending their minimum wage on junk food and bright shiny trashy little toys and worshipping Ronald McDonald, with no race, no culture, no God, no identity, nothing to live and die for except bloody money and mindless recreation. If it can't be the white man's world ever again, by God, it will never belong to the Jews!" He saw she was looking at him strangely. "Sorry. Got up on me soapbox there for a bit."

"No, I'm riveted, actually," she said earnestly. "Look, Mr. Dundee, or Mick, or whatever your name really is, I have to admit, all this is a bit freaky for me, but not in a bad way. I was listening to you just then, and all of a sudden it hit me that in all my life, I've never known a man, a *real* man, of my own race."

"What about Chase?" he asked her.

"Chase was everything that a modern feminist would want in a partner," said Erica. "Jesus! You hear, I just said partner and not husband. I guess that shows how deep all this PC social engineering and mental conditioning goes."

"It's just like George Orwell wrote in *1984*," agreed Randall. "By controlling the language, they eventually control thought. I'll try to counteract it a bit by addressing you as *Miss* Collingwood."

"Thanks, but Erica's good," she laughed. "Chase was kind, and gentle, and supportive, and creative, and funny, and a great kisser, among other things."

"Those aren't at all bad qualities for a man to have, you know," Randall reminded her gently. "Sounds to me like you could have done a lot worse."

"Yes, I know, but that's *all* he was," said Erica. "It's like that with so many otherwise fine white males today. It's like half of them is missing. The hard half, the strong half, that once led our race to conquer almost all the world, to make the world the way it is today. The strength, the courage, the ruggedness, the will to power and to overcome obstacles that our people once had is gone now."

"The Old Man calls it the alpha gene," said Randall.

"Yeah, well, it seems to have gone missing in white males these days. If it's there at all, it's there in some weird, mutated form like obsessive and heartless ambition and clawing for money, or else it shows up in sudden psychotic episodes that always catch you by surprise just when you think you know a guy. For the rest of us, it's like we've just given up and accepted our own end. You'd be amazed how many white people of my acquaintance simply take it as a matter of course, as an irreversible fact of life, that the white race is going to become extinct in a generation or two, and that we're all going to

become coffee-colored, like you said just now when you were on your soap box. Chase had everything I could ever want in a man, except that," she said mournfully. "Don't get me wrong, I loved him and I love him still. But now it's kind of hitting me for the first time that I was only *settling*, because I knew he would be the best I could ever do from the available field of choice. I didn't know there were any of you older models still in service," she added with a rueful smile.

"Yeah, a few," Randall replied, grinning. "Kinda hard to get parts, though."

"I suppose this is the cue for me to go all slinky and ask you how long we've got until that next Volunteer knocks on the door?" she said, trying to laugh it off.

"Best offer I've had all day," said the Australian gallantly. "But even if you were serious, I couldn't take you up on it. Business before pleasure, and all that."

"Yeah, I figured," she said with a nod. "But look, if we both make it through and it turns out to be possible, you've got my number and you know where I live."

"Invitation accepted. I'd really like to get to know a girl who reads Henry Lawson better," said Randall, and she could tell that he meant it. "You may consider yourself on my to-do list." She giggled. "Now, you've got cable in here, right? I need to keep it on the local news channels, see if there's anything brewing Oscar-wise or all around the town that might affect us, although Mr. Ripley tells us that so far everything is going as planned. When do you have to show up for the penthouse bash?"

"Not until about one," she said. "I need to go up and help Janie and the caterers get set up. I'll need to come down here about four thirty and change into my Prada threads."

"The lads have already been told that you don't exist," said Randall. "You can trust them to protect your identity as much as is possible from anyone in a situation like this."

"Don't worry," said Erica. "I meant it when I told you, I want my name in the hat along with all of you. It's an honor."

An hour later came the secret knock on the door. Randall looked out the peephole, saw Cat-Eyes Lockhart outside, and opened it to let him in. Lockhart was wearing a false moustache, sunglasses, and a baseball cap, hopefully to fool any facial profiling software that might pick him up on camera. He peeled off the moustache and took off the hat as they went into the living room of the suite. "Damned thing itches. So this is how the other

half lives!" said Lockhart with an appreciative whistle. "Snazzy." Erica got up from the sofa. Lockhart was startled. "Well, I'll be damned, you're . . ."

"She's no one," said Randall. "She's not here, remember?"

"Now that's a real pity," said Lockhart, shaking his head admiringly. "Sorry, ma'am. I'm a bit star-struck, but I guess you're used to that."

"I'm the one who should be star-struck, Mr. Lockhart," said Erica, shaking his hand in some awe. "I think your face has been getting more air time than mine for the past year. My God, how can you walk around in public with the whole world after you?"

"You're an actor, so you should know the answer to that," said Lockhart. "You just school yourself to understand that you're on stage all the time, twenty-four seven. You assume a character and you live it, and you never let yourself forget the role you're playing. Everyone you meet on the street or in this hotel or anywhere else is your audience, and if your performance slips just once, you're done for. Death is the ultimate bad review."

"Wow, talk about total immersion!" said Erica, shaking her head in wonder.

"You're going to be playing that role yourself, from now on," Randall reminded her.

"Jeez, you know, you're right!" Erica acknowledged.

"Starting tonight," said Lockhart. "Ma'am . . ."

"Erica," she said.

"Okay, Erica, as I understand it from my briefing, you're going to be presenting the Best Screenplay award to those two faggots?"

"Yes, that's right," she confirmed. "I hope you're as good a shot as your reputation claims, Mr. Lockhart."

"Might as well call me Cat-Eyes, or just Cat," said Lockhart. "Everyone else does, including that asshole on Fox News who added a hundred thousand dollars of his own personal money to my DT bounty. Look, I know this is kind of late in the day, but do you understand that you might be hit yourself? We'll be firing without our usual telescopic sights, because we don't have any way to re-zero and adjust them after breaking the weapons down and putting them back together. Ron and I are both good at what we do, but in that kind of confined space with all the noise and confusion, anything could happen. It's going to be a slaughterhouse down there," he concluded bluntly.

"She understands that," said Randall. "This is why all six of you have to see her, and know her for one of us, to make sure no one takes her for just another dumb Hollywood blonde and decides to add her to his bag. After which you delete that file from your memories."

"Ten-four, sir. But one thing, Erica. I've got first shot. When those two fruits get up on stage, and they're standing at the podium together, make sure you quietly step back a couple of paces. Give me a little wiggle room to play with."

"Not a good idea," she said, shaking her head. "You obviously don't know how the Tinsel Town mentality works, lucky guy. In Hollywood, shrinking violets finish last. We *always* try to upstage one another any time there's a camera rolling or any media around. It's so much part of the mindset in this town that any deviation from that pattern will look suspicious. I don't know if you've ever actually watched the Oscars, but if you have, you'll recall that the presenters always try to grab as much face time on camera as they can. After they've opened the envelope and the winner or winners are up on stage, the presenters *always* try to stay in the shot, even if they're just hovering in the background. Sometimes they even mug the winners behind their backs, much to the studios' displeasure, but it's become kind of an accepted thing. If I step back from Nat and Marty while they're making their acceptance speech, far enough to be out of your line of fire, then about the fortieth time the FBI and the DHS replay that tape, one of their psychologists or profilers is going to notice the fact that I stepped out of the way, and they're going to wonder why." She took his hand. "You're supposed to be the greatest rifleman in the world, Cat. Be that. I trust you with my life."

"Uh, okay," said Lockhart, still somewhat dubious. "Well, I hope so, because the other sniper and me are going to be using special ammunition, something our quartermaster's father cooked up for us. All lead slugs, no copper jackets since at this range we won't need them for ballistics, hollow points with mercury fulminate caps and an extra hot load. That soft lead will pancake and the cap will explode when the round strikes, and each shot will blow holes in people the size of a phone book."

"Thanks for the visual," she said wryly.

"Now, I've got another question, uh . . ." Lockhart looked at Randall and nodded almost imperceptibly toward Erica, arching his eyebrows in question.

"Mick Dundee, in present company," Randall told him.

"Okay, Mick. In view of the ongoing nature of our mission here, do I, or you, or both of us card this tickle? God, I'd love to!"

"Naturally, since it will probably go down in history as your masterpiece," laughed Randall. "I don't think either of us could possibly be more wanted by ZOG than we are already. A hit this big, you're the first one they're going to accuse anyway. Me they don't know from Adam's house cat, which is as it should be, but they bloody well know the Prince of Wands. Hell, let the

kikes know that the Volunteers have sent down their A team. With tonight's festivities as an opening number, that will rattle them even more. Sure, let's both card 'em."

"Uh, card?" asked Erica.

"Our signature cards which we leave at the scene of our hits," explained Lockhart. "I'm the Jack of Diamonds, as you probably know from the media. I use regular playing cards because I'm in a line unit. This gentleman here is Third Section. He's part of what we call The Squad, courtesy of the famous Irish revolutionary leader Michael Collins, so he gets a Tarot card. He's the Prince of Wands."

"If I ever get a card I want to be the Queen of Hearts," laughed Erica. "That way I can yell, 'Off with their heads!'"

By three o'clock that afternoon, all seven NVA Volunteers were ensconced in Suite 1401. Erica spent several hours up in the penthouse setting up the party with Jane Gerasimo and schmoozing with the early arrivals who were drifting in, drawn by the scent of free alcohol and drugs and the possibility of earning a role in an upcoming movie through fast and witty patter, or through a quick act of fellatio in one of the bathrooms. The only disturbance had been some noise outside the door at about three o'clock; Erica had just come back down to the suite, and she slipped out to see what was going on. She came back and reported, "It's all right. Seymour Grossberg from Warner Brothers and Bart Payne were just having an argument about his cut for his last film. The studio literally Jewed Bart into accepting ten million up front, plus a three-point percentage, and now he's pissed. He would have gotten at least that much from the opening weekend alone if he'd gotten the ten points he told his agent Manny Skar to go for. I think I mentioned Manny used to be my agent as well? I wonder if Bart's figured out yet that Manny himself got two points under the table from Seymour for keeping him down to three? The usual thing. When two Jews get together in Hollywood over lunch, the Gentile client is the dessert."

"That's the flick about the brave astronauts who go into space to shoot down the aliens who have allied themselves with the Muslims and are going to zap New York and Tel Aviv with their ray guns?" asked Lee Washburn.

"And breed the alien monster in the Pope's belly that bursts out of his robes during his Easter address on St. Peter's Square wearing a Swastika armband, yes. *Terror from Beyond the Stars*," confirmed Erica.

There came the last coded knock on the door. Randall opened it and Kicky McGee walked in, wearing a neat business ensemble with long sleeves and black hose that covered her legs, as well as the mandatory L.A. sunglasses.

"Okay, that's the last of us," said Randall. He phoned Christina, who answered in the name of a well-known pizza joint. "Just thought I'd let you know, the one with the anchovies finally got here," he said. Back at the safe house Christina turned and told Hill and the rest of them, "They're all in!"

"Was that Bart Payne out there in the hall?" asked Kicky back in Suite 1401.

"Yep," said Lee Washburn.

"Christ, he looks old! Gin blossoms all over his face and he needs to hit the showers, or at least put on some deodorant," she said. "I met him getting off the elevator and he leered at me and tried to pick me up. I told him I was meeting somebody, and he wanted to know what I was doing after the Oscars. He invited me up to the party in the penthouse."

"What did you say?" asked Randall.

"I told him I'd give it a shot."

"Cute."

"You're a girl!" blurted out Erica.

"All my life," agreed Kicky.

"This is Tanya," said Randall.

"Yeah, I figured I'd use Patty Hearst's old handle since this is Hollywood," said Kicky. "Death to the Zionist insect!"

"Wait, I know you!" exclaimed Erica, staring. "Jesus, that big gunfight with the cops you guys had up in Portland last year! I know Cat-Eyes and that other guy in there, Thumper, he was in it, now you're here too. You were the girl who was shot and bleeding, but you kept on firing your gun and charging down the street at them! Oh, wow!"

"I never liked that clip," said Kicky with a wry smile. "The camera didn't get my good side. I know you, of course, or I would if you were anywhere near here. My brother had a real crush on you and a poster of you in his bedroom when he was fifteen."

"Cool!" said Erica. "Is your brother part of the operation too?"

"He came back from Baghdad in a bag. Several bags, actually. Poor white boys who grow up in double-wides on 82nd Avenue don't get draft exemptions like they do at Beverly Hills High." Kicky suddenly remembered the well-publicized story of Chase Clayborn's fate, and she slapped her forehead. "Oh, shit! Damn! I'm sorry, Erica, that was a stupid thing to say. I should have known better. I saw what happened to your boyfriend on TV."

"It's all right," said Erica. "You're right, of course. Chase ended up where he is only because I pissed off the wrong Jews, in case you're wondering why I'm helping you guys."

"I'm really sorry, about what I said, and about what happened to him."

"Your stuff is in the bedroom in there," said Randall, pointing to one of the doors. "Go ahead and check out all your gear, then go ahead and get into your tux." Erica followed Kicky into the bedroom. As she started taking off the feminist cubicle wear, Erica observed her tattoos and the scar on her arm in fascination, as well as when Kicky took out the Heckler and Koch MP5 submachine gun she would be carrying that night, checked the chamber, attached the sling, and slammed a magazine into the well, following that by screwing the silencer onto her own Ruger .22 automatic.

"Look, don't take this wrong, I know this is going to sound weird, but do you mind if I kind of watch you and talk to you while you get ready, Tanya?" asked Erica. "The reason I ask is that it occurs to me that someday I may have to play, uh, someone like you."

"I assumed from your presence here that you *are* someone like me," Kicky told her, as she pulled the hand grenades out of their olive green cardboard canisters and hooked them onto her web belt, to Erica's startled gaze.

"Ow! Touché. It's just that I always study people, watch how they act in as many different situations as I can, so that if I'm ever faced with a similar situation in a part I can make it real. I've done a few gun and crime scenes, and I was a female detective in one flick, but I was never really comfortable with those parts because I didn't *know.* Sorry, I know that sounds like I'm trying to use you as a guinea pig or something."

"I've been used as worse, honey," said Kicky.

"I know you don't have time to sit down and tell me your life story, and you wouldn't tell me if you did, but can I ask, just what's your motivation? Why are you involved?"

"I have a little girl," said Kicky. "Almost four years old now. I want to make sure that when she grows up, she doesn't turn into me." She called into the other room. "Jimmy, you wanna come do my hair?" Wingo entered the room, and while Kicky laid out her tuxedo on the bed he began braiding her hair, which had grown long again, into a single braid.

"Why is he doing that?" asked Erica.

"One of the things female volunteers have picked up through experience is that the best way to go into action is with one braid you can stuff into your collar and down your back," explained Kicky. "That way your hair doesn't get in the way, flapping around in your face while you're running and jumping and covering and trying to aim, that kind of thing. It's also a lot easier to wear your mask, and it breaks your profile if you're seen or recorded on camera. Afterward when you've broken contact, you can undo the braid real quick

when you change your clothes and let it drop on your shoulders like normal, changing your appearance."

Suddenly Erica's cell phone bleeped. She opened it and listened, then said, "Hi, Janey. Yeah, okay, I'll be right up." She closed the phone. "I've got to go back into glitterati mode and get back upstairs and schmooze some more, before I come down and get ready to go on myself. Well, ah, good luck." She left with an embarrassed air.

"Did you ask for her autograph?" Wingo asked Kicky.

"Another rich bitch who thinks there's something cool about growing up in a trailer park on Meth Row," sighed Kicky. "What is it with these girls? Delusions of squalor or something?"

"Yeah, well, did Cat tell you she's going to be standing right next to the two fags when he opens up?" inquired Jimmy. "It ain't just her money and her fame she's putting on the line."

"If she can stand still and smile and chatter for the camera when she knows she's in Cat Lockhart's sights, she's got more guts than I have," admitted Kicky.

Cat and Randall monitored the various pre-Oscar shows, flipping from channel to channel with the remote, looking for any new developments that might affect the plan. At a little past three the first stars began to show up outside the theater, mugging and posing as they strolled down the red carpet. There were increasing levels of shouts, laughter, cackling voices, thumping and bumping from the hallway outside as partygoers went up and down the corridor, to and from the elevator. Erica came back down at about four o'clock. She found them all sitting in the living room of the suite in their tuxedos. The TV's sound was off, and Kicky was holding up large glossy photographs of various studio executives, actors, directors, and Hollywood big shots in front of them. She held up a photograph. "Art Bernstein!" several of the Volunteers called out. She held up another one. "Allen Adler!" came the shouts of recognition. She held up another one. "Sid Glick!" snapped back Cat and the others. She held up another photo. "Peter Mandel!" came the quick responses.

"Kind of reminds me of that scene in *Tora, Tora, Tora!* where the Japanese pilots are getting ready for the attack on Pearl Harbor," she said, shaking her head in amazement.

"Not a dissimilar sitch. How's the party going upstairs?" asked Randall.

"Pretty slow so far," said Erica. "One minor drug OD that the house doctor is taking care of, and somebody barfed on the carpet, but otherwise just the usual grab-assing. Most of them understand they need to stay reasonably

straight for the ceremonies so they don't show their butts, get tossed onto the paddy wagon to Betty Ford, lose millions and maybe get blacklisted by the Glick Gang. I need to get into my outfit and get down there in time for the presenters' call at five. Have you got everything you need out of the second bedroom?"

"Yeah," said Randall.

"Thank God I never went in for big fancy hair styles," she said. "I always go for a simple look." She disappeared into the bedroom and closed the door. Simple look or not, it took her almost an hour, but when Erica opened the door and stepped out again the whole room fell silent. She was wearing a sheer sleeveless silver lamé evening gown with matching high-heeled shoes, carrying a matching purse, and adorned with a string of pearls around her neck, a silver bracelet, and gleaming diamond earrings, and a matching purse. Her cornsilk hair floated down over alabaster shoulders in a foaming wave; the best hairdresser in Hollywood couldn't have done better than she had done herself with a brush and a mirror.

"Looks like a movie star to me," said Lockhart with an approving nod.

"If that's a simple look, I'd love to see you all dolled up," said Randall.

"Get your damned jaw off the floor, Jimmy," Kicky told him in asperity.

"I wish you'd reconsider my advice about taking those two steps back, ma'am," Lockhart urged her sincerely.

"Nah, I always do my own stunt work," she told him with a smile.

"Okay. Just remember what I told you."

"One good scream to be recorded for the ages, then hit the floor, roll under the curtain out of the line of fire, and get behind any cover I can find," she repeated.

"I know you can scream," said Randall with a smile. "I saw you in that slasher film, *The Boogeyman Does Boston*."

"I screamed better in *The Bugs*, when I was covered with cockroaches," she said. "Live ones, not animatronic. The FX crew dumped 70,000 of them right over my head from plastic bins. I think I swallowed a couple during all the screaming and thrashing around in that scene. But this one tonight will be my masterpiece."

"Yeeew!" said Kicky.

She turned to the group. "I have to get going," she told them all, quietly but in a strong voice. "I very much hope that I will meet all of you again." She glanced quickly at Randall. "But if that's not the way it plays out, then I want you to know that it is a privilege for me to have met you, and I am

proud and honored that you have let me be a part of this memorable evening in history." She walked to the door and turned with her hand on the knob. She held the other hand up, not in a National Socialist salute, which her dramatic sense told her would have been overdoing it, but simply as a gesture of parting. She did not shout, she simply spoke a word that filled the room. *"Freedom!"*

"Freedom!" replied Lockhart.

"Right back atcha, babe," replied Randall.

* * *

They watched the opening revue and speeches on television. Randall was already wearing his air conditioning mechanic's outfit with the contractor's badge, his long red metal toolbox carefully packed with the tear gas grenades and his Uzi. His silenced Ruger was now in a shoulder holster under his coveralls, which were unzipped down to the waist to give him easy access. His radio hung on his tool belt. "The chorus line and whatnot should be cleared out of backstage and out of the dressing rooms in the basement by the time we get there," he told them. "Security doesn't like them wandering around after they've danced for their masters, so they get cleared out of the building pronto. One departure from the final briefing. When you leave this room, carry your web belts in your bags, don't wear them, since with these corridors as crowded as they are we might be seen and reported to hotel security. You'll put on your belts when you reach the jump-off in that corridor under the stage. Make sure that you do not leave anything of yours in these rooms, and make sure you spend the time between my departure and yours wiping this place clean as a whistle of prints, every single object any of you may have touched. Cat, you've got the schedule. Are they on it?"

"Down to the minute," said Cat. "Best Documentary is just coming on. What did we finally decide on for departure times?"

"I leave at 6:30 sharp, and you lot at 6:40," said Randall, looking at his watch. "Which means I'm off in about sixty seconds. Cat, keep your radio on. I will let you know if there are any problems, and you let me know when you leave. Comrades, I second everything that non-existent person said when she left. Let's give these bastards a night to remember." Randall picked up the toolbox, turned and walked out the door. In the hallway he could hear noise and music and maniacal laughter from the other suites along the corridor. A man in a white tuxedo was standing some ways down the corridor talking to the wall in a monotone, stoned on something. Randall entered the elevator

and rode it down to the garage level, card-swiped into the laundry room and found the door into the underground passage to the Kodak Theater without meeting anyone. He took out the swipe card copied from the one Erica had obtained for him. *If this doesn't work, we're screwed,* he thought to himself.

The door clicked and slid open silently. The long, dimly lit, carpeted passageway was empty. Randall got on the radio and clicked it three times. Back in Suite 1401 Cat Lockhart said, "That's it. He's in the Trap Door. His card works, so ours should work as well."

The door on the other end had no keyed access on the inside. Randall simply pushed it open, slowly peering out into the corridor by the old Green Room. It was empty. He could hear one of the award winners up on the stage droning on with his speech, and the noise of the audience that filled the theater. He entered the corridor and went to the open archway, carefully looking around. The backstage area was empty. He could see no activity up on the catwalks.

Randall looked up and waited for the traverse camera to begin its leftward swing, and then he moved swiftly along the back of the stage, stopping briefly to make sure the small door that led to the orchestra pit was indeed open, and then headed for the stairs, going upward into the gallery of makeup rooms and dressing rooms above. Randall and Sterling Farrell had carefully plotted out a circuitous route that would get him to the interstitial area with only two spots where a short time visible on the security cameras was unavoidable. The first was at the end of the dressing room gallery where he had to enter one of the main corridors for about 50 feet, which he did, walking casually as if he had every right to be there, swinging his tool box. Someone in the control room now knew he was there, if anyone was paying attention. As soon as he got out of camera range he ducked into a men's room that had a second exit door leading onto a short staircase down to lobby level, which Farrell had assured him had been somehow neglected when Centurion had been placing the cameras. If Centurion was sending somebody to look for him, they wouldn't know which way he had gone and they would waste time searching the whole corridor and all the rooms on it.

The second exposed place was the lobby-level corridor leading toward the interstitial area; Randall had to get down that and walk almost into the wall at the T-junction so as to get under the camera, so they couldn't see which way he was turning. If they figured him for an Oscars gatecrasher, they would assume he had turned right to try and get into the theater itself. Instead he turned left. They would not know he had entered the interstitial area until he swiped his key card and it registered in the control room. He

then had to wait there until he got word that the team was in place before popping his gas grenades, and shoot anybody who came through the door. He met no one along the way. He swiped the card and entered the room, drew his pistol and stuck it into his tool belt, opened his toolbox and took out an elastic bungee cord that he looped and hooked around the doorknob with the other end around an electric cable conduit. It would slow up anyone trying to open the door long enough to warn him so he could get his gun out. Then he took out his radio and clicked it three times. The roar of the air conditioning was so loud that he could speak in here. "I'm in place," he told the rest of them.

In the Hollywood Royale's Suite 1401, Cat-Eyes Lockhart said, "We're on our way," and slipped the radio into his back pocket. "Right, let's go." The six Volunteers left the suite, all wearing identical black and white tuxedos and wearing festive costume party masks, each lugging a heavy canvas gym bag. They met a drunken couple shrieking with maniacal laughter as they staggered down the corridor, the shoulder strap of her evening gown half off. "What's in the bags, guys?" cackled the woman, her eyes dilated.

"We're that new band, the Grim Reapers," said Cat from beneath his gorilla mask, as they waited for the elevator. "These are our instruments. We're going to do a hot number on the Oscars tonight."

"Knock 'em dead!" offered the drunken woman cheerfully.

"We will," said Cat as the elevator doors opened. They made it into the laundry room and to the door of the secret passageway without further incident, and everyone held their breath while Cat swiped his card through the slot. The card worked. The team moved swiftly down the corridor, into the theater, and then after a wait for the camera they went into the entrance of the small tunnel leading to the orchestra pit. Cat tore off the monkey mask and picked up his radio and clicked it. "We're in place," he said. "Set in sixty."

"I'm set," came Randall's voice. He had the air vent grill plate unscrewed and out on the floor, and his three CS grenade canisters were laid out on the duct. He had also taken the precaution of laying out a Prince of Wands tarot card, prominently displayed on another nearby duct, in case he hadn't time to do so if things got hectic. "Any hiccups?" he asked.

"Nary a one," said Cat. All around him the team members were taking off their fun masks, strapping on their web belts, and removing weapons and ammunition pouches from the canvas bags. Kicky and Lee Washburn carried HKs. Mike Gauss was quickly assembling his famous Thompson submachine gun, slapping in a 100-round drum, and over his shoulder he had slid a canvas

pouch containing two extra 100-rounders and two 50-round drums. Jimmy Wingo took out an AK-47, extended its folding stock, then a drum magazine that he inserted into the weapon. In his cylindrical pouch he carried four more such magazines. All the ammunition he and Gauss carried for their weapons was a heavy burden, but they figured to lighten their load significantly by the time they left. Kicky and Lee held flashlights while Cat-Eyes and Ron Kolchak carefully assembled and loaded their broken-down rifles. Then they stashed their masks in the bags, which also contained the street clothes in which they had entered the Royale, and the bags themselves into Wingo's large U.S. Army duffle bag. Finally, they pulled the dark blue ski masks down over their faces. They were ready in forty-five seconds. Cat got on the radio. "We're set," he told Randall in a tense voice.

"Wait on my signal," ordered Randall's voice. *No one's tried to come in here and check out what's going on,* he thought. *Bloody Norah! Are those people all asleep down there?*

As Randall was to learn later, the reason no one had come to see who he was and what he was doing in the building was that the control room staff members were all watching the action at the front door on their monitors. Security Sergeant Sterling Farrell had picked a fight with a drunken paparazzi, an obnoxious little Third Worlder of some nondescript brown appearance, who had been trying a routine schmooze past the metal detectors with a camcorder. Instead of simply telling him to get lost, Farrell suddenly went berserk, pepper-sprayed the man, knocked him down and began beating on him with a nightstick. Centurion Vice President for Operations Marvin Hagerman, head of security for the event, had come running from the control room and was still at the front door trying to sort out the brawl, which had left the pap with a broken nose streaming blood and screaming that he was going to sue everyone in sight.

Randall checked his portable cell TV and stuck the earphone in his head as he saw Erica Collingwood walk onto the stage with calm poise, her silver lamé gown and her golden hair floating around her. He heard her mellifluous and sensual voice say, "This year's nominees for Best Screenplay are . . ." He put on his gas mask, popped the grenades one after the other, and dumped them into the air conditioning vent. He waited almost thirty seconds before he heard yelling and screaming through the ducts from the floor below him that let him know the gas was in the control room. He picked up his radio and yelled *"Go! Go! Go!"*

They went. The six Volunteers broke out of the doorway beneath the stage at a run, and each group of three charged for their respective stairwells.

Cat, Kicky, and Wingo bounded up the stairs to the third floor, weapons at the ready, and when they got into the corridor Cat handed Kicky his M-21 while he drew his silenced Walther P-38. They ran down the corridor until they came to the short little alcove that led to the projection booth. Cat leaned around and saw a large, fat negro in a Centurion security guard uniform with a 9-millimeter automatic in a black holster on his hip, sitting on a chair watching the Oscar ceremony on a wireless cellphone. He looked up just as Cat-Eyes shot him twice in the heart. The guard didn't even fall out of the chair; he just grunted and slumped over. Cat walked up and put another slug through the top of his head.

Then he swiped the card he had been given through the slot. He kicked the door open and a surprised young redheaded, green-eyed white girl in sweats looked up in terror from beside the projector. Cat was on her, shoving her against the wall, his hand over her mouth, gun muzzle below her chin. "Do as I say, if you want to live," he whispered to her gently. "When I take my hand off your mouth, you will not speak. You will be quiet and do what you're told. If you make any sound of any kind, then you must die. Do you understand? Nod." The terrified girl nodded. Kicky grabbed her away from Cat and forced the girl onto the floor on her stomach. She pulled the girl's hands behind her back and bound her wrists together with a plastic cuff tie, standard Iraq issue by the hundred thousands, and then bound her legs at the ankles, while Cat drew a small spool of duct tape off his web belt and taped her mouth. "Can you breathe, Miss?" he said with equal gentleness. "Nod." She nodded. "Do not move or do anything at all foolish," he whispered to her. "Many people must die tonight, but as God is my witness, you will live, if you simply lie still and be very quiet." He rose to his feet and ignored her from then on. Jimmy Wingo handed him his rifle through the door and went down to the end of the short passage to cover down on the main corridor.

Down on the stage, Erica Collingwood called out, "The envelope, please!"

Cat took up a position on the right side of the projector, and Kicky to the left. Cat took out an extra 20-round magazine for his M-21, containing normal copper-jacketed rounds, and checked to make sure that the magazine in his weapon indeed contained the special exploding lead bullets. Kicky took out both her grenades and set them on the base plate of the projector, then slipped the safety off her HK and covered down on the target area, the forward VIP section in front of the orchestra pit with its tables of wine champagne and dainty food, glittering with men in gleaming tuxedos and women in a fantastic array of color and bejeweled elegance. Cat did the same, searching

the kill zone over the barrel, marking targets. He took out the radio. "Red Team set," he said. There was a delay of ten seconds or so, which seemed very long, and then he heard Kolchak's voice say, "Gold Team set."

"Red Team Leader, fire at will," came Randall's voice, somewhat muffled due to his gas mask. "I will begin my own E&E when I hear you open fire. Good luck and good hunting, comrades. *Freedom!*"

On stage the pudgy Martin Rudin and the tall, slim mulatto Nat Turner Thomas, elegant in their tuxedos, approached the podium, hand in hand. They each embraced a smiling Erica and gave her a kiss on the cheek as she handed them the gold Oscar statuette. Marty Rudin began to speak. "It's no secret that *The Color of Love* is largely autobiographical, the story of how my beloved partner Nat and myself were able to overcome a racist society's hurdles, not just one, but the triple prejudices of racism, anti-Semitism, and homophobia . . ."

"Come on, honey, step back!" Cat muttered to Erica under his breath. "Step back, please!" Rudin droned on, but still Cat held his hand, not happy with the shot that presented itself, afraid of hitting Erica with one of the deadly rounds.

Kicky leaned under the projector and whispered in his ear, very softly so the bound girl on the floor could not hear. "Cat, she's one of us. She's a Volunteer and she's doing her duty. Now you have to do yours."

"Nat, I couldn't have done it without you," blubbered an overcome Rudin down on the stage. "I couldn't have done any of it without you." The two men leaned over and gave each other a long, tongue-slurping French kiss. There was a sigh of *"Awwww . . ."* and a scattering of applause from the audience.

The two kissing men's heads exploded like watermelons, a single bullet virtually decapitating both of them. Erica Collingwood's mouth opened in a single long scream of pure terror, a scream heard around the world and immortalized for all time. She seemed to faint and dropped to the floor. Then all hell broke loose.

* * *

The Kodak Theater was originally designed as an operatic and concert house, and the acoustics were widely and justly acclaimed to be the best in the world, second only to the Sydney Opera House. The ribbed and shaped steel bands running from floor to high domed ceiling along the oval walls could magnify and reverberate the sound of a coin being dropped on stage.

The noise that filled the theater now passed any description that might convey the reality of it to anyone who was not there. The subsequent millions of replays of the videos from all angles were filled with the madness and the terror and the death and the blood, but could never adequately convey the *sound* of the gunfire that roared down from the sky, rolling in waves from the ceiling and the walls. One survivor described it as being "trapped inside an endless clap of thunder." The first grenades flew down from the projection booths, bounced and rolled along the floor, then detonated and hurtled fragments of wood and metal from chairs and tables, and human body parts. Several people were blown into the air, whirling like rag dolls in a tornado. Men and women screamed and scrambled and ran and hid, trampled and fought one another to get to the exits while a rain of death poured among them, rifle and submachine-gun fire, cutting them down and sending them flopping and gushing blood down to the floor.

After maybe ten seconds, Kicky and Cat heard pops from the theater floor and heard the slap of pistol bullets slamming into the wall around the projection booth. The security guards, the bodyguards, and the cops were firing back at them. One bullet shattered the lens of the projector, showering them with powdered glass. A second clanged into the metal body of the projector and rang deafeningly. "The bells, *the bells!*" moaned Lockhart in a Hunchback of Notre Dame imitation, grinning maniacally at Kicky, who screamed with adrenalin-fueled laughter, blazing away with her submachine gun. Still firing, Cat yelled "Grenade!" and Kicky threw her second one, then returned to spraying bullets at anything that moved, slapping empty magazines out onto the floor and full ones into the weapon. The grenade exploded with a *whump* that made the building shake, and maybe five seconds later the fourth grenade from the other projection booth detonated as well.

In one way it was an endless time, and in another way it was but the flash of a moment until Cat ripped the empty magazine out of his M-21, slapped in the next one, pulled a Jack of Diamonds card out of his pocket and laid it on the bullet-scarred ledge, and yelled, "That's twenty rounds, and we're outta here!" Kolchak and Washburn were still firing into the shrieking, undulating mass of bodies down in the theater. Out in the corridor, heavy-set Jewish men, some in yarmulkes, all in tuxedos, had come charging out the doors of the private boxes dragging women in expensive gowns, mostly young and blonde, as they tried to escape. Jimmy Wingo was waiting for them, crouching behind the corner of the entranceway, and with short, well-aimed bursts he cut them all down. Not one made it to the stairs.

Cat and Kicky came out of the projection room. "Let me go first," said Wingo, and they pelted down the corridor after him. Just as they reached the stairwell the door opened and a Centurion guard popped out, pistol in his hand. Wingo chopped him down with the AK. A bullet screamed by them and slapped into the wall. Kicky turned and blazed away with the HK at a couple of guards who were stumbling along the corridor behind them, hitting one of them and dropping him. The other turned and fled. They crashed down the stairs and Wingo machine-gunned another Centurion guard who was on his way up.

The backstage area was no longer empty. It was filled with milling and jabbering members of the orchestra, some of them wounded, who had fled through the passageway under the stage. A woman screamed as the Volunteers came out of the stairwell in their ski masks. Wingo spotted a Mexican security guard and splattered him against the wall with a burst of the Kalashnikov, quickly removing the magazine when it ran dry and slapping in another. The people all screamed and fled or ducked under cover. They met Ron Kolchak and his team at the door of the passageway, and Lee Washburn tore the door open and grabbed the duffle bag with all their bits and pieces in it. Then they ran for the archway and the Trap Door. Mike Gauss walked backwards, spraying the oncoming guards and police with bursts from his Thompson.

With perfect timing, Randall was waiting for them at the door, holding it open. "Uh-the-uh-the-uh-the-uh-*that's all, folks!*" said Cat-Eyes as they moved into the passageway. They ran down the passage and came out into the underground garage beneath the Royale. It was empty except for two police cruisers parked near the Highland Avenue exit. "Wait, we need to make damned sure they're ours!" said Randall. Two uniformed LAPD officers were standing by the squad cars, but they could not be recognized at that distance. He called out to them, *"Apple?"*

"Cobbler!" shouted back Volunteer Joe Pilefski.

"Here, take these!" Randall handed them his toolbox and his Uzi and ammo pouch and tool belt, retaining only his pistol. "I'll meet you back at the Batcave. Good job, comrades, but we're not home free yet. Now go!"

He watched them all run to the squad cars and pile inside, then watched the cars depart, their blue and red lights silently flashing. Then Randall walked up the stairs and entered the hotel lobby, where there was chaos, people running around and shouting and weeping, others glued to the television sets in the bar and in the lobby, staring at the carnage on the screen. Randall walked unnoticed in his gray coveralls through the lobby, down another hall and right into the control room of the Hollywood Royale Centurion

security force. There was a single Mexican security guard in the room. He looked up and said, "Hey, man, you ain't allowed in here." Randall shot him in the head. He went over to the console, felt around under the board until he found a switch, and released the hard drive containing the security digital recordings for the hotel for the past several years, which he dropped into a plastic carrier bag he unfolded from his pocket that said "Hollywood and Highland, Where The Stars Shop!" Randall returned the pistol to his shoulder holster. Then he walked unnoticed out the front door. Three blocks down Hollywood Boulevard a late-model BMW pulled over to the curb and beeped. Randall got into the car. Barry Brewer was driving. "Everybody else get away okay?" asked Brewer.

"They made it to the cop cars," said Randall. "You got any word on Farrell and Erica?"

"Farrell just called me. He slipped out in the confusion and he's heading for the pickup point. Erica made it too. I heard her being interviewed on the car radio by some of the media people who also survived. She's laying on just the right combination of hysterics and confusion, as well she might. That first bullet of Cat's must have shaved an eyelash off her. God damn, that girl has got balls!"

"She wasn't hit, then," said Randall with a sigh of relief. "She ducked and covered okay. Thank God. I got the hotel security videos." He shook the bag. "You get any take from the early media yammer on how we did?"

"I can tell you this much. You cut out Hollywood's heart and stomped that sucker flat!" said Brewer.

* * *

The day after the Oscar Night Massacre, the following casualty list appeared on the front page of a black-bordered edition of the Los Angeles *Times.* In addition to the dead listed here, over two hundred people were wounded by bullets and flying shrapnel, and also from being trampled in the stampede to escape. The L.A. *Times* list was subsequently posted to the internet on a satiric Web site called insidetinseltown.com, with certain pointed and irreverent commentary added. The day after it was posted, the site was shut down and the webmaster arrested under the Patriot Act. He has never been seen since. But this did not occur before the site was mirrored all across the World Wide Web:

Adelstein, Jeremy (34)—Jewish. Scriptwriter for six major television sitcoms on two networks. Faked mental illness to evade draft.

Adler, Allen (41)—Jewish. Senior vice president in charge of marketing, Paradigm Studios. Got his start making porno and snuff films in Mexico.

Baylor, Amber (30)—White. Nominated for Best Supporting Actress for portrayal of tough female FBI agent hunting evil white racists in the Pacific Northwest. Married to Israeli independent producer and director Avrohom Stern.

Bernstein, Arthur (45)—Jewish. Prominent director, recipient of two Lifetime Achievement Academy Awards and two Best Directors. Slated to direct *Great White North* for World Artists. Indicted for insurance fraud and tax evasion. Charges dropped.

Borenstein, Albert (50)—Jewish. Senior Vice President In Charge of Production, World Artists. Several complaints of physical and sexual abuse by multiple wives dropped through unknown influence.

Cochran, Mark (44)—White. Married, no children. Nominee for Best Special Effects for *The Return of the Zoid.*

Cohen, Harry (23)—Jewish. Actor. Star of television sitcom *The Rabbi and Me* wherein Cohen plays feckless high school kid who solves mysteries with the help of a wise old rabbi, crimes that always originate with evil white racists or Muslims. Charges of obtaining a false medical exemption from the draft dropped, influence of Sid Glick.

Cohen, Todd (36)—Jewish. Casting director, Paradigm Studios. Subject of repeated sexual harassment suits from aspiring actresses and studio employees.

Colbert, Kaneisha (24)—Mulatto. Actress. Nominated for Best Supporting Actress for her role as a Strong Womyn African-American freedom fighter in the epic Southern anti-slavery movie *Eagleton Plantation,* for which she had already received the Best Actress award from the Black Film Actors' Guild. Ms. Colbert was not shot, but trampled to death by her fellow glitterati trying to escape.

Concasseur, Ti-Jean (35)—Black. Centurion security officer. Former UN-trained Haitian police officer, former Port-au-Prince gangster and enforcer for outlawed Lavalas party.

Daniels, Ray (42)—White. Actor. Nominated for Best Actor for *Let's Go Home*, wherein Vietnam vet returns to reunite with his Saigon bargirl lover and his mixed-race child and fights against the Communists and then wicked racist American immigration law to bring them into the United States.

Dickstein, Morris (39)—Jewish. Golden Globe award-winning actor and stand-up comedian. Chairman of the Hollywood-Israel Friendship Society. Two arrests for pedophilia, suppressed by influence of unknown persons.

Fiegenbaum, Yossele (70)—Jewish. President, MGM Studios. Member of Anti-Defamation League's national Board of Directors. Reputed to have private room in his Beverly Hills mansion stocked with drugs, sex toys, pornography, and Satanic ritual objects.

Franken, Andrea (38)—Jewish. Co-scriptwriter for *Great White North.* Police broke into her apartment when neighbors heard screams and found Franken bound in leather restraints and apparently being raped and beaten by James Waterson, 26, Hell's Angels gang member with prominent Swastika and white racist tattoos. Charges dropped when Franken admitted the acts were consensual and Waterson was paid for them.

Galvez, Ramon (28)—Hispanic. Centurion security officer.

Ganz, Allen (32)—Jewish. Head of script department at FoxFlix Productions. Heroin addict.

Gelblum, Emmanuel (54)—Jewish. Chairman of the Board of Directors of World Artists Studios. Approved recent project *Great White North.* Son heroin addict, daughter in mental institution in room next to her mother. Gelblum was a *shochet*, a kosher slaughter man, not out of religious obligation but because he simply enjoyed killing animals.

Glick, Shlomo (53)—Jewish. Head of Mammoth Productions. Scheduled producer of *Homeland.* Reputed to be drug addict and insane. Stabbed a secretary with a pair of scissors in his office, released after thirty days' court-ordered psychiatric observation. Scandal ensued when it was revealed that Glick only spent one day in observation and was actually at work and at home when alleged observation was supposed to be taking place. Story killed on order of his brother, Sid Glick.

Glick, Sidney (58)—Jewish. President, Paradigm Studios. Known as "Mr. Hollywood," Glick was renowned as the most powerful Jew in the motion picture industry since Louis B. Mayer's time. Driving force behind *Homeland* project.

Goldblum, Ari (56)—Jewish. Israeli-born head of largest talent agency in Hollywood. Famed as first Hollywood manager actually to write a casting couch clause for actresses into his contracts, known as the "personal services" clause.

Goldblume, Jerry (42)—Jewish. Actor-director. Arrests for rape, bestiality, and stock fraud, all suppressed through the influence of Sid Glick.

Goram, Rafi (31)—Jewish. Bodyguard to Sid Glick. Ex-Israeli Mossad. Goram was wanted by the United Nations War Crimes Committee for the murder of over 100 elderly Palestinians in a nursing home burned to the ground during an Israeli army incursion into Ramallah.

Greenwood, Michelle (25)—White. "Aspiring actress" actually employed by escort service, accompanying Saul Steinberg of Twenty-First Century Fox to ceremonies that night.

Gunderson, Robert (43)—White. Bodyguard to Sid Glick. Former FBI agent. Dismissed from Bureau for selling information to Colombian drug lords.

Gutierrez, Pablo (32)—Hispanic. Hotel Royale control room guard.

Halter, Yossi (34)—Jewish. Just appointed youngest studio Vice President in history at Mammoth Productions. Reputedly blackmailed entire board of directors with six months' worth of secret surveillance tapes of their assorted sexual and financial peccadilloes. "This young man will go far," said Mammoth on announcing his appointment in the media.

Hirschfield, Albert (50)—Jewish. Editor of *Variety Online.* Suspected of poisoning his elderly mother with strychnine some years ago in order to get a large insurance settlement.

Horowitz, Joshua (30)—Jewish. Scriptwriter for *Great White North.* Had bribery arrangement with California Department of Corrections wherein

he was occasionally admitted to correctional institutions and left alone with "white supremacist" inmates who were handcuffed and restrained, and allowed to beat them with a baton. It is not known whether he was ever allowed to flagellate his co-writer Andrea Franken (see above).

Hudson, Mary Anne (27)—White. "Aspiring actress" actually employed by escort agency. Accompanied Irving Kirschbaum to the ceremonies that night.

Jones, Lamont (29)—Black. Bodyguard to Yossele Fiegenbaum. Karate black belt, ex-Marine Corps. Cocaine addict.

Katz, David (52)—Jewish. Director and independent producer. Producer of *Great White North.* Two counts of rape dismissed through influence of persons unknown.

Kirschbaum, Irving (58)—Jewish. Producer of over seventy major motion pictures, including four Academy Awards for Best Picture and one personally for Lifetime Achievement. Widely believed in the industry to be insane. Claimed to be accompanied always by Angel Gabriel and conducted long conversations with said divine being at various inappropriate times such as board meetings, etc.

Kirschner, Marion (56)—Jewish. Specialized in wise and salty Jewish mother roles, including her latest television series where she portrayed a wisecracking Yiddishe mama who was also a federal judge, sentencing evil white racists and Muslims to prison every week. Found dead at her VIP table, face down in a bowl of her own trademark chicken soup.

Landauer, Hyman (49)—Jewish. Senior Vice President in charge of Production, World Artists studios, in charge of proposed film *Great White North.* Arrested in legal Nevada brothel after being found under influence of drugs in bed with strangled prostitute. No charges filed.

Mandel, Peter (75)—Jewish. President of Global Studios. A raging sex maniac who once engaged in coitus with two dozen aspiring starlets in one twenty-four hour period to win a bet, one per hour, after which he fired them all and had them hounded out of town by the LAPD because "Nobody nails my leftovers."

Martinez, Rafael (26)—Hispanic. Centurion security officer.

Nussbaum, Philip (48)—Jewish. Producer and director, mostly for Paradigm. Killed three members of the Riordan family of San Diego, including two children, while driving the wrong way up an exit ramp on Interstate Five at eighty miles an hour in his Maserati, with a blood alcohol level of .16. Charges reduced to straight DUI, license suspended for ninety days.

Padilla, Juan (30)—Hispanic. Centurion security officer.

Pechter, Rabbi Leo (48)—Jewish. Southern California regional director, Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. Served as interrogator in U.S. Army, investigated by JAG for torture of Arab prisoners going even beyond the Dershowitz Protocols, quietly discharged, and immediately employed by ADL.

Ratner, Lew (54)—Jewish. "Attorney to the Stars." Main legal troubleshooter for Hollywood establishment under Generalissimo Sid Glick. Once got black athlete and aspiring actor Tyrone Fowler acquitted for rape and murder of Russian hotel maid, a homicide that was cam corded in it entirety by paparazzi lurking on balcony and introduced into evidence. Fowler was nominated for this year's awards as Best Supporting Actor for *Blood on the Basket* but was found dead in his Mercedes of a drug overdose before awards night.

Robertson, Frederick (40)—White. Centurion security officer. Married, two children.

Rodriguez, Manuel (22)—Hispanic. Centurion security officer.

Rosenberg, Abe (45)—Jewish. Senior in-house legal counsel to Paradigm Studios. Found with almost a full gigabyte of child pornography on his company computer and a whole secret viewing room full of such material in his Carmel, California home. No charges filed.

Rubinstein, Jennifer (40)—Jewish. Gossip columnist and reviewer for *Variety.* Alleged to have driven actresses Jenny Kraft and Mila Bellarov to suicide after ruining their careers.

Rudin, Marty—(36) Jewish. Homosexual. Joint winner of Best Screenplay award for *The Color of Love.*

Salazar, Ramon (27)—Hispanic. Centurion security officer.

Shmulevitz, Rabbi Samuel (62)—Jewish. Director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles. Personal friend of Hillary Clinton.

Stanford, Jenna (26)—White. Actress. Star of several interracial films including a Mafia version of *Othello,* the consensual incest movie *Brother Beloved* wherein a teenaged Stanford seduces her ten year-old brother, as well as engaging in one of the grottiest lesbian scenes ever filmed during the movie version of *Sappho*.

Steinberg, Saul (59)—Jewish. Executive vice president, Twenty-First Century Fox. Known associate of organized crime figures, suspected of money laundering, reputed to be unofficial Mossad station chief for Hollywood.

Steinfeld, Bert (43)—Jewish. Actor. Specialized in macho martial arts roles beating up on Arabs, Nazis, Frenchmen, and other villainous characters. Rifle bullet entered anus while Siegel was crawling on floor and exited his brain.

Stern, Avrohom (63)—Jewish. Israeli independent director and producer. Imported over ten thousand black Africans from Guinea-Bissau and Senegal into Florida to use as extras for an African war movie he was making. Movie lost financing, and so Stern simply opened the compound one morning and turned the Africans loose, resulting in several dozen murders and over two hundred rapes of local residents, as well as over a thousand separate lawsuits, all of which were dismissed due to unknown influence.

Thomas, Nathan Turner (31)—Black. Homosexual. Joint winner of Best Screenplay award for *The Color of Love.* Arrested for child molestation three years ago, charges dropped through influence of persons unknown.

Tostigsdottir, Ingrid (21)—White. Icelandic supermodel, escorting Hyman Landauer to the Oscar ceremonies.

Washington, Bo-Bo (47)—Black. Centurion security officer.

Weinberg, Bruce (54)—President, Star Crown Motion Pictures, Inc. Investigated by the SEC for securities fraud and by the DEA for allegedly

arranging "in-house" narcotics supplies to his actors and executives, and collecting cut of the profits. No charges filed.

Weinstein, Abe (60)—Jewish. Senior vice president for Finance for Universe Studios. Investigated for "creatively financing" many films with laundered drug money and for statutory rape of a minor. No charges filed.

Woltz, Louis (70)—Jewish. CEO of Excelsior Studios. Multi-millionaire. In his younger days as an agent he was charged with embezzling clients' money, mail fraud, drug trafficking, and suspicion of murder when actress Jill Considine died under mysterious circumstances in her home just after filing a multi-million dollar lawsuit against Woltz to recover money he stole from her over a five-year period.

XXII

Send Off The Clowns

Oh God! That one might read the book of fate
And see the revolution of the times
Make mountains level, and the continent,
Weary of solid firmness, melt itself into the sea!

King Henry IV, Second Part—Act III, Scene 1

The response to the Oscar Night Massacre was immediate, on the part of both the Hollywood establishment and the United States government.

From Washington, D.C. came a televised address to the nation from President Hillary Clinton. The skin of the old woman's face was stretched so taut by repeated plastic surgeries that her translucent cheeks and chin actually gleamed white in the camera lights from the bone beneath, despite the best makeup, skillfully applied. Her eyes glistened as well, sparkling with near insanity at these uppity white boys. Her whole manner and address seemed a bit unhinged, a fact not lost on viewers and commentators. The President spent the first 20 minutes delivering a maudlin eulogy of the Jewish victims of this "unspeakable act of bloodthirsty and unquenchable hatred." ("She got that right," snarled Charlie Randall as he watched the broadcast in the Culver City apartment.) Hillary's grief for the dead of Oscar Night wasn't completely feigned; many of the dead Jews had been significantly responsible for elevating her to the Presidency in exchange for selling her soul to Israel, and the unswerving support of the Hollywood media establishment had been instrumental in keeping her there, especially in beating her impeachment by the House of Representatives and her subsequent trial in the Senate for

allegedly ordering the murder of several of her more vocal political opponents and critics.

Hillary concluded by announcing that "the patience of the American people with racism and terrorism is at an end, and we are going to crush these evil men like the insects they are." She announced that a new paramilitary force, the Federal Anti-Terrorist Police Organization (FATPO) would be immediately deployed into the Pacific Northwest and that they would operate under "special rules of engagement" that would allow for the "complete eradication of terror, and at long last mete out the condign punishment that should long ago have been applied to every manifestation of racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, nativism, and sexism."

"You forgot thoughtcrime, bitch," sneered Cat Lockhart.

"Oh, no, she didn't. Neat move," commented Hill after the special Presidential address had been concluded. "We've known her little Army of Darkness was on the way for at least a year, but some of the last holdouts of the old way in D.C. were worried about whatever legal or constitutional fig leaf she was going to use to justify creating what is basically her own private militia. This way she avoids having to declare martial law throughout the Northwest, which the United States military has repeatedly told her they cannot possibly enforce while they're scattered all over the globe grabbing oil wells and chasing Muslims and protecting Israel's ass. Not to mention making a mockery of her own professed liberalism for all time. No martial law, oh, no heaven forbid! She just unleashes her little private army of thugs and killers on the population of an entire region with 'special rules of engagement.' That will give them the power to go berserk and slaughter anyone they suspect of supporting the NVA or even of thinking unwholesome racial thoughts."

"Hell, these people have been sidestepping the Constitution and due process for decades, ever since her husband was in power," commented Christina Ekstrom.

"I thought they weren't going to bring in those goons until sometime this summer?" asked Lockhart.

"That was the original plan, yes," replied Hill with a nod. "We've forced their hand, compelled them to react to us, and that's always good."

The surviving members of Tinsel Town's Hebrew and homo movie-making élite assembled a huge press conference in the auditorium of 21st Century Fox studios four days after the slaughter. They were obviously shaken and paranoid, seeing NVA assassins behind every bush and under their beds. The conference was surrounded by hundreds of LAPD and private security contractors who were armed and equipped better than most military units

fighting in the deserts of the Middle East. It took the press reporters and television crews five hours to pass all the security checks to get into the auditorium, as they were searched and X-rayed and their equipment taken to pieces by Kevlar-covered muscle-men bristling with a panoply of automatic weapons, sniffer dog teams, holographic facial profiling computer systems, fingerprint and retinal scanners, metal and chemical detectors, snipers on every elevation and helicopter gunships hovering overhead. The participants at the conference, all Jewish, including six studio heads, six major producers, and four world-renowned directors, were seated at a long table behind a clear screen of special bulletproof Plexiglas-type material. An obviously twitchy and nervous Arnold Blaustein, who had taken over Paradigm on the demise of Sid Glick, announced the establishment of a special private "justice fund" by the movie industry, which offered a reward of five million dollars *per head* for information leading to the apprehension alive of any terrorist who could be shown to have participated in the events of Oscar Night in any way—and ten million dollars dead. Then the conference ended and all of the participants dispersed, surrounded by bodyguards, to a variety of undisclosed locations.

"Beautiful," commented Randall when he heard of the reward offer. "Now we're going to have every bounty-hunting criminal and scumbag in the world who thinks he's some kind of hotshot coming here trying to track us down, as well as all the cops and FBI and whatnot."

"It's a big city," said Hill. "Nonetheless, better to be safe than sorry. I think we need to jump into hyperspace."

"What?"

"I have a whole second string of safe houses, apartments, and storage facilities lined up for Task Force Director's Cut," said Barry Brewer. "The lieutenant means we move everything, just in case someone got careless or some nosy neighbor has gotten curious about the new folks next door."

"Once we all get settled into our new digs, we go out again and we start taking down individual targets," said Hill firmly. "Remember the first rule of the NVA, gentlemen. They don't hunt us. *We* hunt *them*, always. We need to keep on hitting them and hitting them, keeping them off balance."

The task force accomplished the relocation into their new quarters that night, executing the movement in separate vehicles and at staggered intervals. The next day they resumed offensive operations, and any hopes that Hollywood entertained that the Oscar Night Massacre was a once-off and the killers had receded back into the Northwest mists was shattered. Australian actor Hugh Lewis, who had made an infamous homosexual Western showing cowboys engaging in sodomy out on the lone prairie, was shot down in the

checkout line of a fashionable organic fruit and food market in Brentwood. Charlie Randall had asked for and received that assignment, and he carried it out personally. "Salvaging the national honor of Australia," he called it. That evening Paramount Pictures' chief financial officer David Rapaport was killed by a single sniper's round as he cavorted in the swimming pool of his Laurel Canyon mansion with two naked starlets, one of whom fled screaming and was cut down on the patio by a second bullet. The second girl had sense enough to hold her breath and dive underwater at the deep end of the pool, coming up for breaths of air at one corner where it was difficult for Lockhart to hit her, because from his firing position on a hill behind the house the diving board was in the way, so he let her go and beat feet.

Oscar Night had stunned and paralyzed the film community, but the screaming headlines and jabbering cable news coverage on the morning after these latest killings started the real panic. Movie stars and B actors, rappers and rock stars, television personalities and newscasters, studio moguls, directors and producers, screenwriters, executives and attorneys, and all manner of lesser fry began to flee the city. Some of the glitterati created elaborate cover stories about shooting on location or vital assignments elsewhere, feeding these fabrications to the media via their publicists, but most of them just plain cut and ran. Whole entourages fled in helicopters and private jets, in limousines, in airport taxis, in tour buses, and in fleets of private cars. They fled to New York City, to Florida, to posh watering holes in Hawaii and the Caribbean, and to foreign countries. "I wouldn't have believed it," Brewer reported back. "Hollywood has become a ghost town in a week! Most of the major enemy assets on our hit list are gone now, scattered all across hell's creation. You guys may run out of targets."

"Oh, they'll be back," said Hill with a shrug. "The Burger Kings can keep the Dream Machine running by remote control to some degree, for a while, by phone and e-mail and video-conferencing. But almost all their plant and facilities, their sound studios and technical stuff, their money, their whole infrastructure is centered here. Not to mention their homes and their lifestyles and all the luxuries they've grown accustomed to. They'll have to sneak back at least intermittently to mind the store. When they do, we'll be waiting for them."

It was true. The NVA was light and mobile; the century-and-a-quarter old Jewish power structure in Hollywood was not, and given the insatiable demand of the American public for entertainment and the equally insatiable demand of the industry for mega-profits, the Dream Machine had to keep on functioning and churning out the schmaltz and the sleaze. That meant

that somehow, terrified actors and directors and crew had to be enticed into staying on the job. Multi-million dollar pictures in mid-production couldn't be just dropped. Television series couldn't get by on last year's re-runs forever; new episodes had to be made and aired. Variety shows, reality shows, game shows that were filmed in front of live studio audiences had to continue taping, in itself a security nightmare since now every audience member had to be given a full security background check and examined from head to toe before he or she took their seat. The producers of these shows got around this by assembling several fully screened audiences of between two and five hundred people who were bused in armored transport from studio to studio, these spectators being paid $200 per show. Since there were often three or four shows taping per day, some of these professional audience members did quite well for themselves simply by sitting in chairs and laughing and applauding when the teleprompter told them to. One man told a news interviewer "The NVA is putting my kid through college."

"We're hitting the bastards hard, where it hurts," said Hill. "In their wallets." The LAPD and a massive FBI task force were practically tearing the entire greater Los Angeles area apart brick by brick looking for the NVA gunmen. The almost empty streets of the wealthy suburbs where the Beautiful People lived and the movie business suburbs like Hollywood and Burbank and Culver City were crawling with police units and FBI undercover cars, private security patrols by heavily armed "contractors," and battered vehicles containing would-be bounty hunters with nothing but a gun and a dream, some of whom ended up in slapstick shootouts with law enforcement teams who mistook them for NVA.

But the members of Task Force Director's Cut became adept at disguise and masters of the immediate bug-out at any sign that the police or federals were getting close, while Brewer and Christina Ekstrom made sure they always had someplace to bug out to. Ironically, Operation We Are Not Amused had so badly stampeded the Hollywood élite that there was an immediate demand for house sitters, and Barry Brewer was able diffidently to offer a solution. He made a couple of calls. "Tina, darling! Hey, look, I heard you were going out of town for a while, and you need somebody to look after your place in Santa Monica. Look, I've got a couple of my kids, bit players, and what with all this violent racist crap going down and production lots grinding to a halt all over town, they're getting called even less than usual and they can use the shekels, not to mention saving on rent. No, they're professionals and they really respect your talent and your work, they won't trash the place or throw dope parties or anything like that, I can promise you. Sure, I'll send

them over and they can talk to your assistant. Hey, when all this shit is over and things get back to normal, we need to do lunch sometime!" The result was that in a number of cases, wealthy Jewish executives and famous movie stars ended up providing room and board in L.A.'s poshest suburbs to the very NVA gunmen from whom they were fleeing in terror, and paying them a salary to boot.

The hits continued, despite the paucity of targets:

* MGM vice president Izzy Sapirstein entered his locked and security-alarmed garage one morning, turned the key in the ignition of his Porsche, and both Jew and Porsche were blown through the garage roof, courtesy of Vincent Pascarella and his team.
* Rapper Booga Booga B and two of his bodyguards were cut down by automatic weapons fire in front of a trendy Compton night club.
* A massive car bomb was smuggled onto the Dreamworks-Disney back lot and leveled an entire Santa's Village set, totally derailing a major Christmas movie and costing DW-D about 40 million dollars in losses.
* Television director Mort Lerner was found dead on the floor of a private lap-dance room in a Laguna Beach strip club with his throat cut; the police could get only a vague description of a young woman with tattoos whom no one remembered seeing around before.
* Television screenwriter and producer David Wilder was found behind the wheel of his Lexus in a Burlingame parking lot, his skull full of .22 LR hollow points.
* Foul-mouthed standup comic Marta Moskowitz, whose shtick consisted almost entirely of obscenities, references to excrement and snooty flaunting of her Jewish heritage, was found tied with duct tape to a chair in her apartment's kitchen, strangled with a garrote, and a bar of soap jammed into her mouth.
* On slow days the crew kept their hand in by doing drive-bys at every studio entrance and office building, and simply shooting any non-white they saw going in or out. These institutions developed severe problems getting their mail, their courier packages, and their pizzas delivered. Their cafeterias shut down and their wastebaskets piled up because the Mexican staff members were too afraid to come to work.
* He-man actor Bruce Willard postured and posed for the media, metaphorically beating his hairy chest, swearing no redneck racist sons of bitches were going to run him out of town. It wasn't a redneck racist who nailed Willard, though, it was a perky little blonde girl dressed as

a waitress in his favorite downtown bistro who handed him a menu, gushingly asked for and received the actor's autograph on a napkin, and then fired three .38 Special Black Talon rounds into his chest and a fourth into his skull, leaving Willard lying dead face down in a bowl of gazpacho. Thus did Lieutenant Christina Ekstrom finally make her bones.

Within thirty days, the Northwest Volunteer Army had effectively shut down the entire American movie-making industry and over half of the television production. Studio budgets were snapping like sticks. Ratings were in the toilet because the whole country was glued 24/7 to the cable news waiting to see which Hollywood celebrity was next on the hit parade, in a runaway reality show from hell. Las Vegas and Indian casino bookmakers were doing a gold rush business giving odds on which of the Beautiful People would end up on a slab, and when. For the first time in living memory, the major entertainment conglomerates were measuring their monthly incomes in mere millions of dollars instead of billions. Something had to be done.

Arnold Blaustein was the first to return to Tinsel Town, where in conjunction with his Israeli security specialists he created what amounted to his own private Green Zone on the Paradigm Studios lot. It was an office building surrounded by Bremer walls, sandbags, and razor wire, every square inch monitored by CCTV and patrolled in force by gorilla-faced "contractors" with dogs and M-16s, commanded by former Israeli army officers. The windows were all replaced by bulletproof and bombproof glass, the air-conditioning was sealed off from all outside access via a completely closed circulation system involving oxygen tanks and filters that now took up a whole basement, and there were anti-aircraft guns mounted on the roof that boasted the first ever BATFE permits for privately owned artillery pieces. Another floor held comfortable if not luxurious living quarters, showers, a sauna, a cafeteria and a cocktail lounge. Getting this fortress built and operational inside three weeks had cost the studio a cool billion dollars and change; Blaustein had signed the checks without a murmur. This monstrosity was called the SOC, Secure Operations Center. Hollywood immediately dubbed it "the Bunker," and some daring wits even called it the "Führerbunker," although after several loose-lipped Paradigm employees were fired for being overheard using the term, it was only whispered. It was this building that became the command post for Hollywood's counterattack against the NVA.

The complex contained a plush conference room with a long mahogany table, buffet and a wet bar. On a day in May, Blaustein convened a meeting of two dozen men, all Jewish. They represented every major studio and television

network, the cream of the surviving crop of Hollywood's élite. "We've got to make a deal with the NVA," he told them flatly.

The men at the table stared at him. "Arnie, I'm hearing you right on this?" gasped Moshe Feinstein from Dreamworks-Disney, his lit cigar falling from his thick lips into his lap unnoticed. "Mine ears aren't playing tricks on me, *boychik?* With Nazis we should make a deal, you're telling me? With *Nazis?*"

"Have you seen your numbers for April, Moe?" asked Blaustein bleakly. "Have you seen all our numbers? We're getting killed out there, in every sense of the word. The *goyische kopf* police and the FBI, they know from nothing, they're chasing their tails all over town and so far they've got a barrel of bupkis. Every day these *yemach-shmoyniks* gun down somebody else, our friends, our best creative and money people, our earners, our rain-makers, the people who make this whole industry move. Every day I talk with Kirby, the FBI assistant director they sent out from Washington, and then I talk with the Chief of Police, then I talk with Homeland Security, and I tell you they got no clue. So we make a deal."

"It's not like we've never done business with *goniffs* before," said Walter Wexler from World Artists, with a tired shrug. "Hell, sometimes we even budget for it. We pay off union bosses. We pay off Third World dictators to film in their countries, and we pay off all kinds of foreign officials to get our movies screened and aired. We want to shoot in New York, we pay off the *vershtunkt* Mafia. We want to shoot in East L.A. we pay off the Mexican gang-bangers, we want to shoot in Watts we pay off the *shvartzers.*"

"This isn't a matter of paying off some pissant little goy gangsters so we can work," raged Feinstein. "These are fucking *Nazis!* What part about the word *Nazis* do you not understand, Arnie?"

"Arnie, there are practical objections as well," spoke up attorney David Danziger, Paradigm's senior in-house counsel. Danziger prided himself on his metrosexuality, his handball-trim figure, his flawless capped teeth, and his expensive but tasteful suits; he looked more like a movie star than many of Paradigm's actors. "Moshe is right. These aren't just criminals, they're fanatical anti-Semites on a mission. They don't want our money, they want our blood, and you know that has historically been the most dangerous time for our people, when we can no longer offer the *goyim* enough gold or pleasure to buy them off, and we have to start looking around for the exits."

"We aren't exiting Hollywood," said Sam Glaser from TriVision. "No way. Not happening. Hollywood is not some godforsaken *shtetl* in Poland we can abandon after the Cossacks come riding through. Hollywood is *ours*, damn

their pig-eating souls to hell! We made it, we turned it into the most golden place in the whole *goldeneh medina*, and we're going to keep it always!"

"No, I agree, we can't afford to abandon Hollywood, and I'm not just talking about money. No one is suggesting that," said Danziger. "I was simply pointing out that we can't buy the NVA off in the normal way we buy off Gentiles, with money or sex or the illusion of power. The second objection is the question of how would we approach them? How do we find our friendly neighborhood fascist death squad and ask them politely to desist? I have no idea."

"And what kind of deal do you think we could make with these cannibals, Arnie?" demanded Moshe Feinstein. "If they won't take our money, what could we offer them to get them to lay off?"

"I think I can guess," said Blaustein. "What I ask myself is what brought this bloodbath on all of a sudden? I think I know. I think that somehow the NVA found out about our two pending projects, *Homeland* and *Great White North.* They found out and this is their answer. Both of those pictures are on indefinite hold now. They have to be, since all of the top people associated with pre-production are dead or in hiding. I think if we made some kind of public announcement to that effect, to let them know we got the message, and we make some sort of oblique promise not to make any really heavy anti-NVA pictures or TV shows, they might get the message in turn and stop slaughtering us."

"In other words, terrorism works," said Glaser bitterly. "Beautiful! Great message! Way to stand on principle there, Arnie!"

"When standing on principle loses my studio a billion dollars a month and costs us the lives of dozens of our most bankable talent and our best executive and production minds, principle can go take a shit in the Pope's hat," said Blaustein flatly. "When principle means I can't go home without an armored car and a squad of bodyguards, and I can't sit by my pool after a hard day's work and get a nice relaxing blowjob from some *shiksa* fluff who wants a couple of lines in a sitcom, I say principle shminciple."

Feinstein had recovered his cigar and now glared at Blaustein. "So you think if we grovel to these motherfuckers in public, if we debase ourselves in front of the murderers of Sidney Glick and Lou Woltz and Artie Bernstein, if we issue some kind of public statement that we will be good little sheenies and not say unkind things about these blood-soaked psychopaths who have defiled this most wondrous and shining of all our earthly temples with the blood of God's own Chosen People, you say if we do that shtick, they will go loping back to the north woods and leave us alone? What makes you think the NVA will do anything except laugh at us and keep on killing us?"

"I don't know," admitted Blaustein. "All I'm saying is that we all have businesses to run, and we can't run them in the middle of a shooting gallery with us as moving targets. I think it's worth a try."

"If only we had some way to talk to them, sit down with them, as repugnant as that would be," mused Wexler. "We've offered five million dollars a head for these swine alive and ten million dead, and it doesn't seem to have done any good. Maybe we're going at it from the wrong angle. Suppose we offered the five million apiece *to* them? I simply can't believe that much money wouldn't turn the head of even the most rabid anti-Semite. I mean, from what I read, these are guys with black teeth and tattoos who come from dirty trailer parks and work as pump jockeys and burger-flippers, or they did before all those jobs were taken by Mexicans. We should be able to riffle a roll of hundred dollar bills in their ear, and it will be like the Voice of God to these schmucks."

"My guess is that even if we were able to buy off this crew they sent down here for the Oscars, the bosses up in Seattle or Portland would just send down some more," said Danziger. "And we have no way to get in touch with them in any case, so the point is moot."

"Somebody down here knows who and where the fuck they are," said Rafi Eitam from MGM darkly.

"I agree," said Danziger. "And I think maybe that's the angle we need to be working on. Starting with the interesting question of just how the hell *did* they know about the two Northwest pictures we were planning? The FBI and the police seem to agree that these people are from out of town, the actual gunners, anyway. They've identified that sniper Lockhart for sure, because he left his calling card, and they've also identified one of the NVA's top assassins as the man who gassed out the security control room at the Kodak, a man known as the Prince of Wands. They've also gone over security videos from the weeks before the Oscars, and they're positive the Jerry Rebs actually took *guided tours* of the Kodak beforehand, just like typical tourists."

"Now, that's *chutzpah,*" Walt Wexler reluctantly conceded.

Danziger nodded. "They think they've identified two more, a man named Wingo and a woman named McGee, whom you may remember had that big shootout at the OK Corral up there in Portland along with Lockhart, the one that was on all the channels and won Cassie Ransome her Pulitzer. The point I am making is that the NVA has sent down their top guns for this operation down here, and they would not have done that and risked their best people without some very serious preliminary intelligence spadework. The cops all agree that there is some kind of spy network of racists here in

Hollywood, working with the NVA. How else are they able to track our people so effectively and ambush them at exactly the right moment?"

"Reading Variety and the tabloids and monitoring the internet will tell you just about anything you want to know about anyone in Hollywood," suggested Wexler. "Part of the price we pay for being public figures."

"Mmm, the NVA's knowledge seems to run a great deal deeper than that," said Danziger. "You know how the cops now believe they got away from the Kodak on the night of the massacre? In two stolen police cars, wearing LAPD uniforms that were obtained from the 21st Century Fox costume department. Two full sets disappeared at about that time. So how did that come about? And how are these outsiders managing to move around town and hide from the law, in a place where everyone watches everyone else as part of the culture? From maps of the stars' homes they buy from street peddlers on Hollywood and Vine? No, gentlemen, these people have help, inside help. Hollywood help. Some of our own are helping them. The cops are looking for the shooters, without much success. We need to concentrate on looking for the inside men. The traitors to our town and our industry who have brought this horror in among us."

"And how do we do that?" asked Blaustein.

"We bring in Marty Shulman," said Danziger decisively.

"The Hebrew Hammer?" said Blaustein in surprise.

"He doesn't like that nickname much," said Danziger. "He thought it was a stupid movie. Well, it was."

"Yeah, I forgot, he's your brother-in-law," said Blaustein. "Is he really as tough as they say he is?"

"What can I tell you?" said Danziger, spreading his hands in the ancient traditional gesture of his people. "The man has lived with my sister Carol for almost fifteen years."

"Point taken," said Blaustein with a nod. "Okay, so we hire your hotshot brother-in-law to do what, exactly?"

"To find out exactly what the fuck happened on Oscar Night, who was involved, and I don't mean those werewolves from the tundra up north, I mean who among our own domesticated *goyim* brought the wild ones here. Who betrayed us? Who has dared to lay their filthy paws on the Apple of God's Eye? We find that out, then we figure out how to use that knowledge. Not to make a deal with these murderers, but to destroy them."

"If Marty can do that for us, you know that money will be no object," said Blaustein, warming to the idea.

"You haven't gotten his bill yet," warned Danziger.

* * *

Licensed private investigator Martin Shulman actually did dislike being referred to as the Hebrew Hammer, since it really was an exceptionally stupid movie even by Hollywood standards. The nickname had stuck, though, and so whenever he was asked about it he replied "It means I'm the Hebrew *Mike* Hammer." In the looks department he wasn't, not by a long shot. Shulman was forty-one, short, fat, bald, hairy as an ape, and possessed of a round fleshy Jewish camel-face and nose that looked like some German Nazi caricature from the 1930s. Marty's jowls were always blue no matter how close he shaved, and he always reeked of stale cologne and sweat. He dressed like a slob in a dusty sports jacket, a frayed tie that was always loosened around an unbuttoned collar, scuffed shoes and a soup-stained shirt. He invariably had the biggest cheap cigar he could find protruding from one corner of his wide, veal-colored lips. He looked like a bookie or the sleaziest used car salesman imaginable.

Nonetheless, Marty Shulman was smart, and more importantly in Hollywood, he was cunning. He was tough, he was completely without conscience, and he was very good at what he did, which was to take care of problems for the cinematic kosher mafia that ran Tinsel Town. That was how he described himself on his business cards, rather than as a PI: *Martin Shulman—Problem Resolution Consultant.* Many times he had sat in the office of Sid Glick or Lou Woltz or some other mogul, or in the palatial home of some well-known actor or actress, and said to the client, "Sid," (or Lou or whoever) "It's like this. I don't do divorce work or background checks or surveillance or inventory control or anything like that. You don't hire me to follow somebody around like a schnook and see who they're shtupping, you don't hire me to catch somebody dipping their fingers in the till, you don't hire me to find out what other studios are offering your directors and your talent or what scripts they're plumping, none of that crap. I solve problems. You tell me what your problem is, you tell me *who* your problem is, and I make that problem go away. When the problem is resolved, I tell you how much, you pay me without question, and how it was done you don't ask. Not ever."

Marty Shulman knew everybody in Hollywood who counted, and many of those who didn't. He had a stable of paid informants in every studio, every city government office, every chic restaurant, every bistro, every hotel and no-tell motel, every hospital and doctor's office, every security company, every private gym and rehab center in southern California. It was a private

intelligence operation that put the FBI's snitch networks to shame. Not to mention the fact that he had half the LAPD and L.A. County Sheriff's Department on his pad, plus the county coroner for good measure. Shulman knew who was taking the bribes, the backhanders and the sweeteners from whom, for what, and for how much. He knew where all Hollywood's bodies were buried, in some cases literally. He knew who was addicted to what drugs and all the stupid things they'd done under the influence. He knew who was straight, who was gay, who was bi, and who liked animals and dead bodies. His intricate system of unofficial wiretaps and electronic surveillance rivaled that of the Department of Homeland Security. In a secret storage locker he kept long rows of filing cabinets containing not only paper files but thousands of cassette tapes, CDs, DVDS and videos of illegally obtained information obtained from his private spying activities that provided him with a blackmail income equal to that on the returns he filed with the IRS every year. This hoard of dirt on the whole town's denizens had acquired mythical proportions on the gossip grapevine, and a large segment of Hollywood's élite lived in terror that Marty's tapes and videos and transcripts of every secret sin would somehow be made public.

Shulman's specialty was making inconvenient people disappear—the stalker; the blackmailer; the drug dealer who refused to cut a bankable talent off their supply so they could clean up for a shooting schedule or who was selling the talent bad shit and causing embarrassing ODs; the union shop steward who got greedy or stupid and wouldn't stay on the studio's pad; the *shiksa* starlet or wannabe starlet from a weekend party who couldn't seem to distinguish between passionate lovemaking and rape, and who was raising a stink and wasting police time with her complaints; stage mothers who were interfering with the development of promising child stars and asking too many financial questions; ex-wives who were entirely too familiar with California's community property laws in divorce settlements; ambulance-chasing attorneys who chased the wrong ambulance and threatened to embarrass the glitterati or the power-men; free-lance journalists who thought they could make a name for themselves by digging up skeletons and airing the dirty laundry of the patriarchs of Israel; paparazzi who took embarrassing photographs of people and events where no photographs were wanted; security guards and secretaries who saw or heard something they shouldn't have. Shulman took care of a whole gamut of people who threatened to gum up the works or annoy the potentates of the mighty Hollywood Dream Machine.

Marty prided himself on his creativity in arranging for such people to vanish. He used outright assassination only as a last resort, because he

understood the dangers of unforeseen blowback. Besides, he considered murder to be sloppy and inartistic, the province of stupid *goy* gangsters and hoodlums. Jews were always much more clever about such things, he thought, always displaying more creativity and *panache.* Sometimes simple cash was enough to persuade some paparazzi to relocate to New York, or some would-be actress to go home to Indiana or wherever. When shekels wouldn't serve, blackmail often did the trick. This being Hollywood, everybody had skeletons in their closet, and Shulman was tireless in ferreting out secrets and using them to leverage others into cooperating. Then there was the carefully orchestrated frame-up or the LSD slipped into a target's drink. Shulman's targets often vanished into prisons and mental institutions and heavily fortified rehab centers, which were in effect private jails maintained by the studios. Sometimes a thorough and bloody beating administered by some of Shulman's special contractors in some discreet back alley or parking garage sufficed to get the message through, although when it came down to it Marty himself was never shy about rolling up his sleeves and getting his hands wet. His favorite instrument of correction for uppity *goyim* was a bloodstained crowbar he carried in the trunk of his Lincoln Town car, the one with the Israeli flag on the rear windshield, the "Jew Canoe" sticker on the front bumper, and the "Kiss Me, I'm Jewish!" sticker plastered on the trunk.

Marty Shulman's heart had swelled with pride and anticipation when he was called into the Bunker, and he was given the assignment by the top men in the industry to find and break the NVA's operational network in Hollywood. This would be his greatest case ever. He had impressed the surviving studio bosses and execs by agreeing to do the job for free, purely out of *ahavat Yisroel,* for love of the Jewish people. Marty knew, and so did they, that he'd be able to turn his success into mega-bucks without them paying him a dime directly. After it was over, the book deal alone should net him a couple of million. Plus the job came with a bottomless expense account he could fiddle for all it was worth. "Just one thing I am asking," he said at the end of the interview. "When you come to make the movie of this, my greatest exploit, I want I should play myself." A bemused Blaustein had agreed. Shulman was in seventh heaven. He had lived all his life around movie stars, and now at long last he would get a chance to be one.

Shulman was given his own office in the Bunker, a nice corner one with carpet and a mahogany desk and a secretary, but he took one look and turned it down. "No, no," he said to his brother in law, Dave Danziger, "This is serious business. I need a place to work, not schmooze." Instead he took over a cubbyhole in the basement next to the roaring air conditioning system,

that he fitted out with two metal desks, a folding table, and some creaky old swivel chairs he found stacked in a storeroom, as well as several battered filing cabinets. On one desk he installed a state of the art computer system with high-speed wireless and satellite connections. In the drawer of the other desk he plunked a bottle of Jack Daniels and his .45 automatic. He always kept both in any desk he used. They fitted with his Raymond Chandler/Philip Marlowe-esque self-image. He had even kept his own public office in a seedy part of downtown, with his name on a frosted glass door; it had taken him months to find a place that had a garish neon sign flashing outside the second floor window at night to create the true private dick ambience. His Hollywood clientele ate it up.

Dave Danziger was to act as liaison with the bosses and make sure he had everything he needed. He came to see Marty on the morning after he moved into the basement. "I give you an office down the hall from my own, and you choose this dump instead?" he asked, looking around the shabby room.

"This is where I shall sit like Buddha in contemplation, and prove for all time that Jewish brain is greater than Nazi brawn," said Shulman with an expansive gesture. "You got what I asked for from the G-men?"

Danziger opened his briefcase and pulled out a huge accordion file so thick he could barely grasp it with one hand. "Our *boychik* at the FBI assures me that this is all the essential stuff, everything they've found out that they think might mean anything. If you see a reference to something in there that's not in that file, some document or witness statement or something, let me know and I'll get it for you. What else do you need?"

"Right now I need for you to make like an amoeba and split. I am going to sit down and read everything in this file, then I am going to think about it. When I am through thinking about it, be it today or tomorrow or next week, I will come upstairs and see you." Shulman was a quick reader and he had a nearly photographic memory. As soon as Dave left he poured himself a huge mug of black coffee from a pot in the corner, added a generous belt of Jack Daniels, sat down and opened the purloined FBI folder. By four o'clock that afternoon he was back up in Danziger's office, and he handed the huge file back to him. "You can take this back before it gets our friend in trouble. I got it all in my *kopf*. I made some notes and a couple of copies," said Shulman, seating himself across from Danziger's polished desk.

"So how the hell did the bastards pull this horror show off?" asked Danziger.

"It's obvious," said Shulman with a shrug. "We know they escaped through the Trap Door, the CCTV footage shows that, so they must have come in the

same way. They came from the Hotel Royale and they had a key card. Their inside man in the theater was this Centurion Security Sergeant Farrell, who disappeared before anyone could catch up to him and question him. He was also the *putz* who started the big *tsimmes* up at the front entrance that lured the chief of security out of the control room just at the very moment they got hit with the tear gas. That was no coincidence. All very meticulous and well planned. You can tell that some of these people are military veterans."

"Yes, we know all this, the FBI already figured it out," said Danziger impatiently. "They're not complete idiots, you know. We also know the terrorists fled the scene in two stolen LAPD police cruisers, two of them wearing copper's outfits stolen from one of our own studios, and at least one of them entered the Royale's security control room, killed the guard on duty, and took the security surveillance system's hard drive, presumably because it would have revealed their activities in the hotel. Farrell's crummy apartment was ripped to pieces, and everyone he ever knew even slightly has been pulled in and interrogated. Every place in town where he ever had a beer or bought a grocery item or a gallon of gas has been tracked down from his credit and his store cards, every library book he ever read has been gone over, all his relatives all over the country are being watched and their phones tapped, and he is now the subject of a worldwide terrorist APB. Farrell's our only link to the killers."

"No, he's not our only link," corrected Shulman. "Forget about the guard. He's probably up in some shithole in Idaho right now wiring bombs to a moose or whatever. They had at least one more inside man. That's the one we need to find."

"How do you know there's any such person?" asked Danziger.

"I deduce him. I sense his presence. He is a disturbance in the Force and I feel him. A couple questions I am asking myself," said Shulman, waving his hands about like palm trees in a breeze. "The question of entry. Where did the shooters get the key card or cards they used to come in through the Trap Door?"

"From the traitor guard sergeant, of course," said Danziger.

"Marvin Hagerman swears that's impossible, he had the Kodak management's key card, the only one, on his own person all the time or else locked up in the control room arms cabinet, which Farrell had no access to. Plus it would have triggered an alarm if anyone had gotten into the cabinet and removed the card from its slot. Let's assume he's telling the truth and the NVA didn't get the card from Farrell. Where, then? The Hotel Royale management have the only other cards. Tomorrow I go down and do some

schmoozing at the Royale, maybe slap the maître-d and a bellhop or two around, and I bet my ass I'll learn that copies of that keycard were going for a hundred bucks a pop to all kinds of people that night, and there was more than one unauthorized copy floating around. The Trap Door is the worst kept secret in town, and all manner of naughty munchkins might have had reasons of work or play to want to get in and out of the ceremonies on the QT. Second question, why did the terrorists take the hotel security hard drive?"

"So they wouldn't be recognized when they were caught on video entering the hotel," said Danziger.

"You need to understand these people's minds, David. I can see why they wouldn't want to be recognized on entering the hotel before they made their attack, true, but afterward? They don't give a shit. They *want* the whole world to know who did this, they're proud of it. They've claimed credit for it, and they even left their fucking calling cards on the scene along with all the dead bodies. So why take the hard drive if not to protect someone's identity who isn't so eager to be known? How did they enter the hotel, with all their gear?" asked Shulman. "They should walk in the front door wearing their masks and holding their machine guns?"

"No, obviously not, they must have slipped in somehow, without their masks," said Danziger. "They must have snuck their weapons and disguises and whatnot in separately."

"My guess: they walked right in the fucking front door, and they already had their weapons and gear and maybe that key card already waiting for them. That means they must have brought the stuff in much earlier, because from a couple of hours before the ceremonies started, the Royale was part of the LAPD security zone, never mind all the rent-a-cops and hotel employees all over. Yet no one reported any suspicious groups of people entering the building. So how did they get all the weapons and explosives in?"

"Uh, in suitcases or trunks something?" speculated Danziger.

"Most likely, yes. So when does someone bring suitcases or trunks into a hotel?" asked Shulman rhetorically.

"When you're checking in!" said Danziger with a frown. "*Gevalt,* Marty, I see what you're getting at. That would mean . . ."

Shulman nodded. "It would mean that rather than try to slip a commando team and an arsenal of weapons into the Hotel Royale during the ceremonies, the shooters entered the hotel a lot earlier than the cops thought at first. The day before, even, maybe earlier. I think they were already inside the building when the security cordon went up. Hiding in one of the rooms."

"But the police and the FBI have identified and interviewed every single person who was a registered guest at the Royale, not to mention all of the staff," said Danziger. "They all checked out as being exactly who they said they were, and they all had a plausible explanation as to why they were there."

"Exactly," said Shulman. "One of those registered guests was the second inside man. Now I am going to find him. Or her."

* * *

In a Brentwood townhouse, a grim group of Northwest Volunteers sat or stood in front of a large plasma screen TV. They were watching the first columns of FATPO, the Federal Anti-Terrorist Police Organization, rolling into Portland, headed for their newly constructed, fortified Green Zone in North Portland. The Fatties, as they were already being called in the NVA and throughout the Northwest, were riding in armored trucks escorted by Stryker and Bradley fighting vehicles bristling with weaponry, painted a deep blue so dark as to look almost black. The men were swathed in body armor, helmets, and goggles. No faces could be seen, although it was known that the new force was predominantly black and Hispanic. "Smart place they picked for their base of operations," commented Cat Lockhart. "Right in the middle of niggertown. Any whites who go in there to scout the place or hit 'em on the street will stand out like a statue."

"The commentary says there have already been some 'terrorist contacts' in Portland, whatever that means and however far we can trust anything they say," said Christina Ekstrom. "They may be making it up. You can never tell with anything you see in the American media."

Lieutenant Wayne Hill scowled at the TV. "Their orders are to provoke incidents with the local people if they can't lure us out to take potshots at them, then to shoot first and ask questions later. They call it 'establishing a dynamic and proactive community presence,' otherwise known as letting the peasantry know who's boss."

"Damn, I wish we were back home now," said Lockhart with a sigh.

Hill shook his head. "It may be that part of their plan, one reason Hillary committed them early, is to try and raise such hell in the Homeland that we pull our task force out of Los Angeles to fight these new goon squads back home, and thus relieve pressure on Hollywood," he told them. "We need to redouble our efforts here to cripple the Dream Machine and prevent the enemy from using it to prop up his régime and spread propaganda. That's more important than ever now, since we don't want the media and the

entertainment industry making Chuck Norris-style action heroes out of these criminal and unconstitutional gun thugs. We have to bear in mind that in Hollywood, ZOG has a weapon far more potent than anything those goons are toting. Since our major human targets have been depleted somewhat, we'll be making more use of Pascarella and his team, building more car bombs to physically destroy their plant, their sets, their equipment. Remember, in a colonial war the generals never surrender, the accountants do, and we are going to drive Hollywood's accountants into despair as we trash more and more of their toys and run up their bills sky high."

"Sir, you told us once that we've known these sons of bitches are coming for over a year now," said Lockhart. "Not asking for any confidential information, but how will the Army be dealing with this?"

"The first effect this will have is to increase significantly the manpower available to ZOG for search-and-destroy, house-to-house searches, security checkpoints, neighborhood lockdowns, so forth and so on," said Hill. "Out in the countryside where guys like Zack Hatfield operate, that won't be too much of a factor. The Pacific Northwest is a mighty big place, and even throwing an extra 50,000 men into the mix isn't going to cover that huge territory too much more effectively than with what ZOG has in there already by way of police and regular military. Where it will affect us most is in the densely populated urban areas like Portland, Seattle and the Puget Sound metroplex, Spokane, a few smaller cities like Boise and Eugene and so on. It will mean they can concentrate more firepower more quickly when there is a tickle. The Greater Seattle area is huge, and I think it might not be quite so bad there, but Portland is comparatively much smaller and much more densely populated, and we will be more seriously affected. Remember the famous Surge of 2007, when Bush Two and his little Jewish neocons friends tried to secure Baghdad with an influx of troops? It didn't work then, but the Sea Hag doesn't seem to have learned anything from Jug-Ears' mistakes. That's what this FATPO thing is all about, basically, securing the cities and reducing the level of violence at least to a manageable level, and keeping the federal control from breaking down completely, as it already has done over vast stretches of countryside. In theory, once they get the cities secured they can try moving in on smaller towns like Zack in Astoria. I'll be interested to see how that plays out."

"So how are we going to counter this, sir?" asked Christina.

"Same way the Iraqis did in 2007," Hill told them. "He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day. We're evacuating the central Portland area, re-establishing ourselves in a necklace of safe houses and ops centers

around the periphery of the greater Portland area, the far suburbs and out in the rural counties, and we'll be striking inward and attempting to lure them out into ambushes. They may successfully reduce the level of revolutionary violence in the city itself, for a time, but overall their own casualty levels will rise, since we now have more targets to shoot at. The whole secret to successful guerrilla warfare, the key to defeating a numerically and logistically more powerful enemy, is to pick your pressure points and make sure that in every small action, you outgun them *at that point,* even if overall you're outnumbered 20 to 1. They're trying to change that equation, and now more than ever, our watchword has to be *don't let them surround us,* trap us in some house or building or small enclosed area where they can bring their superior numbers and firepower to bear. We have to stay light, stay mobile, never let ourselves be trapped, and above all we have to *hit, hit, hit!* Ideally no one should ever turn on the television in the Northwest and see what the Fatties and the cops are doing. People need to see what the NVA is doing. We need to do our bit, and make sure they have something besides drunk and stupid celebrities to watch on *Showbiz Tonight.*"

"What's the latest on our own security sitch, sir?" asked Lockhart.

"We've been busy planting fake trails, calling in fake leads to the tip lines and whatnot to waste their time and run them in circles, and that's helped a lot," said Hill. "Now Ripley tells me that the FBI has gotten tired of working hard and they're going to try working smart, as they see it. They finally seem to have understood that we must have some kind of local assistance to be able to conceal ourselves and move around effectively in Los Angeles, and so they're digging like hell into all of their old intelligence files and rattling the cages of anybody who has even the remotest connection with the Pacific Northwest, which is going to be yet another monumental waste of their time and effort, not to mention upsetting and alienating a lot of perfectly loyal Americans who won't be so loyal after getting rousted by our friends in the silk suits."

Hill didn't know it, but at that moment just such a person was finding that her life had suddenly turned to excrement, because of a completely innocent connection with the Northwest. 31 year-old Julia Lear, an up-and-coming assistant television producer at Fox Entertainment's Los Angeles studio, came in to work that morning to find her co-workers falling silent in the elevator and staring at her as she entered the admin area. Julia, tall and slim and poised in her usual flawless business suit, went into the break room to put her fully organic lunch in the refrigerator, and was puzzled when the employees sitting at the tables sipping coffee and munching

bagels rose silently and left the room. She walked down the hall to her own office and said to her Asian secretary, "Lin, is my deodorant not working this morning? The weirdest thing just happened . . ." Then she caught the Oriental girl's angry glare. Lin pointed at Julia's office, where she found two hard-eyed FBI agents, one black and one white, calmly going through her desk and riffling through her appointment book. "What the *hell* are you doing?" she shouted in astonishment. The agents looked up, reached into their pockets, and flipped their badges and IDs.

"I'm Agent Redfearn," the white guy told her, "This is Agent Webb. We're with the FBI. Here's how it's going to work, Ms. Lear. You're going to sit down and you're going to answer every single question we ask of you, immediately and fully, and you are not going to give us one single syllable of crap or attitude. We are investigating one of the worst acts of mass murder and terrorism in this country's history, and we will accept nothing less than your complete cooperation minus any noise, minus any evasion, minus any deceit. Neither will your employers. We have already spoken with your boss Myron Silverstein about you. At the end of our conversation, we will decide whether or not you come downtown with us to talk to a very unsympathetic lady with a set of needles, and Mr. Silverstein will decide whether or not you still have a job." Redfearn sat down behind Julia's own desk, and the black agent Webb closed the door. Redfearn pointed to the chair in front of the desk. "Sit down."

Julia was stunned. "But I don't understand . . ."

"*Sit down!*" roared Redfearn. Webb grabbed her shoulders, shoved her down into the chair, and quickly lashed both her hands to the arms of the chair with plastic handcuff ties he pulled from his pocket.

"What are you doing?" Julia shouted. "You can't do this! You have no right . . ." From behind her Webb took hold of both her earrings, twisted her lobes, and pulled hard, tearing the rings out of her pierced ears. Julia shrieked at the sudden pain and stared in horror as Redfearn leaned forward and spoke quietly.

"Don't even think about trying to tell us again what we have the right to do and what we don't, Ms. Lear. I don't know where you have been for the last few years, but we have both the legal and the moral right to do whatever the fuck we want, to you or to anybody else in pursuit of these terrorist murderers who are trying to destroy our freedom and our American way of life. Now, I will ask the questions and you will answer them. If I don't like what I hear, you're coming with us, and not only do you get to tell your lies to the needle lady, but tonight in the holding cell you will be introduced to a

whole new diverse and multicultural sexual lifestyle. And when the men are through, we'll throw you in the women's bullpen for yet more total immersion in America's gorgeous mosaic. They got some big black mamas and some hot Latina ladies in there who want to rock your world. Do you understand me? Now, how well do you know one Zachary Ellison Hatfield and when did you speak with him last?"

"Son of a bitch!" sobbed Julia. "My brother is a cop, he's the sheriff in Clatsop County, Oregon, and if you hurt me he'll come down here and he'll . . ." Webb leaned over and applied the tangs of a taser set low power to the nape of Julia's neck, and for several seconds she screamed in agony until Redfearn impatiently signaled for the black man to stop.

"She has to be able to hear the question and answer," he said. Julia shivered in the chair, her head hung low, the blood from her torn ears dripping down both sides of her neck and onto her collar and blouse. "Zack Hatfield," said Redfearn coldly. "Zack Hatfield. *Now,* Ms. Lear!"

"I haven't seen or spoken with Zack Hatfield in years," said Julia sullenly, still unable to believe this was happening when not ten minutes before she had been on her way up the elevator to a day of meetings and script work and a lunch date with a director. "What about him?"

"You know what about him," said Redfearn coldly. "You know what he's been doing for the past two and a half years?"

"Yes, I know," said Julia. "He's with the NVA now. That's what this is about? You're torturing me because of someone I knew fourteen years ago?"

"You lay down with a dog, maybe you got up with some racist fleas," said Webb from behind her, his voice low and mean.

"That brother of yours doesn't seem to be doing a very good job of catching him," said Redfearn. "Perhaps we're talking to the wrong Lear, but you're the only one who's down here in the same city where a mass murder took place on nationwide television, so we're starting with you. What is your relationship with Zachary Ellison Hatfield?"

"I dated him in high school back in Astoria, then he was drafted and I went on to college," Julia told them. "That's *it.* I really truly don't remember when the last time I spoke to him was. I don't get home that much."

It went on for over an hour, on and on, the same questions. When had she last met or spoken with Zack? When had she last spoken with her brother, Sheriff Ted Lear? When had she last been back to Astoria or anywhere in the Northwest? Who else from Astoria did she know who was in the NVA or who might harbor racist sympathies? Who did she know in Los Angeles who was from the Northwest? They shoved pictures

of people she had never seen before under her nose and demanded when she had met them last. They wanted to know where she'd been on Oscar Night, every minute of her time, which was a bad point since she'd been at home alone watching the ceremonies on television. She tried to tell them that she had been genuinely shocked and horrified at the slaughter, that she was not a racist, that she had no sympathy with the NVA, whom she genuinely considered to be murderers and madmen. They simply kept on pounding her with questions, shouting at her, abusing and threatening her. Webb hit her in the side of the head when her answers were slow, and tased her once again just for good measure. Once he came around the chair and spit on her. Julia knew that the whole floor must be able to hear her screams and pleas for mercy and the shouting and bullying of the FBI men. No one came to help her.

Then abruptly Redfearn looked up at Webb and said in disgust, "Shit. She doesn't know anything. Let's wrap it." He got up from behind the desk, Webb opened the door, and without another word the pair of them walked out of the office. Frightened eyes stared at the two FBI men from the over the tops of cubicles as they stopped by the elevator. Webb punched the button and pulled a notebook out of his pocket, making a couple of notations. "Who's next on the list?" asked Redfearn conversationally. The elevator door opened with a ding, the two agents stepped inside, and the door closed. The floor was quiet except for Julia's muffled sobs coming from the open door of her office.

No one went into the office. A few minutes later a uniformed security guard, a middle-aged white man, appeared from the hallway and walked down to the office door. He looked inside and quietly went over to the woman in the chair. He took a pocketknife out and cut the plastic ties that bound her, and helped her to her feet. "I'm going to take you to the ladies' room, Ms. Lear," he said gently. "I'll let you get cleaned up a little. Then I have to get all your keys and swipe cards and your employee ID from you, and make sure you get any personal items out of your office. I'll get a box for you to put your stuff in. Mr. Silverstein says you're terminated effective immediately, and I have to walk you out of the building. He also said to tell you don't bother applying for any more jobs in Los Angeles or anywhere in show business. He said some other things about you that I won't repeat. I am so sorry, ma'am. I always liked you. We all did."

"You didn't like me enough to help me," Julia sobbed bitterly. "You heard what they were doing to me in there. All of you heard!" she screamed into

the line of cubicles. "Why didn't any of you lift one fucking finger to help me?" she shouted.

"Why don't white people ever help other white people?" asked the guard with a sigh. "Because they were *afraid*. You know that. We're all afraid."

"Not all," whispered Julia with a sniffle as she opened the door of the ladies' room. "I know one white man who isn't afraid."

XXIII

Into The Lion's Den

Take thy fortune; thou find'st to be too busy is some danger.

Hamlet—Act III, Scene 4

Once he had decided that the NVA's inside man in the Hotel Royale was most likely someone with a room that the hit team could hide in, Marty Shulman's approach was methodical and thorough. He went down the list of every registered guest who had been in the Royale on Oscar night, and looked at them from every angle until he felt he could cross them off the list. He tracked each one down and talked to them personally, with varying degrees of politeness and couth according to their respective rungs on the Hollywood ladder. This took him two weeks of legwork. In some cases Shulman had to fly across the continent and even to Europe to catch up with a former guest on his list. First class, of course, given his bottomless expense account. There were tourists, legitimate business travelers, journalists and media people from out of town who were covering the Academy Awards, assorted people who were guests of the studios or studio heads, fringe celebrities, and various others registered on the lower floors and who appeared to have some legitimate reason for being checked into a Hollywood hotel that night. After Shulman had crossed these lesser fry off his list, there remained the suites on the two top floors and the penthouse, the party zone, the rooms that had been rented to the big-name stars, the shakers and movers.

Here Shulman knew he had to tread a bit more carefully, to avoid upsetting the bankables and also to avoid tipping off his quarry that the Hebrew Hammer was on the trail. "I'm getting close," he told Dave Danziger, who

had dropped in to see Marty in his basement lair. "I can always tell when I'm getting close, because I can feel my ass twitching."

"So now your ass twitches?" asked Danziger.

"My ass is starting to shimmy and shake like Little Egypt, so close I'm getting," Shulman assured his brother-in-law. He tossed down a roster of names on Danziger's desk. "This is our short list. Now we have to make it shorter. I've eliminated Jews and *schvartzers* and dykes and fairy-boys, on the assumption that none of them would be *meshugah* enough to get involved with Nazis who want to shove them into a gas chamber. These are all the *goy* players who had rooms up on the two top floors, or who were known to be up there partying hearty before the bloodbath. It's one of those names, I'm sure of it."

Danziger looked over the list and whistled. *"Gevalt,* Marty you'd better be right! There's a couple of hundred million a year in bankable talent on this list, and you know how temperamental some of them can be and how fragile their egos are. If you go around accusing them of being terrorists and murderers, they'll plotz! They'll scream and scream, to me they'll scream, to Arnie and Moshe and Sam they'll scream. My God, we *made* all these people! Why would any of them bite the hand that feeds them in this terrible way?"

"They're *goyim,* David," said Shulman. "What's the first lesson you and I both learned in yeshiva school? Never, ever trust a *goy,* for they are beasts without souls. All of the sons of Esau hate us unto death, because our blessed forefather Jacob stole their birthright and left them with nothing but a mess of pottage. They've never really resigned themselves and accepted that as a done deal. No matter how often we keep filling up their bowls with pottage, they secretly want their birthright back. I'm convinced I'm right. One of the people on that list betrayed our friends and our elders to their death, and they're still doing it as we speak, still helping these animals to kill us."

"Yeah," said Danziger bitterly. "Tell me about it. Before I came down, I heard on the news that the sons of bitches murdered Herschel Rabinowitz from MGM this morning. They got past his cameras, the guards, everything, and they shot him through the window at his own breakfast table in Malibu."

"Fuck me, Hesh is dead?" exclaimed Shulman.

"Deader than a dog turd in the road, my friend," confirmed Danziger with a grim nod. "The day before that they rammed a car bomb into the main office of Fox News and damned near leveled the building, killed everybody in the lobby. The day before that, somehow they found where Shelley Klein was hiding in Santa Barbara. They tied her up in a chair and then took her out back and dropped her into the swimming pool and watched her drown.

As of this week it's official, the movie industry and the television business are paying more for security costs than they're paying in salaries for working employees, which isn't hard since almost no one is working anymore. They're all in hiding and wondering who will be the next to die? This can't go on, Marty!"

"So let's get on with the job of putting a stop to it," said Shulman firmly. "Now, what can you tell me about the people on that list? Let's start with trying to figure a motive. For example, who's having problems with their agents?"

"What are you talking about, Marty?" asked Danziger in exasperation. "*All* of them have problems with their agents, always, and with their contracts and their royalties and their bonuses and their percentages and their fucking egos. No matter how much cash we shovel down their throats, it's never enough."

"I mean specifically, recently, something that might make them turn on the industry out of revenge?" persisted Shulman. "Any of these celebs been really fleeced or shafted recently by one of our boys? Not just problems with agents, but arguments with studios or directors, some kind of personal or sex thing that might make them turn really vicious? How about their personal lives? Anybody gone weird in the head lately? I mean weirder than usual for Hollywood? Really bad drug trips, playing with guns, muttering to themselves in corners? Anybody had a bad breakup with a Jewish significant other or been shafted by a Jewish journalist in a tabloid? How many of them have been forced into rehab, I mean real rehab, when their booze or junk habits started to affect budgets or profits?"

"Oh, they hate that," said Danziger with a laugh. "Those glitterati ought to be glad we bother to salvage their sorry asses, glad we don't just cut them up like an expired ATM card when the account is empty and throw them away. Sometimes we do, you know. A lot of them have been down that rehab road. Marty, I don't know what to tell you. You know this town. It's a snake pit. Hollywood is a place where a friend is someone who stabs you from the *front.* Somebody's always feuding with somebody else. They fight and rip each other up over money, or who's knocking boots with whom, or some dirty trick or slight real or imagined, or out of just plain boredom and meanness, but we don't *kill* people over it!"

"Not until recently," Shulman reminded him. "What about Bart Payne? I hear he was hot under the collar with Seymour Grossberg over his last picture, and they were overheard arguing in the hallway of the Royale a few hours before the attack on the awards ceremonies?"

"Yeah, that's true, but Bart's not interested in anything except money and pussy," said Danziger dismissively. "He's on the downward slide and he's

trying to grab as much of the life as he can before he does his last romantic action lead, and he starts getting cast in character parts. Besides, I don't think he has the guts or the brains for something like this. He couldn't pull it off. He's not really a very good actor, you know."

"Ah, now that's a very interesting remark, Dave. A very significant point," said Shulman with a nod. "That should be part of our profile of who we're looking for, someone who's a real actor, who could maintain a deception like this in a town where everyone is trained to spot deception and phoniness at a thousand yards. How about some of those has-beens you've mentioned, the ones the studios have finally decided to cut up like that expired ATM card because they stopped bringing in enough at the box office to justify the *tsimmes* they created by constantly showing their butts? Somebody who didn't appreciate being told that his fifteen minutes was up, and get the hell off the lot?"

"The list of those would be a lot longer than this one," said Danziger with a grim chuckle.

"So make me up such a list, in case I'm wrong. But would any of those have rated a hotel suite on the Royale's party floors on Oscar Night?"

"Marty," said Danziger thoughtfully, "You've got my *kopf* working now. What do you think about Max Garrett?"

Shulman scowled. "Max Garrett is a schmuck and an anti-Semitic son of a bitch who is enjoying a well-earned exile. As far as I am concerned he should have had his celebrity immunity revoked and been charged with hatecrime after those drunken remarks he made to that cop who pulled him over for DUI. Under the jailhouse now he should be rotting, like an onion, with his head in the ground."

"That was discussed at the time," ruminated Danziger. "You may recall that I advocated that very response from our community, but the usual so-called older and wiser heads prevailed, and we decided to deal with Garrett the old-fashioned way, which we have done. His films couldn't very well be pulled out of circulation. They're still making money. Too many classics, too many awards, too many millions in residuals. No point in cutting off the industry's nose to spite our face. But we've made damned sure he'll never eat lunch in this town again. No one will touch Garrett or any of his projects anymore, and the few times he's tried to produce or direct indie flicks we made sure he couldn't get so much as a grip or a script girl to work for him, and we made it clear that anyone whose face we saw in a Max Garrett production was out in the cold for good, just like Garrett himself. He is toxic. He is radioactive. He is dead to us, dead to this town. So he just sits all day in his big empty

mansion in Beverly Hills surrounded by his memories, while he waits for the phone to ring, which it never will. A man can do a lot of paranoid brooding in a situation like that, and we know that Garrett was an anti-Semite and a Catholic religious nut to begin with. How do you like him for the NVA's inside man?"

"Oh, I've thought about him," said Shulman. "First person I checked into, in fact. And believe me, if I can find any way to link Garrett to that holocaust on Oscar night, I'll see him burned alive on pay-per-view. But Garrett was not in the Royale that night, and he had no connection of any kind with the Oscars. Like you said, he's radioactive. They wouldn't even have let him in the theater. Garrett's a thought, for sure, but not the one we're looking for right now. I still think our man or woman is there," said Shulman, pointing to the paper in Danziger's hand. "Let's get back to that list. What about Jeff Gallagher? I heard he was behind some really nasty tabloid rumors aimed at Sid Glick and Art Bernstein?"

"Nah, he was just pissed because he flew back from location a day early and he walked into his own bedroom and found the two of them making a sandwich with Charlene Dawson. It was just business. Charlene was up for the lead in a Paradigm flick. She was clinching the deal in the traditional manner, and adding an extra million onto her advance, but Gallagher took it personally and broke off their engagement, with all the usual tabloid and TV ruckus following the bust-up. So Jeff claimed he hadn't caught Sid and Artie with Charlene, but with a pair of golden retrievers. Nasty, yeah, but par for the course in Tinsel Town. That blew over a long time ago. It wasn't Jeff. He's in hiding now, scared out of his wits. Remember, Jeff was the second buggeroo in that homo cowboy flick with Hugh Lewis? Now Hugh's dead and Jeff's scared shitless he's on the NVA's death list himself, which he probably is. It's not him."

"Okay, how about one of our lovely ladies of the silver screen?" asked Shulman. "I understand Brittany Malloy isn't too happy about being sidelined into rehab after that drunken stunt she pulled at last year's Oscars. Maybe she thought this was the way to make sure she stole the scene again this year?"

"Brittany's been on probation since she got out of Betty Ford, exiled to Dancing With The Stars and guest appearances on sitcoms, so she can think about how naughty she's been. She wants back in, wants it in the worst way. She doesn't want to bring the whole house down like Samson in the Temple. It's not her," said Danziger, shaking his head.

"Well, here's another question for you," said Shulman. "What about Erica Collingwood? She's from Seattle originally, isn't she? And wasn't there some

buzz about how Chase Clayburn ending up in the U.S. Army wasn't really because he longed to do his patriotic duty to our land of the free and home of the brave? Something about how Erica wouldn't put out for Sid and Artie and they decided to teach her some manners? Any truth to that?"

"Hmmmm . . ." said Danziger thoughtfully, rubbing his chin. "Yes, in fact there is quite a bit of truth to that. Sid ruled this town with a velvet glove, but every now and then he liked to let everyone know there was an iron hand inside it, and the Collingwood bimbo pissed him off. Now that I think of it, Marty, you might have something there! I know she's a prude, won't strip off for the camera, won't do lesbian roles, and I heard somewhere she always manages to take herself out of the running for any interracial romantic or sex role. Always a good excuse of course, prior commitments or whatever, but that sort of thing does get noticed after a while. Of course there's also the objection that she was standing right there on stage beside Marty Rudin and his chocolate *fageleh* when the shooting started. The first bullet almost clipped her too."

"Is that really an insurmountable objection?" asked Shulman keenly. "Look, Dave, these Nazis are devils in human form, but they're sharp bastards. They're cool and calculating, enough so they've been one jump ahead of us all the way on this. What better way to draw suspicion away from the inside man, or woman, than to have them right out in public view and screaming like crazy for the cameras when the shit comes down? She says she was able to drop and roll and cover behind the curtain when the shooting started. Maybe. Or maybe the whole thing was a set-up from the get-go, and she was the one doing the setting up. You know from talent, you must know something about this Collingwood twist. Is *she* a good actress?"

"Damned good," conceded Danziger with a nod. "One of the few Americans who can do Shakespeare and get a standing ovation from a British audience. You know, Marty," he went on slowly. "Damned if I don't think you might have something here! Erica Collingwood has never said or done anything overtly anti-Semitic or racist or political that I know of, other than declining to be the filling in Sid and Artie's sandwich that one time. But it seems to me I've heard she never *has* paid her dues or given any of our people their props, not with anybody on any picture or TV show she's ever been on. Nor can I remember her dating any minorities or doing any of the usual girl-on-girl dabbling at weekend parties, nothing like that. And she can't have been too happy with her boyfriend coming back as a paraplegic. That's the kind of thing that might turn a chick pretty bitter. Yes, I think maybe you should have a little talk with Ms. Collingwood."

"I've already penciled her in for tonight," said Shulman.

* * *

Marty Shulman pulled his Jew canoe into the courtyard of Erica Collingwood's Spanish Colonial-style apartment complex at a little past midnight. He had done his homework. It had cost him $500 slipped to one of the technicians at the private security company employed by the apartment management to get Erica's own security code for the automatic wrought-iron gates, to ensure that the cameras monitoring the entrance and the courtyard itself would suffer a mysterious malfunction on the stroke of twelve, and that the alarm system on Erica's apartment would be similarly disabled. He wasn't certain yet what he was going to learn from Erica, but he had an idea that he should cover his tracks.

Shulman parked the car and turned off the engine, then quietly got out and popped his trunk. He checked the .45 in its shoulder holster, jacking a round into the chamber. He pulled a Trilby hat down over his balding skull, and from his pockets he drew a pair of latex gloves that he pulled onto his stubby hands. From the trunk he took a gym bag containing a very special kit he had put together for those occasions when vigorous private questioning of naughty *goyim* seemed to be called for. It contained his favorite crowbar, of course. There was also a set of plastic restraints as well as two pairs of standard handcuffs, a full set of Dershowitz needles, several pairs of pliers and channel locks, a rolled packet of bladed instruments ranging from a surgical dermatome scalpel to a small hacksaw, a small propane burner for heating same, and a packet of cigars cheaper even than those Marty normally smoked, but that burned hot with a glowing tip that could be applied to human flesh in order to loosen tongues. Marty sighed; even if he was wrong about Erica, he knew this would be one of those moments that made him love his job so, and he was looking forward to it with anticipation.

He crept up to her front door. Secure in the knowledge that the alarm had been disabled, he drew a rubber suction cup from the gym bag, affixed it to one of the glass panes beside the door, and then used a glass cutter quickly to cut a hole around the cup and pull the circle of glass away, stowing the suction cup and glass in his bag. He reached in with his gloved hand and carefully turned the dead bolt, removed the chain, then turned the doorknob from the inside. The door slid open several inches. Shulman stopped, put everything back in his bag, and then slowly eased the door open, being careful not to make any noise. He slipped inside like a greasy shadow. The apartment was

dark except for a single table lamp on in the living room, and a light coming from the kitchen, not bright, probably the little bulb over the stovetop. A radio or CD player in the bedroom was softly playing some kind of Celtic mystical New Age sound, or maybe Loreena McKennit. Shulman didn't know what it was and didn't care, but it indicated to him that his quarry was home and in the bedroom. He drew the .45 from its shoulder holster and clicked off the safety. He didn't plan to use it except as a conversation piece to get the terrified woman he had come for to submit to being bound, on her own bed, and then he would remove any extraneous fabric and begin to question her. His long liver lips curled in a grin, and he began to tiptoe across the living room. In his growing excitement, he forgot to check out the kitchen.

Behind him Marty Shulman heard the sound of a cartridge being jacked into the chamber of an automatic pistol. He turned and saw a tall, blond, stone-faced young man wearing nothing but dark green boxer shorts, not four feet behind him, leveling a 10-mm Browning High Power automatic at his head. "G'day, mate," said the young man. He sounded Australian. He had Shulman nailed, and Shulman knew it. His bowels began to tremble preparatory to releasing his supper of Chinese and Chivas Regal into his trousers. Shulman shrugged, "*Nu?*" he said.

"And what's *nu* with you, mate?" snarled the Australian. Shulman jerked the .45 around and managed to get off one round that plowed into Erica's wall, while Charlie Randall fired again and again into Shulman's chest, into his pendulous belly, sending a final round crashing through his fleshy Judaic nose into his skull as he lay on the floor, thrashing, kicking, flopping, shitting, then dying.

"Charlie!" came a scream from the bedroom. Erica Collingwood appeared in the doorway, her golden hair disheveled. She was in the act of throwing on a robe and belting it about her waist. "What the fuck?" she cried, staring at the dead Jew on her floor.

"Stay away from the windows!" barked Randall. "There may be more of them! You need to get dressed. *Move!*" Erica disappeared back into the bedroom and Randall quickly checked the door and all the windows. The courtyard appeared empty, although he noted Shulman's parked Lincoln. He slipped into the back garden and peered over the wall. There was no sign of flashing lights or any other intruders, but he noticed that the light in Erica's upstairs neighbor's apartment had come on. He went back into the living room and checked out Shulman's body, pulling his wallet from his now blood and feces-soaked trousers. "Do you know a guy named Martin Shulman?" he called into the bedroom, looking at Shulman's driver's license.

Erica appeared in the bedroom door wearing jeans and a pullover sweater. Her feet were still bare. "Shit! That's the Hebrew Hammer!"

"The who?" asked Randall.

"He's a bad-ass Jew private dick the studio bosses use to do a lot of their dirty work. They call him the Hebrew Hammer. What the hell is he doing here?"

"I checked the door," Charlie told her. "He broke in. He must have disabled the security system somehow. He was carrying this." Randall unzipped the gym bag and dumped its contents out onto the floor. He pawed through the pile, holding up the pliers and propane burner, unrolling the Velcro strap of scalpels and blades, and finally opening the plastic case of Dershowitz needles, and holding one up for her to see. "This is why he was here," whispered Charlie, shaking with rage. "All this is for you, babe. He was here for you."

"He was going to torture me," said Erica calmly. Her face was white with horror. "Probably kill me afterwards. He does that kind of shit for the studio Burger Kings. Did that kind of shit, I should say. He's known for it. You saved my life, Charlie. Thank you."

"No worries, babe. When they cancel General Order Number Ten after the war you can buy me a beer and we'll call it even. You're lucky you're so bloody delectable I just had to keep coming back for more." Randall looked down at the corpse. "You're lucky too, mate. You died way too quick." He rammed the Dershowitz needle through Marty Shulman's one remaining eyeball and into his brain. "Burn in hell, Jew!" Randall said in a low voice filled with loathing.

Erica sighed in despair. "They're onto me, Charlie. Damn, damn, *damn!*"

"I know," said Randall. "We're going to have to pull you out." There was a creaking on the ceiling from over their heads.

"That's Helen Morgan upstairs," said Erica. "Nice lady, not a bad actress. She does a lot of bit parts on the daytime soaps. She must have heard the gunshots. You know she's probably called the cops?"

"Yeah, I saw her light come on."

"Charlie, please, don't . . ."

"No, no, not to worry. She's got no idea what's going on, she's a civilian and we don't hurt civilians when we can help it. What's the police response time for this neck of the woods?"

"Four or five minutes, depending on how busy they are."

"Then we need to hit the road, now. Get your bag." Charlie had instructed Erica to put together an E & E kit containing essential items of clothing,

money, and some false ID that she had been given by the NVA. Without a word she went into her bedroom and took the bag from the closet, and brought it back into the living room. "Anything else you want to take, load it up, but be quick about it," said Randall. He went into the bedroom and quickly pulled on his own clothing and shoes. When he came out Erica was at her bookshelf, quickly selecting a half dozen volumes. "You're taking your Henry Lawson?" asked Randall.

"You bet," she said. Police sirens were heard in the distance.

"They're playing our song, babe. We need to shoot through," said Randall.

Erica zipped up the canvas bag and took one last look around the apartment. "Well," she said with a sigh. "Guess this is it. Twelve years past the hour. This town, this place, this craft, this life, all gone."

"I'm sorry, Erica," said Randall compassionately. "Truly, I am."

"I was never one of those people who thought you could roll the dice but never put anything on the table, Charlie," she told him. "I wouldn't trade these past two months for anything on earth. No regrets. Let's go."

* * *

On a morning a week later, Julia Lear was sitting at the kitchen table in her own apartment in Burbank, having a late breakfast consisting of a croissant and half a grapefruit and turning over in her mind what to do with the rest of her life. Myron Silverstein seemed to have kept his word. Employment-wise, Los Angeles was now bone dry for her, at least as far as anything in show business went. She had made calls to as many people as she could think of anywhere in the television business or the movie industry, and in her years in California she had come to know many people. Most of them wouldn't even return her calls, and those who did were sympathetic, but firm. The word was out on her. She was officially Poison, with a big Jolly Roger stamped on her forehead.

"Julia, I'm damned sorry as I can be," she'd been told by one executive producer, a man with whom she'd had a brief affair some years before. The affair had apparently left enough good memories behind it so he would still speak to her. "But you have to understand, it's a nightmare out here. Everybody in town has paid their PC dues in one way or another, burned that pinch of incense on the altars of multiculturalism and diversity and buggery. Some of us burned more than a pinch. Now it turns out that some picture or TV show we were associated with in the past, even in a peripheral way, might get

us killed. We never saw this coming, and now everybody's going over in his own mind every line we ever wrote, every scene we ever shot or directed or acted in, wondering if we're next on the NVA hit parade. Everybody's running for cover. Even if you weren't blacklisted, I'm not sure I could hire you for anything. Every project is dead in the water because the cast and crew are in hiding. The summer release lineup for theaters and DVD is decimated, and God only knows what the fall TV season is going to look like. But the fact is that you *are* blacklisted."

"Over a guy I knew in another life, when I was a teenager, a guy I haven't seen in years and whom I'd run from in terror now if I saw him coming in the door," Julia reminded him bitterly. "For all I know I might be on the NVA's hit list myself, because Zack thinks I'm some kind of traitor for working for Jews, and they treat me like this!"

"Yeah, it's a tough break, kiddo, but it's the break you got. Be glad those two FBI goons didn't take you downtown and from there on to points unknown. You hear about it happening these days, more than once. After the bloodbath in the Kodak on Awards night, and then all these murders, and finally this incredible revelation about Erica Collingwood, the Big Boys are going completely batshit paranoid about everybody with a pale skin. They don't know who they can trust. Neither does the FBI. They're seeing Jerry Rebs under every bed. They're lashing out in all directions. Hell, they were in here the other day giving me and all my white staff the third degree, not as bad as you because I've got a name in this town. Or had one, anyway. The rumor mill is roaring like a blast furnace. After Erica the bosses are supposed to be considering a complete ban on anyone of European descent working in movies or in TV who can't document at least one gay or interracial sexual relationship."

"Well, that lets me out, so I probably would have been canned anyway," said Julia with a chuckle. "Looks like you were smart after all to dump me for that China doll from marketing."

"Uh, Julie, I . . ."

"Water under the bridge, Stan. I got over it. Thanks for calling. I know it's probably not safe, and you're taking a risk. I assume you're using a pay phone so no one can tell from your phone records that you've been in contact with me?"

"Ah, yes, actually, I am," said the man, somewhat disconcerted.

"Jesus, Stan, that was a joke! Is it really that bad?" asked Julia in surprise.

"It's really that bad," said Stan before he hung up.

Now Julia sat disconsolately picking at her grapefruit, flipping idly through the tabloids she'd bought in the supermarket the night before through force

of habit; part of her old job had been keeping up with the downmarket buzz. The front page of every tab displayed a video still of Erica Collingwood in her Prada gown, standing on the stage at the Kodak and about to make the presentation for Best Screenplay, with some caption to the effect of "a smile on her face and hate in her heart." On the inside continuation there would be a studio head shot or a still from one of her TV shows or movies. The headline on the rag Julia was leafing through now shouted TRAITOR ERICA! Another tabloid's lead article took a different line, sporting the headline IS ERICA ANOTHER VICTIM OF OSCAR NIGHT? This rag speculated that the NVA had kidnapped her, or murdered her and concealed her body. Marty Shulman as well rated spreads on the inside pages of most tabs, with some fuzzy photos of his cigar-chomping mug and a header along the line of P. I. TO THE STARS VOWED REVENGE ON OSCAR NIGHT KILLERS. The usual crap. Julia was stunned over the whole Erica Collingwood affair. She had known Erica casually from Fox and she didn't know what to make of it. All she knew was that whatever the tabloids said was most likely nowhere near the truth of whatever had happened. The whole world seemed to be going mad.

Julia knew she'd have to make a plan soon. She couldn't afford the rent on this place with no job, and it looked like if she stayed in town and she did get something, temping for an insurance company or whatever, she wouldn't earn anywhere near what Fox had paid her, so in any case she'd have to move to someplace cheaper. Leave L.A.? But where to? Going back to Astoria wasn't much of a thought. Not only were her years as an assistant television producer not much recommendation for anything she might find open in Clatsop County, Oregon, but apparently her home town was now in the middle of a war zone, someplace the FBI and the media referred to as "NVA bandit country," thanks to Zack Hatfield. Julia didn't understand that. She still spoke with her mother and her brother Ted, the sheriff. Ted had told her by e-mail that he couldn't discuss anything that was happening in the county because of "security considerations," and then he'd sent her a postal letter telling her the phones were tapped and his e-mail monitored by the federal authorities, which confused Julia even more. Why on earth would the FBI be monitoring Ted's phones and e-mail? He was the *sheriff,* for God's sake! And when she spoke with her mother, her mom just rambled on and on about old neighbors and acquaintances and church stuff like nothing was happening, like she wasn't living in the middle of a guerrilla insurgency. She actually sounded oddly happier and more at ease than normal. Julia had asked her mother several times over the past two years to move down to Los Angeles

and live with her so she could be safe, and her mother had replied "Oh, no, dear, believe me, I'm a lot more safe right here than you are down there with all that horrible crime and all those drug addicts and gangs."

"Mom, just because you're the sheriff's mother doesn't mean that you couldn't become a victim of all that violent crazy stuff going on back home!" Julia had protested in exasperation. "In fact, you might be more at risk just because you *are* the sheriff's mother! Ted can't protect you all the time!"

"You don't understand, dear," her mother had told her gently. "Ted isn't the one who protects us all now."

"What do you mean?" Julia had asked.

"Never mind, dear. When you come home for a visit next we can talk about it. In the meantime, little pitchers have big ears. But don't worry, I'm quite safe."

Suddenly Julia's cell phone rang. She picked it up, half expecting another obscene phone call of the kind she'd been getting ever since she was blacklisted. They all seemed to be from men with distinct New York accents who described in detail what they wanted to do to her, in bed and torture-wise. In several cases Julia had recognized the voices of some of her Jewish former co-workers at Fox, including a dignified vice president whom she knew had grandchildren and who had always treated her with unfailing courtesy until she had been tarred with the "Nazi bitch" brush. For some odd reason, these calls didn't bother Julia. She had become familiar with Jews in her years in Hollywood, and familiarity must have bred contempt. Now she was a marked woman, she didn't expect anything else from them. Usually she simply screened her calls through voice mail, but she was expecting a return call from another contact about a job this morning, and so she answered the phone herself, risking an outburst of filthy Yiddish obscenity. "Ms. Lear?" said a male voice.

"Yes, this is Julia Lear," said Julia.

"Ms. Lear, this is Arnold Blaustein speaking, president of Paradigm Studios. Do you recognize my voice?"

"Uh, yes, Mr. Blaustein, I do," replied Julia, stunned.

"How are you this morning?"

"Up to shit, frankly. You've blacklisted me from my profession and you're trying to run me out of town."

"Well, that's actually what I want to speak with you about," said Blaustein. The studio head had done some acting himself in his younger days, and he could still lay on a mellifluous voice and tone of genuine regret and concern. "I've spoken to Myron Silverstein about your case, and I have to say that I think he overreacted. I'd like to see what we can do to set things right."

"Who's we?" asked Julia suspiciously.

"Some of my fellow executives in the industry and I. Ms. Lear, I'd like for you to come in and have a talk with us. Right now, if it's convenient. I think we can be of great mutual benefit to one another. In fact, I'm so eager to meet you that I've taken the liberty of sending my personal driver and limousine to your apartment to pick you up. He should be there in about an hour, but he'll wait as long as you need to get ready, and then he'll bring you here to Paradigm."

"One minute I'm blacklisted, and the next minute I'm getting invited to the Bunker?" gasped Julia. This was getting surreal.

"Hey, what can I tell you?" said Blaustein. "This is Hollywood, where anything and everything is possible."

Julia remembered the pain of the FBI taser on her neck and the slaps on her head while she sat tied in her own office, and for a second or two she considered telling Blaustein where to get off, but she decided against it. In the first place, it was clear that the handwriting was on her wall, and this was almost certainly the last chance she would ever get to work in a profession she had come to love. Like it or not, Blaustein and his fellow Jews held the keys to the kingdom, and if she wanted back into the Emerald City the only way she'd get her Hollywood privileges restored would be from them. Also, she was intensely curious to find out what the devil was going on. "Sure," she said. "An hour will be fine."

Since she didn't know the exact nature of the occasion, after her shower Julia put on a neat and professional looking business suit, as if she was going to a job interview, which this might turn out to be for all she knew. The limo arrived promptly; the driver was a tall black man in a chauffeur's uniform with a Blackwater insignia on it, who had a bulge under his jacket and must have doubled as a bodyguard for Blaustein, but that was situation normal in Tinseltown these days. She was definitely expected, because the car zipped right through the checkpoints and barriers at Paradigm. She was met at the entrance to the Bunker by an obsequious flunky in a sports jacket who escorted her directly through all the metal detectors and guard posts, into the elevator, and right up to a room on a sealed corridor, not the conference room but a luxuriously furnished lounge with plush carpet and leather armchairs and sofas. On her entrance, not only Blaustein but several of the wealthiest and most powerful men in Hollywood, which meant several of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the world, politely rose to their feet. Julia recognized Feinstein from Dreamworks-Disney, Glaser from TriVision, and Paradigm counsel Dave Danziger, as well as three other men

she'd never seen before. Three of the seven were wearing blue yarmulkes. A buffet table in one corner was set with thermos dispensers of hot drinks and plates of exotic-looking sandwiches, even though it wasn't lunchtime yet. A white-jacketed Hispanic waiter stood silently by. "Good morning, Ms. Lear," said Blaustein graciously. He gestured toward the buffet. "Would you like coffee, or tea, or herbal? Or something stronger from the bar? A little nosh by way of brunch, perhaps?"

"Uh, you got a double latté?" she asked, bemused. The waiter immediately drew her out a large ceramic cup of the white frothy liquid from one of the stand-up thermoses, brought it to her on a saucer with a napkin. At a brief head-jerk from Blaustein, he and the flunky left the room.

"Have a seat, please, Ms. Lear," said Blaustein, indicating an armchair with a coffee table beside it. Julia sat down, took a sip of the hot coffee and set it and the saucer down on the table. She decided to take the bull by the horns.

"Mr. Blaustein, I have no idea on earth why you've asked me up here, but judging from the presence of these other gentlemen it must be something important," she said. "You said on the phone you wanted to make things right regarding my blacklisting from employment in show business, something that I have to say right here and now I have done nothing to deserve."

"So I've been informed, Julia. May I call you Julia? You might as well call me Arnie." *Oh, God, here it comes,* she thought. *What the hell are these guys planning on doing to me?*

She went on in a calm but firm voice, "I was visited by the FBI, interrogated, intimidated, physically assaulted in my office, and fired from my job because a little over fourteen years ago I had a high school relationship with a man whom I haven't seen since the summer I graduated. I know better than to expect any accountability from a government agency, and I haven't even bothered to file a complaint that I know beforehand would be useless and probably just get me into more trouble, but frankly I expected better from an employer and an industry that I have served loyally, with enthusiasm and all the energy and creativity I could muster. I have earned every cent you have ever paid me. But not only was I fired by a security guard, with no chance to explain or tell my side of the story, but thanks to the gossip grapevine in this industry, I am now branded as Axis Sally, and no one will hire me. We all know perfectly well that you gentlemen in this room can turn that gossip mill on or off at will. I want to know what it will take for you to call off the dogs?"

"You know how we do things in Hollywood, Julia," said Blaustein. "An exchange of favors. You carry out a sensitive piece of work for us, and you've

got an assistant producer's slot here at Paradigm or any other job you want, at any salary you want, with any studio or network in town. I guarantee it. Hell, you pull this off for us and you can have Myron Silverstein's job if you want it."

"Now that's a thought," said Julia with a wry little laugh, sipping her latté. "I don't need to tell you gentlemen what kind of wall I've got my back against. You know better than anyone, since you put me there. I don't seem to have much choice. Whatever it is, I'll give it a shot."

"An ironic choice of words," said Blaustein with a mirthless chuckle. "Actually, we want you to try and stop the shooting."

"What?" asked Julia in surprise.

"Ms. Lear, you have been very frank with us, and we will be equally candid with you," said David Danziger, leaning forward. "This . . . this horror, this bloodshed, this madness has to stop. Our industry is being destroyed. I think we're all shocked and appalled at how easily and quickly this NVA terror campaign has brought us all to a standstill, with everyone from mega-stars, to executives such as ourselves, down to our set crews and tech crews, the studio staff, and the people who do our catering and janitorial work afraid to show their faces anywhere near a studio office, a set, or an industry event. The amount of money we have lost already is so huge that we can't even quantify it, and if I quoted you any figure it would be meaningless today and invalid tomorrow, as the butchery goes on and on. The FBI and the police have been trying for months now to get a handle on it, and they have come up empty. For all they know, Scotty may be beaming these gunmen and bombers down from the Enterprise, and beaming them back up after they kill again. The closest we've come to any of them is when my late brother-in-law Martin Shulman, a lifelong friend and a very brave man, was able to track down Erica Collingwood as the inside contact who helped set up that slaughterhouse at the Academy Awards. Erica has vanished, and Marty paid with his life for getting even that close. We have come to realize that if anything is to be salvaged out of this wreckage, billions of dollars and tens of thousands of jobs and careers, including our own, then we are going to have to swallow some very bitter medicine indeed. We must defer our anger and our desire for revenge until times and circumstances change. In the meantime, we must at least attempt to make some arrangement with these murderers that will allow us to resume production and put our people back to work. That may not be possible, and if not then God only knows what will happen, but we have to at least make that attempt. That's where you come in."

"Me?" gasped Julia in amazement.

Danziger nodded. "To put it melodramatically, Julia, we want you to bear our flag of surrender to the enemy. The problem we have in attempting to negotiate or at least communicate with these people is the same one the police and the FBI have. We haven't got a clue where to *find* the sons of bitches. You are the only tenuous lead we have, at least the only one we know about. Obviously *some* people in town know where to find them, like that Collingwood bitch," he hissed viciously. "But the death of Marty Shulman has demonstrated the danger of trying to track them down that way. We want you to try and slip in the back door and have a word on our behalf, see if you can talk to someone who might be able to call these dogs off us. Then we can call ours off you."

"You mean Zack," said Julia slowly, comprehension slowly dawning.

"Yes," admitted Danziger. "We want you to go on a visit back up to your home town and look up your old boyfriend."

"I'm not sure I could find him myself, if the entire might of United States law enforcement and the military can't," she told them. "I'm not sure I want to. I'm not sure he'd want me to find him. Why Zack? I haven't heard that he's involved in any of this stuff going down here in Hollywood."

"I understand he's a battalion commander, whatever that entails, and more or less the NVA's local warlord for the northern Oregon coast," replied Danziger. "Not to mention something of a media star in his own right, riding around in a Humvee with a .50-caliber machine gun and a feather in his cap, flourishing a Winchester like an old-time cowboy. His gang even call themselves the Wild Bunch. He sounds like he'd have the kind of juice we need, or he knows who does, if you can persuade him."

"And risk getting the same bullet for my trouble that Marty Shulman got?" exclaimed Julia with asperity.

"I meant it when I said that you can write your own ticket in Hollywood if you do this for us," said Blaustein. "I didn't say you wouldn't have to earn it."

"Now, you say you haven't seen this man Hatfield in years," pressed Danziger. "Just how close were you, if I may ask?"

"We were at least in the discussion stage of getting married, as serious as that can be with two 17 year-olds, but his family didn't have the money for college, he got drafted and ended up in Iraq for a lot of years, and I lost track of him. Obviously he's changed quite a bit since then," said Julia sourly. "America taught him how to kill, and it looks like he can't kick the habit."

"Do you think he would harm you or allow others to do so if you tried to contact him and speak for us?" asked Blaustein.

"Honest to God, sir, I just don't know," said Julia, shaking her head. "I hear about him on the news sometimes. That's not the boy I remember, is all

I can say." She took a deep breath. "Look, I want to work again, and I want to work here, in TV or movies. That's always been my dream. If I do this, and if I can find Zack, and if he doesn't shoot me or just plain kick me out on my ass, what exactly do you want me to say to him?"

"Keep it simple," said Blaustein. "Just ask him what it would take to put a stop to all this murder and destruction down here. If it's money, we'll pay it, however and wherever they want it. If it's something else we can live with, we'll do it. Just let us get back to work."

"What couldn't you live with?" asked Julia. She was frightened at what they were asking of her, but fascinated as well.

"They've got to be at least a little bit realistic," spoke up Moshe Feinstein. "They've got to understand we can't simply fire every Jew and every homosexual and African-American who works for us, we can't stop making movies and TV shows with minority actors, nothing like that. It would shut us down just as effectively as their murder campaign. *Oy,* maybe that's what these maniacs want and there's no way we can work anything out with them at all, in which case I guess we'll have to move the whole industry to Europe or New Zealand or someplace. We don't want to do that, end a century-old tradition here in Hollywood. We just want to know if there's any way we can work out some *modus vivendi* so that we can shoot a film without worrying about truck bombs and snipers on the set."

"And I'm supposed to negotiate all this on my own?" asked Julia incredulously.

"No, we wouldn't expect that of you," said Blaustein. "If your old high school flame seems receptive at all, ask him to pass it up the line to his own superiors and give us some kind of contact down here in California, preferably someone who knows the industry, someone with the authority to make an agreement on their part. He has our solemn undertaking that we will keep this strictly between ourselves, and that no police or FBI or government will be brought into the matter. We want this settled, and we understand the preconditions."

"Do you think they'll accept the word of Jews on anything?" Julia asked them bluntly, looking around the room.

Moshe Feinstein spread his hands. "Madam, I assure you, with a gun pointed at our heads, we're as honest as the day is long."

XXIV

One If By Land, Two If By Sea

Dispatch: this knave's tongue begins to double.
Sound, trumpets, alarum to the combatants!

King Henry VI.—Act II, Scene 3

Julia hadn't been home for over three years, since before 10/22 in fact, and she was astounded at how complicated the journey had become these days. Massive airport security boarding the plane at LAX was something she was used to, but having to go through the same extensive screening when she got off the plane in Portland was a new one on her. This included X-rays, metal detectors, and full searches of her checked luggage and her laptop, her carry-on bag and briefcase as well by sullen maroon-jacketed Sky Marshals, most of whom seemed to be Hispanic or black, and all of whom carried holstered Glocks on their hip. It took her almost two hours from the time she stepped off the plane until she finally got into the main arrival lounge, and even then there were differences. The terminal was a lot more quiet than she remembered other airports ever being, and she quickly spotted the probable cause. In almost every corner, and strolling up and down the causeway, were pairs of blue-black uniformed men and a few women in heavy body armor, with helmets and dark visors, carrying M-16s with infrared sights. On their backs in bright gold letters were the letters FATPO, the acronym of the Federal Anti-Terrorist Police Organization. Julia noticed that people were trying to avoid the government gun thugs as much as possible without seeming to do so. They seemed to have a habit of stopping people in the terminal for no reason, barking orders and glowering and demanding documents. The Iron Heel had arrived in the Northwest.

Then Julia spotted a slim middle-aged man in a blue blazer and white trousers who was holding up a cardboard sign with the word *Lear* on it in magic marker. She walked up to him, pulling her travel suitcase behind her on its casters. "Hello, I'm Julia Lear," she said to the man.

"Wally Post," he said, shaking her hand.

"Mr. Blaustein said you would meet me, but why?" asked Julia.

"I have a little company here called Oregon Security Associates," explained Post. "I used to be a P.I., but since The Trouble started we specialize in tourism and business travel. We make sure people who need to visit our fair City of Roses and certain of our scenic rural areas for any legitimate reason can come in, get their business done, and get out without incident. You might say I'm your trusty native guide. I'll get you through the jungle safely and keep you away from the lions and tigers and bears, oh my!"

"Being a native of this particular jungle myself, I don't think I need a guide," said Julia with a laugh.

"Blaustein tells me you haven't been up here since things started going boom in the night," Post told her. "The jungle is a lot more dangerous now, *mem-sahib.*" He glanced behind her. "Case in point . . ."

Julia felt a heavy hand on her shoulder, and she turned to find a huge black man in FATPO body armor behind her. His partner, a smaller Mexican, was standing several paces away with the muzzle of his M-16 pointed right at Julia's midriff. "Who you be, woman, and whut de fuck you doin' comin' into my town?" demanded the black belligerently. Before the stunned Julia could reply, Post deftly slid a small card out of his shirt pocket and extended it to the FATPO.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," he said suavely. "I'm Wally Post from O.S.A. This lady is from Paradigm Studios in Hollywood, and I am escorting her to make sure she is safe from the insurgents. As you can see, I have a courtesy card from your commanding officer Colonel Aceveda. His cell number is on the back."

The huge negro glanced at the card, but was evidently familiar with the system in place, and he handed it back. "You wan' be safe fum dese racist muthafukkas, you ought be hanging wid de 'Po while you in town," he said to Julia with a leering grin.

"Actually, she's here gathering background for a movie Paradigm is considering, all about you FATPO heroes and your gallant battle against hate and terrorism," said Post smoothly.

"Yeah?" spoke up the Mexican. "You gonna need some of us 'Po Boys for actors in your movie, essay?"

"The more authentic the better," agreed Julia.

"Dass cool. I like to be a movie star, essay. I'm Private Ramirez, Tiburcio Ramirez, but my homeys in de 'Po call me Cangrande. Dass Big Dog in Spanish. You need some technical advice or something, you look me up, hokay, mami?"

"I'll remember," promised Julia. The black man's radio crackled, something unintelligible came out, he grunted to the Mexican and they moved away down the terminal causeway. Julia stared after them and swallowed.

"A lot of them are former gang-bangers from L.A., New York, Chicago, Miami, places like that," explained Post conversationally.

"How bad could that have gotten?" asked Julia nervously.

Post smiled. "Here in public, in the daylight? Probably not too bad, if you had sense enough to keep your cool and keep it light and bantering. Out there at night, on some street corner or on some dark rural highway with no one around but you and them? Bad. Very bad."

"What was that card in your pocket, and how did you get it?" asked Julia.

"The Portland commander of the FATPO is one Colonel Reynaldo Aceveda, a Colombian. I'm told he used to work for the CIA down there. He clearly thinks he's back in Medillín, and for all practical purposes I guess he is. The Fatties are his own private army, they're legally immunized both by Congress and by a Presidential Executive Order against prosecution for anything they care to do to anyone. In the few short weeks he's been here, Aceveda's already making money hand over fist with a dozen scams, mostly involving protection from his own armored goons. That card has his private cell number written on the back in green, which means I've paid him for a certain level of protection and co-operation. That's the middle level card, one cut above black ink. I won't tell you how much I paid, because you wouldn't believe me. If I can get you in and out in one piece and you can get done whatever it is he wants you to do, Mr. Blaustein has promised me a bonus big enough to buy a red card off Aceveda, one with his number written in red ink. That's the one you want."

"What does a red card get you?" asked Julia. "Or do I really want to know?"

Post gave her a chilly smile. "Among other things, with a red card I can kill people. How were you planning on getting down to Astoria, ma'am?"

"Uh, renting a car, like I usually do?" said Julia, bemused.

"Not recommended," said Post, shaking his head. "Doesn't matter if you take Highway 30 or Highway 26, you're going to run into at least a

couple of FATPO checkpoints, and once you get past those, usually between Rainier and Clatskanie, you may run into a few NVA checkpoints as well. Cap Hatfield likes to keep up with who's coming in and out of his manor. The goots know the local people and don't bother them, but I'm not sure if you're still considered local or not. And I really, really would not recommend a single white woman trying to get through a Fattie roadblock after dark. These guys aren't regular police or even regular military, they're a brute squad sent in here by Hillary Clinton to stomp on anybody with a white skin who looks at them wrong. You need me, Ms. Lear. Really, you do. Blaustein hired me to get you there and back. Please let me do so."

"Okay," said Julia, shaking her head in wonderment. "Let's go." She followed Post out of the terminal and into the short-term parking tiers, and he loaded her baggage into a new Jeep Cherokee. As they were pulling out of the airport and onto a feeder road heading to Interstate 5, Julia said carefully, "You mentioned a guy called Cap Hatfield. I thought his name was Zack?"

"It is," said Post. "He's an NVA captain, so the locals call him Captain Zack or Cap, and the media seem to have picked up on it. Real cowboy, packs a Winchester and uses it, too. Hatfield killed some hotshot U.S. Marshal last year who challenged him to a duel or something. Faced him down in the street in Clatskanie with that rifle and knocked him ass over head before the fed could get his Glock clear of the holster. The local cops seem to have decided to just stay the hell out of his way, and after that they *damned* sure did. The First Portland Brigade of the NVA has three battalions. Hatfield is commander of the Third Battalion. Call themselves the Wild Bunch. Nobody knows how big the first two are, but the Third Battalion seems to be pretty big and it covers a really huge area, pretty much from roughly Rainier on down to Astoria and as far south as Cannon Beach or so. His guys have pretty much taken over down where you're going. From there on down to Newport it's the Second Oregon Coastal Brigade, commanded by some Swede who calls himself Ragnar Redbeard. His real name is Dan something. Guy's a real head case. He's got a boat he set up like a Viking long ship with shields on the side and a dragonhead prow. Back when there were still Mexicans along that stretch of 101, he used to chop them up and go fishing using the bits and pieces as bait. No more Mexicans around, though. Once it all started up after 10/22 they got the message *real* fast. You won't hear any Spanish outside Portland now."

"Well, that will be a change from L.A.," said Julia.

"I imagine so," agreed Post. He took an exit and started heading down toward the river.

"You know this Hatfield personally?" asked Julia casually.

"Why?" inquired Post.

"Because he's the man I'm going to Astoria to see," said Julia. "I don't know if I should be telling you this or not, but the fact is that once I get to Astoria I haven't got a clue how to get hold of him. I do have some contacts in local law enforcement, so to speak, but . . . well, I'm not sure they'll discuss things with me. I don't even know how to go about asking," she concluded, shaking her head.

"Mmmm . . . I wouldn't be broadcasting that about," said Post carefully. "You're lucky. I'm something of an ethical mercenary, and when I'm paid I stay bought. But there are those who would shop you to the Fatties in a heartbeat if they found out something like that about you. There is a lot of reward money on the hoof moving around the Northwest these days, ma'am. Every mother's son and daughter of the NVA has a basic $50,000 DT on his or her head, that's domestic terrorist bounty, and from there it goes up depending on how naughty the individual Volunteer has been. I think Hatfield's up to over half a million now. In addition to all the other gun-toting loons we have up here now, we got bounty hunters and free-lance snitches under every rock."

"These people have women members?" asked Julia in surprise. "Wait, what am I talking about? That's a stupid thing for me to say. I knew one of them myself. Erica Collingwood."

"Yeah, they got women. They call 'em gun bunnies. Some of 'em real hotties, no offense," chuckled Post. "Erica, and Melanie Young with the Olympic Flying Column, and that tattooed biker chick who shot up Flanders Street and killed the police chief along with Cat-Eyes Lockhart and those other gnarly dudes. Anyway, to answer your question, I wouldn't be much of a native guide if I didn't know all the tribes and customs along the way. I'll make some calls, very carefully of course, and I'll see what I can do to speed things along and find Cap for you." He pulled the Jeep into a small boat dock by the river.

"Where are we going?" asked Julia in surprise.

"Astoria, the same way Lewis and Clark got there," said Post. He pulled up to a slip containing a motorboat about twenty-five feet in length named the *Nemo.* "What can I say? Movies are everywhere, and my kids love that one. We'll be heading down along the river. Lucky for you it's June and the sun doesn't set until almost ten, so it should be still light when we pull into the Astoria dock."

The trip was magnificent, down the mighty Columbia River under a high summer sun. Julia spent the entire voyage sitting in a lawn chair on the deck,

accepting Post's offer of a late lunch of homemade ham and Swiss sandwiches on rye from plastic baggies, and multiple bottles of Henry Weinhard beer from a cooler. She had never made the trip on the water before, and she found herself stunned and awed by the incredible beauty of own her own native land. Both the Oregon and Washington banks were sun-dappled and glowing in brown and evergreen, and sea lions barked on the shore. The smokestacks of Longview still spewed their white fumes into the air, and great container ships still plied the waterway up and down to and from Longview and Portland. Other than the occasional police boat along the way there seemed to be no sign that there was an insurgency going on. As they sailed beneath the great bridge at Longview Julia went up to join Post on the bridge. "I know this sounds stupid, but you'd think if the NVA was trying to overthrow the government and wreck everything, they would have blown up this bridge, and the big 101 bridge down in Astoria," she said. "I thought proper guerrillas were supposed to blow up bridges?"

"Then how would *they* get across the river? Swim?" responded Post with a chuckle. "Besides, guerrillas don't get very far if they totally ruin the lives of the local people they rely on for support. The local fuzz reached a *modus vivendi* with Jerry Reb on the bridges. The cops don't put any checkpoints or cameras on either side of the bridges, and the NVA let the bridges stay up. Some of the state police and federals didn't get the message during the first year or so and tried checkpoints, here in Longview and Astoria. The Wild Bunch simply shot the checkpoints on the Oregon side all to hell, and their colleagues in Cowlitz and Pacific counties shot them to hell on the Washington side. After half a dozen dead state troopers and FBI, the law realized they were just providing the NVA with targets and losing men for nothing, and so they pulled in their horns. Same thing with all these container vessels. The NVA could choke off the Columbia River maritime industry any time they want. They could just get up on that bridge at Astoria and drop a bomb on some Chinese freighter. They might sink it in mid-channel and block off the whole river. Even if they didn't, they would effectively bottle everything up, because most captains and crews don't really fancy a 100-mile voyage along a river where you're mostly within small arms or at least rocket range of one shore or other, and somebody's shooting at them. The Feds are probably pretty nervous that someday Jerry Reb will do just that, but the fact is that the U.S. military and cops are already stretched so thin that they simply can't guard hundreds of miles of river bank and coast by placing troops every few yards, which is what they'd have to do. As bad as things are here, the overwhelming majority of America's four million troops are still overseas trying to hold down six or

seven countries in the Middle East at any given time. So the powers that be just leave it, and cross their fingers."

"Looks like they've gotten some extra manpower on the ground, from what I saw at the airport," commented Julia.

"Those are thugs, not soldiers," Post reminded her. "They are not here to perform legitimate military tasks. They're here to spread terror and intimidation and frighten white people into submission to the régime. But you're right, at some point fairly soon, they're going to have to try and move in downriver here, especially into Astoria. Astoria has become almost a kind of liberated zone, where white people can live safely and peacefully among their own kind. The United States can't allow that."

"You sound like you sympathize with them," said Julia. "Look, Wally, I'm grateful to you for the help. You're right, I might be in trouble without it, and I don't want to offend you or start an argument. But I have to remind you that these people are murderers. They've murdered some of my friends, including slaughtering some of them on live nationwide TV a few months ago at the Oscars."

"Well, I'm just a hired hand and I won't get into a political discussion, ma'am," said Post. "When you get into a war, one of the first things that becomes completely irrelevant is who started what. But you saw back at the airport how the United States government has responded. Let me ask you, ma'am, if destiny has decreed that the old Brady Bunch life is gone forever, as I think it has, and you had to deal with armed men in the dark of night on some street or some stretch of highway, who would you rather run into? That monkoid and his beaner buddy back at the airport? Or Zack Hatfield?"

"I don't know," said Julia, shaking her head. "I really don't. I'd rather not have to choose."

"That's the problem," said Post gently. "Eventually, you may have to. You can be ruled by gunmen from a different race, or gunmen from your own. That's a shitty deal, but it's a lot older situation than our so-called democracy here. Insofar as we ever really had one, which was never very far."

* * *

As Julia Lear was enjoying her cruise down the Columbia, back in Portland Lieutenant Billy Jackson of A Company, First Brigade, sat in the back room of an upscale tanning salon in a small strip mall just off Skyline Boulevard. The place was called The Children of the Sun, appropriately enough; so far no one in the United States government had been sufficiently erudite to spot

the ancient name of the Aryan peoples of the earth. Jackson had just finished a conversation with a young white man of nondescript appearance, who slipped out the back when he was through saying what he had to say. Jackson looked at Gary Bresler with a grim face. The news had not been good. "I'll contact the commandant and bring him up to speed," said Bresler. "But we've got to have a quiet word of prayer with that newshound, no question. How do you want to handle it?"

Jackson flipped open his phone and dialed a number. When his call was answered he said, "Hey, Tom boy! I just got into town and I was hoping to catch you. How about a late lunch? What's the best steak house in Portland? Never mind, we'll figure something out. I'm at the Pioneer Inn." The Pioneer Inn was downtown and nowhere near Jackson's location, but it was the code word for the tanning salon. "Can you break loose from whatever you're doing? Great! Oh, and be sure to bring that friend of yours, Becky. Mom has heard a lot about her and she wants a full report." He hung up and looked at Bresler. "We're going to have to extract Zucchino and take him off somewhere for our little talk, and that means we've got to get him out of the hotel without attracting attention. We're going to need a Lorelei on this one."

"Becky?" asked Bresler. "You think she's up for it?"

"I wouldn't have called her in if I didn't think she is," said Jackson. "But we'll find out soon enough."

Eric Sellars and Annette Ridgeway were seated together in a lecture hall on the Portland State University campus when Jackson's call came in. Eric had his NVA special throwaway phone on vibrate, so it didn't ring out loud and he was able to conduct a *sotto voce* conversation without anyone other than his immediate neighbors knowing he was on the phone, and without disturbing the desiccated professor who was droning on about the vital importance of the Native American tradition in American history.

Eric's grades had been good enough, and Annette's father was rich enough, so that they both could have gone to any college or university in the country. It caused some surprise and a bit of consternation among their parents when both had insisted on remaining close to home and attending the distinctly second-string and highly politically correct PSU, but with a little blarney they had been able to put it across. Annette told her father she still wasn't comfortable leaving her mother alone, which was a valid enough reason, since Lorraine was still shaky and still on way too much medication for either Annette's liking or her father's. She also pointed out that PSU did have one crackerjack asset, an executive MBA program that would look very good on her resumé. Eric told his father that PSU had all the requisite pre-engineering

courses he would need before he went on to Stanford or MIT or some other science-heavy campus, and he was open about his desire not to be separated from Annette, which his dad fully understood.

It was by now accepted that barring some unforeseen circumstances, at some point in the middle-term future the two would marry. Both families were grateful, since neither now had to worry about the great American nightmare of what sort of revolting specimen of humanoid creature their son or daughter would bring home one day. The young people had acceded to their parents' request that they wait until after they both got their bachelors' degrees, so on the home front everything was smooth sailing. Both sets of parents were intensely relieved that there were no signs of drug use, insanity, or dysfunctional neurosis in either Eric or Annette, and that both seemed to be serious and goal-oriented young adults. They assumed that when their kids were out at all kinds of strange hours they were shacking up somewhere, but in view of how much, much worse they knew it could have been, they counted their blessings and said nothing. Nor had Ray Ridgeway ever mentioned his missing .45 handgun.

After some preliminary arguments, both families had decided that their children would do two years at PSU and get all their basic credits under their belts before transferring to a more high-caliber institution for their degree. They were not yet aware that the only two choices the pair would consider when the time came would be the University of Oregon at Eugene, which was prime for Eric with its strong research emphasis, or the University of Washington in Seattle which would be better for Annette's business degree, and that the choice would be dictated by the lovers' superiors in the NVA, based on where they could be the most use to the revolution.

"The boss man wants us both at the Pioneer Inn ASAP," Eric whispered to Annette.

"Wait ten minutes until the bell rings and class is over," Annette whispered back. "Remember, this bullshit is a PC required credit to make sure our skulls are properly filled with mush about Indians. If we walk out we might draw suspicion. Besides, I want to get on this asshole's good side, so maybe we can set him up for a hit down the line. The United States Constitution was *not* based on the oral laws of the Iroquois Confederation, it was based on the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England! Jesus, what fucking pig-ignorance! Where do they *get* this crap?"

"Mostly they just make it up," said Eric. "Who's going to argue with them when contradicting a politically correct professor in class can get you five years in prison?"

It took them almost an hour after they left the campus to get to Skyline Boulevard in Annette's Lexus, because Eric carefully took a maze of back streets to avoid the new FATPO checkpoints that were springing up all over Portland like mushrooms. Finally they walked into The Children of the Sun. The muscular and well-tanned young beach boy type behind the counter looked up. "Can I help you? We've got an introductory discount. You guys do look a little pale."

"Yeah, I hear this is where some other pale people hang out," said Eric. A yellow legal pad and a pen lay on the desk, and the young man looked Eric in the eye while he drew a line diagonally across the page.

"Pale's not too fashionable these days," he said. "You're a lot better off brown."

Eric glanced down at the paper and picked up the pen. "You look like you speak from experience." He crossed the diagonal line with another, making a large X on the paper.

"I bet you could even pass as a Mexican if you wanted," said Annette, picking up the pen and adding in the four cross-arms to complete the Swastika.

The young man smiled, tore the paper off the sheet, and fed it into a shredder underneath the counter. "I have, you know. Four years of Spanish in school actually turned out to be good for something." He nodded to the rear. Annette and Eric walked down a corridor past cubicles of overweight yuppies of both genders broiling themselves on the tables and entered the back room. They found Jackson and Bresler waiting for them, sitting at a folding table.

"Saw you come in on the monitor," said Jackson. He pointed to two chairs, one with a can of diet soda and one with a mug of steaming tea. "Herbal, right? Not sure if that's the kind you like."

"Thank you, sir," said Annette as she and Eric sat down.

Jackson leaned forward. "Comrades, we have a problem and we need your help. Especially your help, Becky. You may be aware that Portland is full of media people, reporters and TV crews and anchorpersons and free-lancers and such reptilian beings from all over the world, come to cover our glorious democracy's battle against the evil forces of terrorism and hate, all that crap. Ever since Fattie moved into town the government has adopted a policy of embedding them, as they call it. Same thing they did in Iraq and Afghanistan. Same reason, make sure that they can't get off the reservation and see and report on things they shouldn't. This is especially important since Fattie is already doing a lot of things he shouldn't, and ZOG doesn't want the world to know

about it. All media personnel now have to be registered with FATPO, and they are assigned so-called security escorts wherever they go. Everything that goes out is censored, or it's supposed to be. The régime is trying to maintain a chokehold on public perception of The Trouble in the Northwest. Obviously, we need to break that chokehold.

"But that's big-picture stuff. Our problem is specific. In Portland the media have been assigned several large hotels, mostly downtown, where they are all billeted and where they do their drinking and schmoozing and war-story swapping and bed-hopping and other journalist stuff. In theory they're not supposed to leave the premises without a security escort of some kind, FATPO or at least one of the so-called contractors. In practice that's pretty porous, as you can imagine. One of the habitués of the Benson Hotel on South Broadway is a reporter for the Los Angeles *Times* named Dawson Zucchino. He's new in town, and we don't have any particular gripe with him. His articles are anti-NVA, but no more so than you would expect from an Establishment newspaper, and they no doubt gain something in the editing. Normally he'd be pretty far down on our list of potential targets, but something has come up that indicates that we need to take a closer look at him and ask him some questions, and we need to do it fast. Like tonight, if we can. We have to get him off somewhere away from his buddies and his FATPO escort, so we can detain him, take him to a secure location, and find out what he knows regarding a particular matter. This may turn out to be very important and time-sensitive information indeed, and if it is at all possible we would like for this to be done so that his colleagues and the Fatties don't know he's been abducted, because if they know we've taken him they may be able to guess why, and that might blow the whole thing. The only way we can think of to do this is to set a honey trap. We're going to need a Lorelei. Becky, you indicated once that you were willing to do that duty if it was required. That time is now. Are you still willing?"

Annette glanced at Eric, who nodded almost imperceptibly. "Yes, Lieutenant, I am."

"I warn you that this is going to be a rush job, and it may go bad," Jackson told her. "If we can't keep you off the security cameras, it may well lead to blowing your cover and forcing you to go under and become a U-boat. There goes your education and maybe your whole future."

"Eric and I have talked about that," said Annette. "We knew what we were in for when we said yes that day in the car, at Flammus' funeral. If that's the way it plays out, that's the way it plays out."

"If that happens, I go under with her too," said Eric.

"We understand that. You're a good team and we wouldn't want to break you up," Bresler assured him.

"Thank you, comrade," said Jackson. There was a tap on the door, and Bresler admitted a small and pudgy young man with a buzz cut, carrying a large canvas gym bag. "Comrade Becky, this is Comrade Stiggs. He specializes in false ID, and you're going to need some right away. But first we need to select your coiffure for the evening."

From the bag, Stiggs produced four women's wigs, two longhaired, one neck-length bob, and one short pageboy style. "That's all I could round up on short notice," he explained apologetically. Bresler pulled out a fairly large mirror and set it up on one of the metal shelves. After some preliminary experimentation and comments from the men, they settled on a longhaired black wig, the one Annette found most comfortable.

"Okay, Becky, next question. Have you ever worn contacts?" asked Jackson.

"No," said Annette.

"I really would like to change the color of your eyes."

"Mmmm, if you could wear contacts to make your green eyes brown we could set you up as a mami," said Stiggs. "Thing is, that would also entail some grease paint to darken your visible skin if we want to do this right. Of course there are light-skinned and green-eyed Hispanic women. Can you do an accent?"

"Fuck the accent, can you actually speak Spanish?" asked Jackson.

"No, I took German in school," said Annette.

"Then we'd better not get too clever for our own good and try to turn you into a *muchacha.* The trouble with that is that you might run into a real beaner who tries to speak Spanish to you. In any case, if you've never worn contacts before, a sensitive mission like this isn't the time to start. With black hair and green eyes, you could be a Russian, but the same problem applies. There are enough Russians around, especially Jews, so you could run into problems. We don't have time to get real complicated with this anyway. You'll just have to be *bimbo Americana.* Let's get the sheet up. Stand here, please, comrade." Stiggs took a blue sheet from the gym bag, Bresler and Jackson held it up, and Annette stood in front of the sheet wearing the black wig while Stiggs snapped two pictures of her with an Instamatic. "Okay, Stiggsy, in addition to the driver's license, what else have you got on hand for a second photo ID?" Jackson asked him.

"Pretty much anything you want, sir," said Stiggs. "Student IDs from Oregon State and University of Oregon, PSU, UW and Washington State.

State employee, city employee, federal employee. I can even make her military or a Portland PB cop if you want. Complete with matching badge."

"Mmmm, she's a bit young for a cop," mused Jackson, rubbing his chin. "But it would give her an excuse to carry a piece."

"Same problem, I might run into a real police checkpoint or stop-and-frisk. Make it a Portland State student ID," suggested Annette. "I know the campus and I can rattle off conversation about school. Why not make me a journalism major? I can be some bright young thing really eager to break into the business hear all his gnarly Hemingway-esque adventures."

"Uh, why does she need false ID at all?" asked Eric.

"So she can get into any bars or night clubs that may be necessary," said Bresler. "Only exception to General Order Number Ten, remember?"

"You'll have to make me 21, then," giggled Annette. "Hey, that's an idea. Make me just turned 21 on June 1st, eager to get my first legal taste of John Barleycorn and the night life with a fascinating older man."

"Not bad," agreed Jackson.

"You can take your first official drink on a false ID supplied by the NVA while doing duty as Mata Hari," said Eric with a wry chuckle.

"PSU it is. She'll need some credit cards as well," said Jackson. "Got any for females?"

"Uh, yeah, one set," said Stiggs.

"What's the name?"

"Mary Jones, believe it or not," Stiggs told them. "The real Mary Jones was a nigger who won't be needing them anymore. But remember, comrade, they're just for show. If someone has noticed the real Mary Jones is missing, they've either been canceled, or just possibly the cops are keeping them live but red-flagged to see if they show up when someone tries to use them. If the cops or Fatties stop you and search your purse and they find nothing *but* a driver's license, they'll be suspicious. You need a lot of junk for it to look normal. I'll do you up a library card as well, a dry-cleaning receipt, that kind of thing so it all looks kosher, pardon the expression. I need to get back to my crib and get these done, Lieutenant. It will take about three hours. Where do you want me to deliver them?"

"I'll text you," said Jackson. "You've got this month's codes?"

"Yes, sir. I'd better get going. Good luck, Becky, I mean Mary," he said as he zipped the bag closed and left.

Jackson sighed. "Okay, guys have a seat," he said. "Tom, you will be part of the extraction team, and after the pickup your job will be getting Becky out of the area. Becky, you are going to be risking your life and your

freedom tonight for our new country in the most dangerous task you have yet undertaken. You both have a right to know why this is necessary, and why it's such a rush. As I've mentioned before, the Benson Hotel is a media barracks now, and so needless to say we've got an ear in there to see who comes and goes, who is doing what, who is doing whom, and listening to as much of the reptiles' drunken ravings as he can overhear. It's a mine of information. These people are incredibly indiscreet when they're drinking, which is most of the time. Last night the newshounds and newshens were holding forth at the bar as usual, and the conversation swung around to Zack Hatfield and Third Battalion down along the North Shore."

"The Wild Bunch?" put in Eric.

"The very ones," said Jackson with a nod. "Dawson Zucchino was several sheets to the wind, which I gather is the normal condition for him late at night. He was coming on to one of his female associates, an anchorwoman for Fox News who was in town looking for on-the-spot dramatic coverage of the war on domestic terror, blah blah blah. As nearly as our guy could overhear, he was promising to let her in on some really big story if she would come upstairs with him and let him drop anchor. When she pressed him for details, he said, and this is the nearest to a direct quote our source can give us, 'I'm going to be there when that swaggering motherfucker Captain Zack gets his silly hat blown off his head, by Rolly Rollins himself maybe. I'm going in embedded with the 'Po Boys and watch them kick racist ass, and since my orders could come at any moment and send me into the thick of battle, surely I deserve one last hell-or-glory fuck from a beautiful colleague,' or some melodramatic babble to that effect."

"Sure the guy really knows anything at all, sir?" asked Eric in surprise. "He sounds like a drunken pompous ass!"

"That's the hell of it," sighed Jackson. "He may *be* just a drunken pompous ass who's mouthing off to try and get into some TV Barbie doll's pants, and it's possible I may be risking your lives and the lives of other comrades for nothing. But we simply can't take that chance. We do know a few things that make this remark of his disturbing. We know that a large force of FATPO, almost a thousand men, were held back when the main body moved into the Homeland, but were instead sent to Oakland Army Terminal in California. Nor has their Head Nigger In Charge, former U.S. Congressman Roland Rollins, put in his appearance in the Northwest yet. No one seems to know where he is; the media have asked but they're getting the undisclosed location rap from the White House. Third Section speculates that they're being held back as a kind of Flying Column of FATPO's own, who can be dropped in

by helicopter or even trucked in as a strike force wherever they decide to open their own front, so to speak. If they're going into the North Shore area they could even be coming in by sea. We also know that a force of helicopters, both transports and gunships, have been assembled at Fort Lewis for some unspecified purpose. They're painted FATPO black, so they're not going to Iraq or anywhere else overseas. They're going to try and hit us somewhere we don't expect. We know the régime has always been real nervous about Zack and his boys sitting astride the Columbia, with those two big bridges across the river at Astoria and Longview. Blow those bridges and block those container ships from coming upriver, and the American economy in the Northwest would be hurting, bad. We've held off because of the intense hardship it would cause white people here in the Homeland and the potentially bad blowback, but if I were the American general I would make it a priority to secure both shores of the Columbia all the way up to Portland. They may be ready to make their move. We *must* find out if this asshole reporter actually knows anything."

"What, exactly, do you want me to do, sir? I mean how?" asked Annette.

Jackson pulled out several sheets of paper. "Got this off the internet. This is Dawson Zucchino, from his column in the newspaper." The photo showed a man of about forty with dark wavy hair and some hard wear already on his face, bags under his eyes and cheeks beginning to bloat and sag from too much alcohol and junk food. Then Jackson pulled out a yellow legal pad. "It's going to be tricky. I don't like pulling any tickle downtown anymore, what with Fatties roaming the streets like packs of wild dogs. I've done a couple of sketches for you, of the Benson Hotel and the streets surrounding it. If possible, I want you to intercept Zucchino somewhere *outside* the Benson, because if you have to approach him in the hotel bar or one of the restaurants inside, you won't be able to get in without showing your ID, going through a metal detector which means you can't go in strapped, and you can't avoid being filmed by the CCTV cameras. I really would like to keep you off Fattie's silver screen. But if that's not possible, then you'll have to go into the Benson itself, pick him up, chat him up with all kinds of journalists and security around, and lure him outside with the promise of a sexual encounter so we can bag him. That's important: get him to come *out* of the hotel. If he's inside the Benson, he'll want you to go up to his room with him, and there's no way we can get in and get him out without shooting and casualties. The hotel itself is guarded by private contractors, Blackwater corporation mercenaries, some of whom are almost as nasty as the Fatties themselves, and there will be plainclothes Fatties inside the hotel as well assigned to the more major

reporters under the buddy system they've worked out. If they tumble to you in there, you'll have as much chance as a mouse at a cat convention. No one questions your courage, comrade. You've proven it often enough since you came to us, but that's all the more reason I want you to come back from this one. We need you."

"Thank you, sir," said Annette.

"Now, I have an idea. I want you to try to get him into another bar down Broadway from the Benson Hotel, about here," said Jackson, pointing to the impromptu map. "Paddy Grogan's Shamrock Pub."

"I know where that is," said Annette.

"It will be crowded, but a different kind of crowd, one you can get lost in rather than stand out in. We will have two vehicles, a van for the extraction and a second car for backup and interference if necessary. You and Tom will have to exit the area on foot, and make it to a third vehicle, your own, during which time you must remove your disguise and resume your own identity, with some suitable reason for being downtown in case you're stopped and questioned. Do not be caught with Stiggsy's false ID on you; possession of false identification is now a Class A terrorism offense and can expose you to the death penalty." The two of them bent over the paper. Bresler spoke up behind them.

"Billy, do you think we should notify Zack?"

Jackson thought a moment. "Call the commandant and see what he thinks, but my feeling is let's wait and see if there's anything to this. Zack has contingency plans, I know, and it would be hard for him to be too much more alert than he is already. Even if they're coming down on him, they won't catch him by surprise. That much we can take to the bank."

* * *

The sun was setting as Post helped Julia carry her luggage up the boat slip and onto the River Walk at 31st Street in Astoria. Now she stood on the River Walk, and she was home again. The town looked quiet and peaceful, in a sense too quiet and peaceful for June. There should be tourists all up and down the River Walk on a sunny summer night in June. She couldn't see the red and yellow trolley that usually ran up and down the riverside, its bell clanging. "Crap, now I'll have to see if I can find a cab," said Julia. "Wait, there's one." To her surprise the dusty blue taxicab pulled into the gravel lot beside them, and the cabby got out. He waved at her. "Ben!" she called.

"Hey, Julie, welcome home!" called Ben Svensson. "Your mom sent me to get you!"

"How did she know I was coming down the river?" asked Julia.

"I made a couple of those calls I mentioned while we were on the way down," said Post, loading her bags and her laptop into the cab's trunk.

"Uh, okay," said Julia dubiously. "Maybe I shouldn't ask."

"Probably not," agreed Post with a chuckle. He handed her a card. "You'll be all right from here on in. Here's my cell phone. I'll hang around here until you're ready to go back, but do me a favor? Check in with me once or twice a day so I'll know you're okay? I don't get you back to Tinsel Town in one piece, Mr. B. doesn't give me my bonus."

"You're a cabbie now?" Julie asked Svensson as they sped up the hill to the home of Julia's mother.

"Yeah, after five years on unemployment and welfare, I'm actually working again now," said Ben with a chuckle. "Amazin', ain't it! Jobs in town going begging and glad as hell to hire us middle-aged white boys, whereas we useta practically got spat on if we dared to put in an application anywhere. I inherited this cab from a Hindu fella. 'Bout three years back, he got a sudden urge to go back home and see the Taj Mahal or whatever. Left kind of sudden-like. Along with all the Mexicans and drug dealers and all them damned fruit flies from California who moved in on us. No offense."

"None taken. California is indeed known for its fruit flies," agreed Julia, feeling a slow freakout building. The streets she suddenly remembered so well were peaceful and golden in the sunset, and here and there she saw white children playing, running up and down, and white people out in their yards. The sudden absence of a sea of black and brown and yellow faces she was accustomed to was strange, disorienting. She was so used to being a minority in her own land that she could not understand the feeling she was experiencing. It was like a great weight lifting off her, but she could not understand why.

Then she was standing on her own porch and hugging her mother. A minute later she was inside the familiar kitchen watching a huge meal of meat loaf and potato salad being set down in front of her. For the next half hour she ate and talked about movies and Los Angeles and the weather and no, no young men in her life yet, everything except what she had come for. Yet all during that time, she somehow understood that through some process she could not fathom, her mother knew why she had come home. Finally she took a deep breath and said, "Mom, I need to talk to Ted. I was kind of expecting to see him here, but I can imagine what with the, situation and all, his schedule is pretty hectic these days. What would be the best time to see him? Should I go to his office? Go to his house? I mean I will anyway, I want to see Rhodie and the kids, but I need to kind of get some private face

time with Ted. I'd rather not get into it, so let's just say it's work-related. I need him to find somebody for me."

Mrs. Lear smiled. "Dear, why don't you take your bags up to your room, your old one, and come back down and I'll see if I can get him to come over?"

"Okay," said her daughter. Julia picked up her suitcases in the hall, put the strap of her laptop up to her shoulder, and mounted the stairs. She went into her old room, which she was glad and yet somewhat saddened to see that her mother still kept the very same as it had been the day she left for college, including the posters of rock stars no one remembered anymore and her stuffed animals on the bed. She tossed the laptop onto the bed, turned to the closet with the suitcase, and nearly jumped out of her skin when she saw a tall man with a weather-beaten face and a broad-brimmed, feathered hat on his head sitting in the corner armchair. A Winchester rifle leaned in the corner.

Zack Hatfield rose and politely took off his hat. "Hello, Julia," he said.

* * *

At about the same time, Annette Ridgeway was sitting down the street from the Benson Hotel on South Broadway, in the passenger seat of a green Toyota Tundra, the NVA's backup vehicle for the evening. It was still full light out. Lieutenant Billy Jackson sat beside her, watching down along Broadway for an armored bus bringing journalists back to the hotel. They had been attending and presumably reporting on an official welcoming banquet for FATPO officers, hosted by the Portland Better Business Bureau and Chamber of Commerce. Annette had been concerned because by virtue of his prominence in the financial community, her father was one of the attendees. "Don't worry, we're not going to hit the banquet," Jackson assured her. "Not enough notice to scout the location properly, and the security would be too heavy. We have to be a lot more careful and prepare a lot more elaborately now whenever we do anything here in the city, with all these new ZOG guns that can be brought to bear on us."

Annette was now Mary Jones, according to the multiple items of ID in the purse in her handbag. She was wearing her black wig and much more makeup than she normally used, including eye shadow and a bright lipstick, along with a sleeveless blouse with the top three buttons undone to reveal a black lace bra, and she wore a pair of hip-hugging jeans. They had let her select her own outfit. "Remember, you're a journalism student and this is supposed to

be a casual and unscripted encounter," Gary Bresler had told her before she went home to change. "I don't know if you have any slinky cocktail gowns or garments of that kind, but if you show up wearing something like that and dolled up to the nines, it might make Zucchino suspicious. He has to feel comfortable with you, comfortable enough to leave the shelter of his own herd in there in the Benson Hotel bar. Your attire should be understated, but sufficiently revealing to give him a preview of coming attractions, so to speak. Your manner when you interact with the target has to make it clear that you've got both the time and the inclination, and if he plays his cards right, he gets to nail a college girl tonight. It has to be *believable* from the get-go."

"Maybe if we can get Erica Collingwood assigned to First Brigade, she can give all our female comrades acting lessons," suggested Eric with a chuckle.

"Actually, I'm sure something like that is in the works, although perhaps not for First Portland Brigade," said Jackson in complete seriousness. "One way or another, the Army will make use of Comrade Collingwood's undoubted talents."

Annette was also wearing a large but not too ostentatious diamond engagement ring which Stiggs provided. "It adds to your persona, since most men will assume that an attractive young woman is involved with someone and may wonder why she isn't," Bresler had told her. "Media guys like Zucchino always fancy themselves as big studs, raffish James Bond international adventurer seducer types, and he'll probably consider an engagement ring a challenge." The final item in her ensemble for the evening was a small stainless steel .380-caliber automatic in a Velcro holster on her right ankle.

"Change in plans, now that we know you will have a chance to intercept him outside. I've decided I want you strapped," said Jackson. "Not just for self defense, but because you may have to pull down on the target and hold him for us if things get hectic. That means that whatever happens, you do *not* enter the Benson Hotel with him, because you can't pass the metal detector. I've thought about it, and as important as this is I simply can't justify sending you into a situation where you will not only be recorded on security digitals and lose your surface status, but where we will be powerless to help you or get you out of there if things go bad. If you can't get him to come with you to Paddy Grogan's where there are no spy cameras, then break it off and we'll figure out something else."

"Sir, this may be very important," Annette told him seriously. "I think I should go with the flow wherever it leads. We need to find out if Captain Hatfield and his battalion are facing an imminent attack. I can lose the gun."

"No, you can't," spoke up Eric firmly. "Annette, this is about as close as a Volunteer gets to the enemy. You'll be in danger, and you need something to fight with, at least hold them off long enough so we can get to you, if things go wrong."

"Hang onto the gun for now," said Jackson, quickly thinking it over. "But I'll tell you what, take the holster off your ankle and stick it into your handbag. We'll figure out some way for you to ditch it if you decide to go into the Benson. Let's see how it plays out. We don't even know for sure that Zucchino's coming in on that bus. He may decide to give his Fattie chaperone the slip and go off barhopping or sleazing around on his own. I'll make it your call, comrade, but do *not* try to go through the metal detector with that piece. I'm sorry, but this is one of those tactical situations where I can't give you much in the way of specific orders or guidelines. Every one of these Lorelei tickles is different. I wish to hell we were able to plant a bug of some kind on you, like the police and FBI use, and sometimes we can, but this is short notice and I couldn't round up the technical expertise and equipment we need, especially with our best tech guys down in Hollywood slaughtering movie stars."

"You're just jealous as hell because you didn't get picked for Task Force Director's Cut," said Bresler with a smile.

"Damned straight I am!" admitted Jackson. "All right, Becky, play it by ear, whatever happens, but just remember General Order Number Eight. If that little ping of warning goes off in your mind, listen to it and break contact."

Now in the fading light of the Northwest summer evening they saw the silver metallic armored tour bus lumbering up the street and pulling up at a far corner; the actual front entrance to the Benson Hotel was barricaded by sandbags and several short concrete berms to keep car bombs at a distance. Slowly but surely, the Americans were learning the lessons of Baghdad, Beirut, and Belfast. A uniformed FATPO officer with a clipboard in his hand climbed onto the bus. Jackson turned to her. "Hmm, looks like they're doing a roll call to make sure all their embedded media assets made it back, which gives us some time. It would appear they keep their reptiles on a short leash. Okay, you're up, Becky. You see where the van's parked? Passenger window's open, Tom and both Things are in the back, but the cab is empty, because cops and Fatties have finally figured out they need to watch for people sitting in parked vehicles. If you can get the target into Paddy Grogan's, you keep the gun, and we'll move the van around and park it across the street. If not, if he'll only go for a drink with you in the Benson, see if you can toss the gun through the window without being seen as you walk by the van on the way inside. Fiddle around in your purse for a cigarette or something."

"If I light one up he'll probably be able to tell I don't smoke," said Annette.

"Yeah, but they're handy for signaling, and when you need something tactile to fiddle with," replied Jackson. "Not to mention as a weapon if things break bad suddenly. Try to light one if it looks like something's brewing, especially if you have to ditch the gun. Nothing like a lit cigarette in the eyeball to slow down an attacker. If for any reason you can't toss the gun through the window, or if he sees you with the piece and twigs to something going on, you'll be near the van and you'll have the guys right there."

"So that's when I call him a perv?" said Annette.

"Yeah, you yell 'Get your hands off me you pervert,' or something else containing the word *pervert,* loud enough for them to hear you inside the van. That's the signal for an emergency quick snatch. Then the Things will jump out, grab him, and toss him in the back of the van. That will tip our hand and they'll know he's been snatched, which like I said before may kind of defeat the purpose. I'd rather do it later on and a bit further away, when the streets are more empty, not right in front of a crowded hotel full of his buddies, but it's better than nothing. Once you get him in either bar setting, you need to take between one and two hours and pour as much booze as you can into him, while consuming as little as possible yourself. After two hours we send in Tom to look for you, but see if you can cut it shorter than that. I don't want to hang around in this area any longer than necessary. It's infested with all kinds of ZOG lowlife."

"What if Zucchino's busy, or else he doesn't like brunettes, and he just blows me off when I try to hit on him?" asked Annette anxiously.

Jackson smiled, "Comrade, trust me, no sexually normal man is going to blow off a come-hither from you, and our information is that Zucchino is not gay. You got the signals for when you come outside with him?"

"Handbag on my right shoulder means everything looks and feels copacetic, and you guys can make your grab. Handbag on left shoulder means I don't like the vibes and proceed with caution. Lighting a cigarette means there's trouble and we all need to beat feet."

"Keep your cell phone on vibrate," said Jackson. "If you detect anything at all that looks wrong or dangerous, you call me and give me the signal, and if we see anything hinky out here we'll vibe you and give you the beat feet. Okay, they're de-busing and heading for the hotel now. In fact, I think that's Zucchino there, in the raincoat. Remember to walk against the flow of foot traffic, not with it, so it's easier to bump into the target. Off you go. We'll be waiting. Good luck, comrade." Annette opened the door of the truck and

got out, slipped across the street, and in a moment she was in among the throng of people getting off the bus. Jackson moved over into the passenger seat of the Tundra and got out directly onto the sidewalk so he could get a better view, carefully shielding himself behind a flight of stone steps rising up to a chic women's fashion boutique. As he had told Annette, it wasn't a good idea to be seen sitting in a parked vehicle in the vicinity of a place like the Benson Hotel, full of potential NVA targets.

Annette saw the man she was after, wearing an open green raincoat, a yellow pastel shirt and loosened tie, and carrying a computer notebook on a strap over his shoulder. He seemed to be alone. As she passed him she sidled into him very lightly, making him step aside to avoid her on the fairly crowded sidewalk. "Excuse me," she said, then suddenly she gushed, "Oh, my *God!* I know you! You're Dawson Zucchino!"

"Yeah, that's me," said Zucchino, glancing over her quickly from top to bottom. Annette was used to men undressing her with their eyes, but Zucchino practically ripped her clothes off in shreds with his eyes in a single second, and she knew instantly that she could hook him and reel him in so long as she stayed focused and played him right. "How did you know me?" he asked. "That photo in my column is pretty old."

"I'm a journalism major at PSU, and last week our professor did a whole hour class on your book *Appointment in Gaza.* With some slides and film clips he got off the internet, the ones showing you riding in on the tank and talking with that general what's-his-name. Professor David Michaels, you know him? He says you're the best and most fearless war correspondent ever to serve in the Middle East." Annette was taking a chance here, since it was possible Zucchino did know Michaels, but he simply smiled, took a bow, and said,

"He's right on the money, of course. No, I don't know your professor, but I'm glad he's giving my book a plug."

"Well, of course, I knew who you are anyway, even before that class. The *Oregonian* syndicates your column. You said a few weeks ago you were coming up here to Portland to cover The Trouble, but I never thought I'd actually meet you! Gosh! I still can't believe it!"

"Well, here I am in the flesh," said Zucchino, spreading his arms.

"Gee, I wish we could get you to come and talk to our class," said Annette eagerly. "Professor Michaels is good, and I don't mean any disrespect, but he hasn't actually worked on a paper in almost fifteen years, and the profession has changed so much in that time! There's nothing like talking to someone who's actually working in print media."

"You mean you want to get into print?" asked Zucchino in feigned surprise. "With your looks I would have thought you'd want to get into television news and reporting. You've got anchorwoman written all over you."

"Oh, wow, thanks," giggled Annette, managing to blush. "But everybody wants to get into TV news. I want to be a good old-fashioned reporter. Lois Lane kind of thing, ya know?"

"I'll have to come to work for your paper," said Zucchino, frankly ogling her now. "I'll use the name Clark Kent, of course."

Annette giggled again, and stuck out her hand, shaking his. "Speaking of names, I'm Mary," she said. "Mary Jones. Oh, gosh, I'm sure you have to be somewhere, but I *really* would like to sit down and talk to you sometime about, you know, the job, the life, and . . . stuff."

A short Portland block away Jackson speed-dialed a number on his phone. It vibrated inside the darkened blue van. "Target engaged," he said briefly.

"Well, Mary, no time like the present," said Zucchino. "First word of advice: it's not all glamor. A lot of the stuff you have to cover is about as exciting as watching paint dry, and you have to apply generous amounts of lipstick to a lot of pigs. Good example tonight: I've just come from an incredibly boring formal dinner replete with rubber chicken and cheap champagne, that I must now write up in 500 words that will grip and fascinate the 50 million or so people who read my column in syndication, and inspire them to continue the fight against racism and terrorism. I was about to fortify myself for the task of putting some lipstick on this pig with a drink or five. How about you come into the hotel with me, and we can find a table off in a corner and . . ."

"Bringing in a guest, Dawson?" Annette turned and saw a handsome and tough-looking young man with a buzz cut, wearing a blue blazer with an insignia she didn't recognize, and a polo shirt underneath with a Christian Broadcasting Network logo on it. She also saw the butt of a Glock automatic in a shoulder holster beneath the open jacket.

"Hi, I'm Mary Jones," she gushed. "Are you a reporter too?"

"No, Perry here is the voice of my conscience," said Zucchino in a dry tone. "He's my security buddy."

"Is that like a security blanket?" asked Annette innocently.

"Very similar, yes," said Zucchino. "He's a private consultant, read hired gunman, from Blackwater Corporation. His job is to make sure I don't get blown up or abducted by the NVA and tortured to make me reveal all my many military secrets." Annette's heart almost stopped, but before she could say anything, Perry spoke to her with a humorless grin stretching his lips,

"Actually, Dawson is being his usual dramatic self. His newspaper and the other employers of journalists and media people who are covering the white supremacist terror situation here in the Northwest have retained our company to make sure nothing happens to them, thus relieving the police and the FATPO to do their main job of eradicating these neo-Nazi vermin who have dared to raise their bloody hands against the Apple of God's Eye. We use the term security buddy. Dawson and the others find us amusing, I'm sure, and sometimes a little annoying no doubt, but one of these days we may just end up taking a bullet for them, and perhaps then they'll find us somewhat less of a subject for humor. Dawson, you need to come in off the street now. If you want to bring this, er, young lady in with you then you know she'll have to go through the usual security checks."

"Anything else you can think of to try and scare her off, Perry?" asked Zucchino in irritation. "Like maybe telling her I've got leprosy?"

Down the block Jackson spoke into his phone. "They've picked up a bogey. Get ready. She may yell pervert, and if she does, you'll need to cack that gun thug in the blue jacket."

"I see him," came a voice in Jackson's ear.

"You need to get in off the street, Dawson," repeated Perry calmly. "You're asking for a drive-by out here."

"Okay, okay, I'm coming," said Zucchino, waving the mercenary away.

"Don't be too long," said Perry. "If I have to come out here again, I'll have to file an incident report. You have enough of those already on file." He turned and walked toward the front entrance.

"Jesus, I hate being embedded!" Zucchino said with a curse. "It's like being in some rich boarding school with hall monitors, everybody marching to and fro in single file, a curfew and a bed check, sometimes literally! Come on in and have a drink and meet some of the other correspondents, Mary. Never mind the security checks, it's just routine. You go through a metal detector and you have to show ID and sign in, that's all."

"Uh, is that guy with the gun gonna be following me around and listening in to us the whole night?" asked Annette warily.

"Yeah, I hate to say it, but probably so," sighed Zucchino. "Perry's a jackass. A religious nut, one of those weirded-out 700 Club types who volunteered for repeated tours in Iraq and Gaza because he thinks Israel is the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and we have to have a nuclear war over there so Jesus will come back, you get the idea. But the government insists we have him and his buddies all over us, and so do all our respective bosses. He's a self-appointed guardian of our morals, which I suspect you've been around journalists enough

even as a student to understand is a pretty tall order. That nutcase thinks it's a sin for anyone to hold hands with a woman before they're married, and even though he's also against alcohol he hovers and looms over us in the bar with a ginger ale in his hand, like that little goody two-shoes kid we all remember from school who was always telling the teacher on other kids. He makes it damned hard to score." Suddenly he realized what he'd said and he tried to recover. "I mean, look, don't get me wrong, I really would like to introduce you to some real working journalists, I wasn't implying that you . . ."

Annette laughed merrily. "That's okay. I don't mind older guys hitting on me. Boys my age are still pretty immature, still boys if you get my drift. But couldn't we go somewhere else? I was actually on my way to Paddy Grogan's Shamrock Pub down the street here. See, I just turned 21 and I haven't been to many clubs or bars and such . . ." At that moment, providentially there came a wild burst of Irish uillean pipe and fiddle music from the distant glowing façade of Paddy Grogan's. "See, that's why I was going to Paddy's. They've got Clan Malone live there tonight, and I love Irish trad music, always have ever since I heard Enya when I was ten. Would you really get in trouble with that character if we went there?"

"Fuck Perry," said Zucchino succinctly. "You've loved Irish music since you were ten, and I've loved Guinness since I was ten, although to do the black stuff justice you really need to be supping it in some little dark pub in Dublin only a few streets away from St. James' Gate. Doesn't travel well. Paddy Grogan's it is, and that moron can write me up all he wants."

"We better go before he comes back out again," whispered Annette conspiratorially, hooking her arm into his, and at the same time casually shifting her handbag from her right shoulder to her left.

"That's the warning signal," said Jackson into the phone. "She doesn't like the vibes, probably that blue boy showing too much interest."

"Want to risk calling her?" said the voice in his ear.

"My guess is that goon got suspicious, looked at her too close, but he went back inside . . . wait! They're moving off down the street toward the Irish pub! Good girl, damned good girl! She's cut him out from the herd."

"So we re-position outside location two?" asked the voice.

Jackson looked up and down the street. Traffic was light; the evening rush hour was over, and the downtown clubbers and restaurant-goers hadn't arrived on the scene yet. Jackson communed briefly with his gut and his antennae. "They took a roll call earlier on the bus, so they're keeping closer tabs on these media jerks than we thought. They're going to notice if he doesn't return to the hotel. Fuck it. Let's pick him up now, before they come looking for him.

Move down and park in front of Paddy Grogan's, but on the right hand side, not across the street. I'll come in from behind. Becky's a smart kid. She'll pick up on what we're doing."

Zucchino and Annette strolled down the sidewalk arm in arm toward the door of the pub with the Irish music spilling out into the street, and the reporter was already into what Annette presumed was his standard opening monologue for putting the moves on starry-eyed female journalism majors, an art in which he seemed quite practiced. *My God, this idiot really doesn't have a clue, does he?* she thought as she walked beside him with a silly grin on her face. *It hasn't even occurred to him to wonder how I just popped up beside him. Is it just American hubris, or is he really that stupid?* She saw the van slide up in front of the pub, and she understood that Jackson had decided to make his move early, which was fine with her. *Great! Now I don't have to watch this asshole get drunk for two hours and try to slide his hand under my blouse!* Jackson pulled the Tundra up to the curb a couple of spaces behind the van, quietly got out and fell in behind them. He pulled out his phone and dialed. Annette could hear him speaking out loud behind her. "Hey, dudes, I'm downtown, just heading into Paddy Grogan's. You guys get your asses in gear and let's party down!"

The rear doors of the van flew open and two men in ski masks jumped out. "What the . . . ?" gasped Zucchino, but before he could say anything else Annette shoved him off the sidewalk and into the waiting arms of the two Volunteers. Jackson ran past her, slugged Zucchino viciously in the kidneys, followed up with a rabbit punch, and then the other two picked him up bodily and hurled him into the van. The two masked men jumped in after him and slammed the doors shut. Annette couldn't tell if one of them was Eric, or if Eric was driving. The van pulled away from the curb smoothly and easily.

"Come on!" said Jackson. They both jumped in the Tundra and Jackson pulled out, following the van. Annette slid down as far as she could in the passenger seat, pulled off the black wig, shucked off her blouse and pulled a dark blue sweater over her head, then pulled a baseball cap over her blond hair. She quickly wiped the makeup off her face with a towelette. When she sat up her appearance was pretty well altered. The whole thing had taken place in a matter of seconds, and when Jackson checked his rear view mirror there was no sign of any pursuit. He put a police scanner onto his dashboard and turned it on, but he heard no unusual chatter on the FATPO frequency. He called the van and spoke briefly. "They've got him restrained," he told Annette. "I need to follow them for a while to make sure they won't need any interference run, but we'll pull over in a bit, you and Tom can get out and catch a bus back to where you left your car."

"Sir, I'd like to come along if that's permissible," said Annette. "I might be able to help."

"I doubt it," said Jackson, looking at her. "You sure? It's not going to be very pleasant. You might see and hear some things you don't want to."

"My Dad always told me never to do anything if I couldn't live with the consequences," said Annette. "I need to follow through, sir. I think it's a necessary part of my training."

Jackson flipped open his phone. "Let me talk to Tom. Yeah, Tom, Becky wants to stick with us for the sociable part of the evening, so she won't need a ride home. How about you? Your call. I'll tell you what I told her, it ain't gonna be sweetness and light. I can put you outside watching the vehicles if you want." He was silent for a moment. "That's what I thought you'd say. Okay, see you there."

There turned out to be a large garage bay in a self-storage facility in McMinnville. They were met by a man in overalls who had a few whispered words with the lieutenant. "Give us a ring on the bell if anyone shows up who's got no business here," Annette heard Jackson tell him. "Come on." They got out of the truck, and Eric Sellars got out of the driver's side of the van. Jackson opened the side door into the large room with a key. He turned on the lights and Annette and Eric saw that the walls and ceiling had been fitted with cardboard egg cartons nailed tightly together like tiles. "Soundproofing," he told them. He went to one corner and pulled out a folding table, which he set up in the middle of the room. He placed a metal folding chair on one side and a much heavier, old-fashioned wooden chair with arm rests on the other side. Jackson then took a large work light on a stand, plugged it in, and brought it to just behind the metal chair. He then went over to a large metal shelving unit standing along one wall, and looked over several items on the shelf. Then he went over to Annette and Eric.

"All right, you know why we've brought this man here," Jackson told them. "He may or may not have information involving the Army's mission and the lives of our comrades. One of the first rules of cross-examination in a court of law is never ask a question to which you do not already know the answer, but this isn't a courtroom and we *don't* know the answer. We don't even know if there is one, or if he was just blowing smoke in the ear of a woman as amoral as himself as part of one of these people's sad little mating rituals. But we will never admit this to him at any time during the forthcoming process. One of the rules is never take 'I don't know' for an answer. Everybody knows something, even if they don't know they know it. We have to find out what he knows, *all* of what he knows, and we have to do it fast. This falls into the

ticking time bomb category. If he refuses to tell us what he knows, or if he is obviously lying, then we must compel him to speak. That does not mean just beating the crap out of him, or cutting off his ears just for the hell of it, or going medieval on his ass just because we don't like him. Our objective here is to force him to tell us what he knows, nothing more and nothing less. I will use only such force as I deem necessary, and since so far as we know he's no worse than most of his kind and not as bad as some, my intention at this moment is eventually to release him alive, after his information checks out and when it seems safe to do so." Annette gave a little sigh. "Does that relieve your mind, Becky?"

"Yes, sir, it does," she admitted.

"There is no shame in that," said Jackson gently. "You're a soldier, and your duty demands that you have to do crappy things sometimes. There's no law that says you have to like it. To continue, the secret to getting information quickly is not torture, but the *fear* of torture. With Americans, anyway. Muslims are a different story. The CIA, Mossad, Blackwater and others do really vile things to Muslim prisoners, but Muslims have a genuine faith in their God and a pride in their nation and their heritage that allows them to withstand techniques that would send an American mad in a matter of seconds. Americans can dish it out, but they can't take it. Although there are some individual exceptions, such as certain white military officers who still hold to the old code of honor, on the whole Americans are very soft and weak, both in body and in character. Especially media people. I'm not anticipating too much trouble with Mr. Zucchino tonight. He may turn out to be one of the exceptions, but I rather doubt it. You'd think that Americans' weakness would make them easy subjects, but actually it's rather the reverse. They're too fragile and brittle. They break easily, but they don't just break, they shatter. Pain literally sends them out of their mind in hysterics or into a kind of fugue state, and it becomes impossible to get anything out of them."

"I remember when we first met, you said if we were ever captured, all the Army asks for is twenty-four hours," Eric reminded him.

"That's correct," agreed Jackson. "Although I'm proud to say that many of our captured comrades have held out much longer than that. The best way to do this with someone like Zucchino is to hurt him just enough so his mind can anticipate much worse, terrify him to the point where he will do anything to avoid more pain. There are in fact certain things we won't do, or at least I won't do. Sexual stuff, rape or threats of rape against women or sodomy against men, threats of stripping them and showing them naked on the internet, that kind of crap. That is what Americans do to their captives

in their prisons. Not us. We are better than that, or at least the Volunteers under my command are. I don't like some of these stories I've been hearing out of Idaho about O. C. Oglevy's crew. But sometimes we have to make a prisoner *think* we might do it. I mention this because whatever you hear me say tonight, you have to bear in mind why I'm saying it."

"What if this guy decides to hang tough and he just plain won't tell us jack?" asked Eric.

"Then we hurt him," said Jackson. "Okay, the prisoner will be restrained in the wooden chair there. I will be seated in the metal chair. I will do the actual interrogation. I will be smoking cigarettes, which is something I normally don't do, but not only can they be handy to make a point with, but smoke in a prisoner's nose and face and lungs increases his discomfort, especially when he is gagged." Jackson walked over to the shelf and picked up some dark woolen blobs. "Here are some extra masks. Wear them. I don't want him getting a look at anyone's face but mine. Becky, you stand over here in the corner and maintain complete silence. I'd rather he not even see you. It could be this idiot hasn't even figured out you set him up, and if so I'd like to keep it that way, so you will say nothing during the entire procedure. Just observe. If it looks like it's going to go on for a long time I want you both to leave, take the Tundra and get back to your car, because you guys are still on the surface, and I don't want you gone for too long or your time unaccounted for."

"Our folks think we spend our evenings in a no-tell motel or some kind of love nest on campus," explained Eric, "But they worry about us, and they ask that we both make sure we're home by midnight."

"Well, no need to disturb them on account of this piece of journalistic dogshit. Tom, you stand behind him, sort of looming, so he'll know you're there, but you let me or when necessary one of the Things do the talking. Observe, and learn. Both of you may have to do this yourselves one day, as awful as that sounds. Let's go get our guest of honor."

A few minutes later Dawson Zucchino was sitting in the wooden chair, his torso stripped to his T-shirt, his arms strapped to the rests with plastic ties and his legs melded to the legs of the chair by heavy Velcro cuffs. His mouth was sealed with duct tape. His eyes were bulging and staring in terror. Three masked men loomed behind him; Zucchino turned his head and strained his neck trying to see them. Jackson sat in front of him at the table, the standing light behind him aimed right in the bound man's face. He calmly lit a cigarette and plunked the pack down on the table. Jackson spoke. His voice was quiet and conversational. "Mr. Zucchino, my name is Lieutenant William Jackson of the Northwest Volunteer Army. I am the commander of A Company, First

Portland Brigade. Did you pay attention enough in your briefings or whatever the hell they gave you, so that you recognize me?" Zucchino nodded. "Good, that will save us some time, since you already know that I am not a nice man. I think you can guess why you are here. You have some information regarding impending events in Clatsop County, Oregon, which you are going to share with us. Information regarding those thousand or so FATPO gun thugs who have been sitting on their asses down there in Oakland. Information regarding the current whereabouts and intentions of a blue-gum nigger named Rollins. Before I give you the floor, I should warn you that I do not want to hear any crap coming out of your mouth about how we can't do this to you, yadda yadda yadda. This isn't your country, it is ours. Your people do not rule here any longer. We do, and we can and we will do any damned thing we want to you. Are you quite clear on this?" Zucchino simply stared in horror over his duct-taped mouth.

One of the Things (Eric couldn't tell them apart with their masks on) reached down and twisted Zucchino's ear savagely, making him bawl weirdly through the duct tape. "Your ears working, asshole?" said the Thing. "You're not answering the lieutenant, so I guess they ain't working. Lemme adjust them for you." He twisted the other ear and Zucchino jerked and writhed and moofed and mooed.

"Did you understand what I just said to you, Mr. Zucchino? Nod your head, please." Jackson repeated politely. Zucchino nodded his head wildly. "Good. Now, the second thing you need to understand is that you *will* tell us every single last scrap of information and knowledge you have about an impending federal attack on the Astoria, Oregon area. Lying to us, withholding information from us, trying to play us or deceive us is not an option here. Before you attempt any such game playing, you need to ask yourself: would you be here if we didn't already know something? Something about the Fatties and something about you? This is the deal. Very simple, no mystery here. I'm going to take that tape off, and you are going to tell me everything, let me repeat that, *everything* you know about this coming invasion of our country by a horde of American scum, and every word of it will be God's diamond truth. If you do that, and we confirm that you have told us the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, then you will eventually find yourself back in Los Angeles in your cubicle or whatever, in front of your computer, tapping away at a string of lies about your long ordeal of horror at the hands of the dreaded NVA. You might even win a Pulitzer Prize and go on the talk show circuit. If you lie to us in the slightest respect, then someday perhaps twenty, or fifty, or a hundred years from now, in the Northwest American Republic of the future, some farmer or hunter or park ranger is going to unearth the

remains of a rotting skeleton from a hole in the ground way out in the woods, and you will end up lying in a plastic storage tray in some basement marked 'unidentified remains, possibly from War of Independence.' Until somebody finally decides your bones are taking up too much space, and throws them away. Are you internalizing all this, Mr. Zucchino?"

Zucchino was shaking like he had the ague, but he nodded. Jackson in turn nodded and one of the masked Things ripped the duct tape from the prisoner's mouth. The other Thing moved away, and Eric stepped up to take his place beside the bound man in the chair. The Thing went over to the metal shelf, and took down two objects resting there. One was a flat block of green wood with a curved blade on a hinge attached to the side, a simple school or office paper cutter. He handed it to Jackson, who placed it on the table. The second was a nozzle with a pistol grip, and below the trigger hung a small blue plastic bottle of propane. Jackson handed the Thing his lighter, and the Thing turned on the nozzle and lit the flame, which he then refined into a long blue pencil of heat. Zucchino stared. "Sweet Jesus! What are you going to do to me?" he mewled in a cringing voice.

Jackson nodded at the hand torch. "FBI and Homeland Security use those puppies to castrate men," he said conversationally. "Did you know that? Burn right through the scrotum and penis if they want it done quick, but usually they simply burn the genitalia off slowly. They call it a weenie roast, or sometimes chestnuts roasting on an open fire. Don't worry, we're not quite so uncivilized as that."

"I saw 'em do that in Iraq," rumbled the Thing with the torch. "More'n once. I figgered on toasting your nuts for you, you lying sack of shit, but Mr. Jackson here wants to be gentlemanly about it."

"And how do you use something like that in a gentlemanly way?" gasped Zucchino, his journalistic training feebly re-asserting itself even through his terror.

"We're going to use it to cauterize the stumps on your hands after we cut off your fingers one by one, should you try lying to us," said Jackson, lifting the blade on the guillotine suggestively. "We can't have you bleeding to death before we finish our conversation. You may yet have to dictate your Pulitzer-winning article about your experiences this evening to somebody who still has opposing thumbs. But at least you'll still have your family jewels. Can't say fairer than that, can I?"

"Yeah, well, I suppose I better be thankful for small favors," said Zucchino with a hysterical little giggle. "Gotta get more pussy, although I think I'll take a pass on that bitch you threw at me tonight."

Eric Sellars didn't stop to think that he was disobeying his orders to remain a spectator; he stepped forward and with one powerful right hook he pulverized Zucchino's mouth and many of the teeth in it. The bound man's head snapped back with a deep groan, and blood oozed from between his lips in a crimson drool. "I hope you didn't break his damned jaw!" snapped Jackson. "How the hell is he supposed to talk with no functioning mouth?"

"Sorry, sir, I just . . ." muttered Eric, stunned himself. The second Thing leaned over and said in a low tone,

"We push his buttons, kid. You *never* let him push yours!"

"Don't do anything like that again unless I tell you to!" Jackson ordered Eric. "Throw me one of those rags!" The Thing with the glowing hand torch pulled a long greasy rag off the shelf and tossed it to Jackson, who wiped Zucchino's mouth with it. "You'll live, although not long if you don't keep a civil tongue in your head," he told Zucchino grimly. "This young comrade took exception to your language, turd. For that matter, so did I." He leaned over the table and shoved the lit cigarette in his hand into Zucchino's left ear; the resulting shriek of mortal agony seemed to shake the roof. Eric understood the need for the egg-carton soundproofing now. Jackson walked around the table and grabbed Zucchino by the collar. He leaned down to the wounded man's right ear. "You need that mouth to speak with, but you only need one ear to hear with. Now you listen to me. Our female Volunteers are the jewels in the crown of the Aryan race. We never speak disrespectfully of them, and garbage like you *damned* sure never does! Zack Hatfield is another jewel in our crown, one of the finest and bravest men I've ever known, and the Volunteers with him are our Flowers of the Forest. They are men. You are not. You are a rodent. I will not allow you to harm them by withholding information about this evil tyranny's plots against them. You are going to tell me now, tell it all, or your hands will become nothing but charred stumps. And then we'll start on your toes."

"Please, please . . ." mumbled Zucchino through his shattered mouth. Jackson ignored him, whipped out a pocket knife and cut the plastic ties holding Zucchino's right arm and wrist bound to the chair, and jerked his hand forward onto the table, pulling out his limp little finger and placing it on the green wood beneath the raised blade of the guillotine, holding it there by force.

"I will count to three," said Jackson. "One, two . . ."

"No! Oh God, no, please don't, I'll tell you, I'll tell you everything!" screamed Zucchino in hideous fear. "Yes, yes, it's true, the FATPO is coming up from California and they're going to land in force and secure that big bridge! The

government is scared the NVA will take it over or blow it up, choke off the Columbia River! Rolly Rollins himself will be in command!"

"How do you know this?" demanded Jackson.

"I was supposed to go with the press party to cover the story! It took my editor a month of schmoozing Rollins to get me in."

"They had a press briefing and told you all of their plans?" said Jackson skeptically.

"No, I just picked it all up. Those guys in FATPO have room temperature IQs on a good day, and I doubt some of them can even comprehend the meaning of the word secret! A bunch of us were supposed to leave for California real late tonight, secret military transport plane, all hush-hush!" gasped Zucchino.

"When are they coming?" shouted Jackson.

"They're supposed to land on the morning of the thirtieth, around dawn!" moaned Zucchino in a broken voice. "Please don't cut off my finger! Oh God, my ear hurts! Yaaaaahhh . . . ."

"That's two days from now!" exclaimed Eric.

Jackson slapped Zucchino, hard. "Stop blubbering, turd! How are they coming? Airplane? Helicopter? Truck convoy up 101? By ship? What?"

"By ship," groaned Zucchino. "They got some old ferries and cruise ships they've rigged up as troop transports, and they're going to have a Navy escort. They'll also have chopper cover, flying down from Fort Lewis."

"I don't believe you!" growled Jackson. "You must not know much about Oregon geography or history, asshole! Ever hear of the Graveyard of the Pacific? There's no way they could land an invasion fleet in Astoria like that, because they'd have to cross the Columbia River Bar to do it, which means they'd have to get a skilled Bar pilot on every ship, and it would take days to get them all in, plus they'd have to sail single file under the bridge within easy small arms range of shore. Even a nigger isn't stupid enough to do that!" He lifted the blade of the guillotine over the hapless Zucchino's finger.

"Not Astoria!" shrieked Zucchino. "Down the shore! They're landing down the shore, miles away! Past Warrenton! Big open place called Sunset Beach! Trucks and armored cars and all! They're going to do it like the Marines landing on Okinawa, guys in full gear splashing through the surf, Rollins stepping on shore like MacArthur, all for the rolling TV cameras! You know, like they did in Somalia in '92! I swear I'm telling you the truth! Please, not my finger!"

Later on, Jackson and Eric and Annette stood outside in the dark while the Things pulled away in the van with Zucchino trussed up like a chicken in

the back. "They'll keep him on ice until after this checks out," said Jackson. "Trouble is, two days . . . that's time enough for somebody to miss him, and they might figure out we took him and cracked him and we know about Sunset Beach. ZOG may well change their plans. This still may turn out to have been all for nothing."

"Sir, I apologize for my losing it in there . . ." began Eric.

"Nyeh, all's well that ends well. Me or the Things would have had to open him up by giving him a good pop anyway," said Jackson. "You were provoked."

"Nice gesture, Sir Lancelot," said Annette with a giggle. "I appreciate it."

"That Blackwater mercenary looking you over at close quarters bothers me," Jackson told her. "I wonder if we shouldn't get you two out of the way for a bit."

"Maybe detached duty down in Clatsop with Third Battalion, sir?" asked Eric eagerly.

"Maybe, but I hope it doesn't come to that," said Jackson. "I'd like to keep you out of the frying pan, but not drop you into the fire. After tonight you're even more valuable to A Company than you have been in your intelligence function. I'm actually getting a bit worried that when Oscar gets back from, well, where he is now, he might try to head-hunt you for Third Section."

"Uh, would you be too pissed off if I said I'd love to try that, sir?" asked Annette meekly.

"I'll hang onto you as long as I can, but the big picture has to come first," said Jackson. "If you end up going with Oscar, that's the way it goes. As to Clatsop, don't worry, guys. Before this is over there will be more than enough war to go around. You'll see your share."

* * *

"Ah, hello there," said Julia, startled and nonplussed. Now that she had found Zack she was at a loss what to say to him. "How did you get in here?"

"Your mom let me in, of course," Hatfield told her. "She's cool, and she always liked me, remember. I had to promise to let you two get caught up on all the mushy mother-daughter stuff before I made my appearance, though, and I am under stern maternal admonition to behave myself and not upset you. I got word you were coming."

"From that guy Wally?" asked Julia.

"Yes, but we knew you were coming up from California before that," Hatfield told her. "I got a call telling me to be expecting you."

"Should I ask how you found that out?"

"No," said Hatfield, shaking his head. "You're looking real good, Julie. I'd tell you that you haven't changed a bit, but you have. For the better."

"You look . . . just awful," she replied helplessly. "Nothing definite, nothing physical. Older of course, but that's not it. I couldn't tell you what it is, but you look like you're a thousand years old, Zack."

"Yeah, well, four of those thousand years were in Iraq. That'll do it," replied Hatfield grimly. "Plus the past few years with the Northwest Volunteers. I'm not surprised I'm showing some mileage."

"I won't ask you what you've been doing with yourself, because I'm afraid I already know," said Julia.

"And I won't ask you how you've been, because I know that as well. I heard about your visit from the FBI. As ludicrously inadequate as this sounds, I'm sorry, Jules. If it's any consolation to you, we'll most likely get the bastards one day."

"My God, you must have quite a spy system down there!" said Julia. "Is there anything you *don't* know?"

"Yes, we have quite a spy system down there, but actually I learned about your feeb encounter from the internet. HollywoodGossip.com to be exact."

"Beautiful," said Julia with a laugh, sitting down on her bed in bemusement. "Then I suppose you know why I've come?" she asked.

"In a general way, yes, although I admit I'm very keen on hearing the details from you personally," Hatfield told her.

"I told those characters down there in Hollywood who sent me up here that I wasn't sure whether or not you'd shoot me when you saw me, knowing who I'd come from," said Julia. "I suppose I should be worried right now, but I find I can't seem to gin it up. It's *you,* after all."

"Yeah, it's me," said Zack with a quiet smile. "And no, you don't have to worry. I'm not going to shoot you."

"Well, now that we've got that out of the way, do you want me to make my pitch now?" she inquired. "Or will I be conducted blindfolded to a secret meeting in a warehouse or a cave, and make my presentation to a long table full of masked men sitting beneath a big Nazi flag? I'm not just being sarcastic, really. I genuinely have no idea how you—you people operate, or what to expect."

"Well, like I said, I'm interested in hearing what you have to say, just out of curiosity, but in fact I don't have the authority to agree to anything along the lines of what I think you want to propose to us," Hatfield explained.

"I'm just a field commander with a specific area of responsibility, and I don't have anything to do with Task Force Director's Cut or Operation We Are Not Amused."

"With *what?*" she asked.

"We call this particular campaign Operation We Are Not Amused, and the team we assigned to carry it out is code named Task Force Director's Cut, because we're cutting down a lot of directors. A little Nazi humor for you there."

"Very little," said Julia archly.

"Anyway, whenever you're ready, I will introduce you to a comrade from the Army Council, and you and he can bat the breeze, with me present or without as you best feel comfortable doing. Then we give Wally Post a ring and back you go up the river, and we'll see what develops from there."

"Uh, I'm sure I shouldn't ask this, but that guy Wally seems to be very knowledgeable about you and what's going on up here. Is he one of you or is he one of them?"

"Wally's a type of character who historically flourishes in situations like this, a guy who plays both ends against the middle and sees how much cash he can pick up from both sides," Zack told her. "After the war we'll weigh him in the balance, and if he sums up more on our side we'll give him a medal. If he weighs up more on their side, we'll shoot him."

"My God, you really think you're going to win!" she said softly, shaking her head in wonderment.

"As it happens I do, yes," said Zack. "I wasn't sure at first, but now I am."

"You weren't sure at first?" she exclaimed. "Then why, Zack? I suppose in one sense that's what I've come all this way to ask you. *Why?*"

"Because it is right," Hatfield told her quietly. "At first it was because a situation developed with a friend of mine, someone you used to know as well, where it was the only thing I could do and still live with myself. But I would have ended up with the Army anyway, Julie, *because it is right.* I won't go into it any further than that, because I'm not sure you'd understand. I'm not being patronizing, I really don't think you would. No offense, but you don't have the right background for it. Until a few months ago everything in your life was going right, or as right as it ever does for anyone in this mess. You had a good and somewhat glamorous job, you had a place in ZOG's scheme of things and all the little perks and luxuries that came with that. You were an insider. You conformed, and the system rewarded you for that conformity, so I really don't think you could understand what it's like to be

on the outside looking in, and knowing that because of your skin color and your gender you would never, ever be allowed in. Always shut out of a land and a world that your own ancestors created. We're taking it back, Julie. Some of it, anyway."

"Leaving aside my life, which believe me isn't quite as wonderful and fulfilling as you seem to think, then that's what this is all about? The have-nots are revolting against the haves?"

"Mmmm . . . that's a very over-simplified way of putting it, but yes. I suppose that's what most revolutions are about in the final analysis. The kicker is that in this case the haves happen to be truly evil, and the have-nots have been for-real robbed of everything that is rightfully theirs. Look, Julie, this is the first time I've seen you in over ten years, and I don't want to spoil things by standing up and delivering a political polemic," he told her earnestly. "Astoria High, me playing football and you cheerleading, then cruising Marine Boulevard afterward trying to get Ted to buy beer for us and the gang, all that's long gone. You're the woman you became, and I am the man that Iraq and Amurrica made me, so let's just leave it at that, okay? How have you been, Julie, I mean really? Are you happy? The bright city lights still bright? Is everything down there turning out for you like you thought it would?"

"God, you sound like my mother!" laughed Julia. "I just went through that whole recital with her downstairs over supper! Next I suppose you'll be inquiring delicately whether there's a young man in my life?"

"Is there?" blurted Zack. "Sorry, sorry, Jules, that was out of line. I mean, I heard about that actor . . ."

Julia shook her head. "I'd rather not talk about him, if you don't mind. Not being rude or putting you in your place or anything, Zack, don't get me wrong. In a sense I know you have the right to be interested, even if it was 14 years ago with us. It's just that was a pretty near miss, and I still can't believe I was stupid enough to almost get dragged into the cheapest and most trite Hollywood drug drama you can imagine. God, I was almost a complete idiot!"

"Yeah, but you spotted the ambush and you E&E'd in time," laughed Zack.

"Huh?" she said. "I don't get it."

"NVA inside joke."

"Oh. Well, basically, yeah, other than the fact that there don't seem to be any worthwhile men for mating purposes in the business, you're right. Up until you guys rained on my parade and got me involved with the FBI because of our few nights of adolescent passion all those years ago, it's been pretty good," she told him. "You mind my asking something? How in God's name

did you get a bankable like Erica Collingwood to join your group and throw away everything she's got? I admit it, that really threw me for a loop."

"How the hell would I know?" asked Zack, laughing and shrugging. "I'm just a grunt, basically. That sounds like Third Section stuff."

"Third Section?" asked Julia.

"The NVA's cloak-and-dagger boys and girls. All I can tell you, Julia, is that each individual's motivation for joining the Volunteers is different, but the same. Infinite variations on the same theme. You get to a point where you have just plain *had enough.* You're not going to take all this American bullshit anymore. Look, we'd best get back to business. When do you want to get together with this guy from the Army Council?"

"As soon as possible," said Julia. "No offense, Zack, but I'd kind of like to get this done and get out of here. I'm bordering on a major-league freakout as it is."

"No time like the present," said Zack. He flipped open his cell phone and hit a speed dial. "Yeah, Mr. Baron, you want to come and take a look at those plans now? Or wait until tomorrow?" He listened briefly. "Okay, see you in a bit." He hung up. "He'll come over. He has some other stuff to do in the area anyway."

"Uh, Zack, this is my mom's house," said Julia uneasily. "Don't you even try to tell me that my own mother is in on this terrorist thing with you guys!"

"No, she's not, she just remembers me from the old days and she always thought . . . well, anyway, she just . . ."

"She always thought I should have waited for you," sighed Julia. "Yes, Zack, I know. She's mentioned that. On more than one occasion, actually."

"I've tried to explain to her that it wasn't your fault, that when we first arrived in Iraq we were promised rotation every fifteen months and I ended up staying there for four years," said Hatfield. "And the only way I got out even after four years was when my leg was shredded. No one in his right mind would expect you to wait that long for something that might never have happened. I didn't. Julia, I don't know if you've ever worried about it, but I want you to know, we're cool. On that, anyway, whatever you may think of me now."

"Yes, Zack, I have worried about it, and I'm glad to hear you say that," she replied.

"Julie," her mother called up the stairs. "Ted's here!"

"Oh, Jesus!" cried Julia in sudden panic. "I forgot she said she was going to call Ted! Let me go down and then when we're in the living room you can sneak down the back stairs and out the rear door!"

"No need," laughed Zack, picking up his Winchester and his hat with the feather. "Ted and I see each other on a regular basis. We have to."

"The hell you say!" gasped Julia. "Oh, come on, now! I will *not* believe that my brother is one of your—your gang!"

"No, he isn't," Zack assured her. "He's a brave and decent man who has found himself in an impossible situation, and who does his best to do his duty in spite of it. I give him all the help I can, although I have to admit there have been some strained moments. But for the past three years not one local law enforcement officer in Clatsop County has been killed by the NVA, and in view of what's been going on in the rest of the Northwest since 10/22 that's a hell of an accomplishment, and one he and you should be proud of."

Julia descended the stairs and found her brother waiting for her in the living room, apparently just come from work since he was wearing his sheriff's uniform. He looked tired. He had aged in a way somewhat different from Zack, and Julia was suddenly very glad to see him indeed, for it struck her what his position in all this must be like and how dangerous life for him had become. They hugged fiercely. Ted looked up and saw Hatfield standing in the doorway behind her, and he nodded briefly. "Zack," he said.

"Hey, Ted," replied Hatfield.

Lear looked at his sister. "Julie, you know I am more glad to see you again than I can say, but I have to admit, I'm kind of disturbed by some things Zack has been telling me. I've been thankful these past years that you've been safely out of all this, down there living your own life in California. Now it seems you've managed to get involved in all this crap up here anyway, and on a dangerous level. Jesus, kid, you're playing with fire here. Are you nuts?"

"Are you? You seem to have been involved as well," pointed out Julia. "Look, Ted, I'm not criticizing, but you're supposed to be the sheriff up here, and I gather you've been turning a blind eye toward . . ." She gestured toward Hatfield. "What the hell's going on, Ted?"

Lear sighed. "It's kind of confusing, Julie. I'm not sure I understand it myself sometimes, but a while ago I had to sit down and do some serious thinking. I had to make a decision as to whether my loyalty was to this community, these people here we grew up with, this place, our home . . . or to a government three thousand miles away that doesn't care about us, to an empire that never did anything for us except to take our young people for their army and flood our land with foreigners because it put money in the pockets of men in suits. Men so filthy rich already that they didn't need what little they took from us, but they took it anyway, because they could. I decided to do what I originally gave my oath to do, to protect and serve the

people of Clatsop County, Oregon. Not fight a war against some of them in the name of a bad and failed government. This hasn't been easy, but I was lucky in that Zack and I go back a ways, and I could deal with him and talk to him and work out ways to cushion the people in this county from all this horror. Sometimes, anyway."

"I wasn't judging you, it's just that I find all of this so hard to understand," said Julia, shaking her head.

"So what the hell is this you've gotten involved in?" demanded Ted.

"Maybe something like what you're doing up here," Julia told him. "I'm here to try and stop some of the killing, if I can. You've heard what's happening down in Los Angeles to the film and entertainment community?"

"I've heard," said Lear grimly. "The media says some of that's Cat Lockhart's doing. They found his calling card on Oscar night."

"So I gather. I have selfish reasons for being here, Ted, I admit that. They blacklisted me and made it so I could never work again."

"Who's *they,* Julia?" asked Hatfield quietly. "I know, you know, Ted knows, but I'm really curious to see if you can bring yourself to say the word."

"All right, if you insist, the Jews blacklisted me!" snapped Julia. "And I would never ever have said that if you guys hadn't forced the whole issue to, with your guns and your bombs!"

"Bingo!" chuckled Zack. "That is exactly one of the reasons we revolted. Even if we lose and we're all wiped out, the Jews won't ever be able to hide and pretend they're just like other people, ever again. We've outed the bastards for good and all."

She turned back to her brother. "But as corny as this sounds, Ted, I really do want to stop the killing and save as much of Hollywood as I can. Yes, I have doubts about some of the content. A lot of us do, although we haven't dared to say it for a long time. Maybe we'll dare to stand up now. Who knows, maybe these terrible things that have happened will finally have the effect of putting a brake on a lot of the really filthy stuff they're putting out, and if so I can't say I'll be unhappy. I do a lot of children's programming, and I really can't see the point in a group of bright little six year-olds singing a song about human genitalia on kiddie shows. But we shouldn't throw out the baby with the bath water! Maybe if these people—oh, all right, the Jews—maybe if they're physically scared to put out a constant stream of garbage, then they'll let some of the rest of us have a crack at it, and create some decent programming."

"Bingo again," said Zack with an approving nod. "You call us terrorists, Julia, but historically, terrorism is the weapon of the weak against the strong,

and as you are learning, *it works.* We are actually changing the behavior of people with power, changing how they use power and against whom. We are *making them stop* doing what they were doing. You remember what this town was like when you left, Jules. How many Mexicans did you see on your drive up here to the house?"

"None," admitted Julia.

"We did that, Julia," said Hatfield with grim satisfaction. "Congress didn't do it. Elections didn't do it. Democracy didn't do it. Signing petitions and marching in the streets and babbling on the internet didn't do it. We did it, with bullets, not ballots. And everyone in this town is better off for it. Ask Ted."

"I have to admit, Zack and his crowd have almost put us out of a job," admitted Lear with a sigh. "Other than NVA stuff, violence and ordinary crime is now almost unheard of here. The Clatsop County jail used to be so overcrowded with Mexicans, drug-related arrests, hatecriminals and people who said the wrong word, weird sex stuff, thieving drunks and psychos, that we had prisoners sleeping on mattresses in the corridors. Now there are whole weeks at a time when the jail is completely empty. All the Mexicans and non-whites and junkies and other bad actors have gotten the hell out rather than face the NVA, and everybody else has a job and a paycheck and much more stable lives. The hairiest stuff we deal with now is mostly traffic accidents and the odd drunken scuffle in a tavern. We even have time to rescue little girls' kittens stuck in trees again. There are those who would say that the price we have paid for this tranquility and prosperity is too high, that it's wrong. Maybe it is. But I know the people in Clatsop County don't think so. And I know what I thought when I heard what those two sons of bitches from the FBI did to you, Julie," he concluded, his voice beginning to tremble with rage. "That went a long way in pushing me toward Zack's way of thinking."

Before Julia could respond the doorbell rang. Zack opened it. "Good evening, sir," he said. A lean and dapper man in late middle age stepped into the room, wearing a light green cardigan. A larger man in blue jeans followed him in, wearing a large automatic openly in a shoulder holster over his khaki work shirt. "Hey, Dex."

"Good evening, Captain," said the man. "Good evening, Sheriff. And you, Mrs. Lear."

"It's nice to see you again, Henry," said Julia's mother.

"Again?" said Julia, arching her eyebrows.

"I've conferred with the sheriff and Captain Hatfield here several times previously, and your mother has favored us with an excellent meal or two,"

said the man. He extended his hand to Julia. "You must be Julia Lear. I'm Henry Morehouse. I understand you have a message for me from the Burger Kings down there in Tinsel Town."

"Burger Kings?" asked Julia, puzzled.

"BKs," said Zack. "Big Kikes."

"How many new ethnic slurs have you guys invented since all this started?" inquired Julia curiously.

"Being a Nazi means never having to say you're sorry," chuckled Morehouse. "You can call me Red, by the way. Everyone does. You too, Zack, this isn't exactly a formal setting."

"Come and sit down in the living room," spoke up Julia's mother. "Do you want something to eat, Henry? How about you, Dexter? I can warm up some meat loaf, put it in a sandwich if you like."

"Nothing for me, thanks," said Morehouse. "Dex?"

"A meat loaf sandwich sounds pretty good, ma'am," said Dexter. "I'll be around and about outside."

They went into the living room, and Ted Lear moved to the sideboard and poured himself a stiff Scotch. "This is one area where we've got it all over you Jerry Rebs," he said with a grim chuckle as he downed it. "We don't have your General Order Number Ten hanging around our necks. Julia, do you want me to stay, or is this top secret conspiracy stuff that I really don't want to know about?"

"Uh . . ." She wasn't sure how to answer.

"By all means, Sheriff, stick around," said Morehouse genially. "I suspect Julia will feel more comfortable with you here." Julia's mother brought in a tray of canned soft drinks and coffee, set it down on the center table and left. Hatfield leaned his Winchester in a corner and stuck his hat on the muzzle.

"I've been meaning to ask you, what's with the hat and the antique gun?" said Julia.

"They're legitimate, in that I like the hat and I like the lever action," said Hatfield. "The media picked up on it, and all of a sudden it kind of became my uniform, or costume would probably be a better word. Like Batman's cape. Obviously if I'm doing something where I don't want to be noticed, I dress down." They all sat down, but not before Julia also made herself a Scotch and soda.

"Zack tells me you're the go-to guy I need to be talking to, uh, Red?" she asked Morehouse. "You actually have the authority to make a deal and put a stop to that bloodbath down in Los Angeles?"

"More or less," Morehouse told her. "I represent the NVA Army Council, which is kind of our general staff and the *de facto* governing body in the Republic, until we can remove the occupation forces and establish a government under the provisions of our Northwest Constitution. This is just preliminary. The Army Council will have to sign off on any eventual deal, but you can take it that what I tell you tonight is the goods. We have already discussed among ourselves a set of acceptable conditions for our terminating Operation We Are Not Amused. Actually, we formulated those conditions before we sent the active service unit down to Los Angeles, so we've thought it all out. We have always known what we want to achieve. Under those conditions we are prepared to suspend activity against your industry. Suspend, not terminate. To put it bluntly, if those kikes down there try to screw us, then we start dumping them in their swimming pools again, face down. I have an authorized exemption from General Order Number Nine issued by the Army Council to negotiate with you, or more accurately with the cartel of studio executives who sent you up here. I understand that your presence here is purely for the purpose of making contact, Ms. Lear, which you've done. I'll give you a general outline of what we want, but once you go down and report back, as far as we're concerned you're out of it. We will appoint someone else to conduct any further dealings along these lines with the entertainment industry."

"That suits me just fine!" said Julia. "Look, before you lay out your conditions, you need to know that the men who sent me here have a few of their own, necessary ones because the industry can't operate otherwise. To begin with, movies and television employ hundreds of thousands of people directly and indirectly, and a lot of those are Jewish, and black, and Hispanic, and gay, and every other minority you can think of. It would not only be illegal under federal law to fire all those people based on their race or sexual preference, it would simply be impossible. The industry can't operate without them. These men want to get back to work, not commit economic suicide, and they're not going to commit suicide. If they can't work out a deal with you people, then they're talking about upping stakes and moving the whole entertainment industry out of the country, God knows where, but somewhere they can make movies without being murdered and blown up. They don't want to do it, but you have to understand they're not going to open their veins as the price of peace."

"We understand that," said Morehouse with a nod. "In essence, you have just stated the whole rationale behind our strategy of taking back only a small piece of what was once the patrimony of our race. We know perfectly well

that the power structure in the United States is not going to just hand over the entire kit and kaboodle to us from sea to shining sea, toss us the keys to the apparatus of power and then toddle off and jump in the ocean. They will, however, eventually be convinced to cut their losses and relinquish to us the Northwest territory we ask for, once it becomes clear that if they persist in trying to keep the whole loaf for themselves, they may lose everything because they simply won't be able to hold themselves together, and the entire edifice they've built over the past century will come crashing down around their ears. We see this in a microcosm with your film and television industry. We're not asking these big Jews to commit Hebrew hara-kiri. Before you ask, we've decided we're not even going to ask for any money, as tempting as that was. No, what we want is a generous helping of what I believe you call creative control."

"In what way?" asked Julia suspiciously.

"The Hollywood entertainment industry, including television, is arguably *the* most potent weapon in the hands of ZOG," said Morehouse. "To be blunt, it is possibly the only one that might defeat us in the end. The NVA has already demonstrated that we can survive anything Amurrica throws at us by way of police, military, or other armed force. We're already killing these FATPO thugs Hillary sent, and it's pretty obvious they won't be able to beat us either. But if we allow the Jews who control Hollywood and the media to shape the minds and attitudes and perceptions of the American people about us, especially young white people—well, we can't allow that. We *won't* allow it. Our primary condition is basically that Hollywood adopt a position of neutrality and balance regarding The Trouble here in the Northwest.

"If your industry wants to survive, it must disarm. It must no longer take sides with the government and make itself an arm of the American effort to suppress the Northwest independence movement. That means no vile movies like those *Homeland* and *Great White North* abortions, movies made purely to heap contempt and vilification on our people. No more incitement to oppression by glorifying the murderers and torturers of the FBI and other federal agencies as heroes. I assure you, they are not. They are shit that mankind needs to scrape off our shoe, as I understand you have learned from your personal experience." Julia winced, remembering the FBI taser on her neck. "No more snide and sneering jokes by late-night talk show hosts. No more spewing of hatred by talking heads on cable news shows. None of this subtle needling here, there, and everywhere in television programming. No more of these stereotypes portraying racially aware white men as cowards and bullies, as stupid misogynists and abusers of women, as dirty and ugly people

with black teeth. No more portraying Confederate soldiers and German soldiers as cruel and wicked perpetrators of atrocities against poor defenseless niggers and Jews. No more portraying white fathers as Homer Simpson-like clowns or evil perverts who sexually molest their children. No more constant regurgitation of old propaganda from World War Two. No more goddamned lying Holocaust crap purveying vicious and evil lies about things that *never happened!* The Jews have milked that wicked fantasy long enough, and it's time they packed it in and found another cash cow." Morehouse leaned forward. "But I don't need to go on, Ms. Lear. Your Jewish bosses know perfectly well what they've been doing down there for the past 100 years, because they've been doing it deliberately. Now they're going to stop it. Or else they will pay with their lives."

"Uh . . . I'm not sure how I can convey that to them, sir, uh Red," said Julia carefully. "Are you going to set up some kind of Hays Office like they used to have back in the old days, with some kind of code of what's acceptable and what isn't? Like the rule they used to have about even married couples being portrayed always in twin beds and always with at least one foot on the floor? Or some kind of vetting board like the House Committee on Un-American Activities set up in the 1950s to try and keep Communists out of the industry?"

"Neither of those were overly successful, if I recall," remarked Morehouse in a dry voice.

"No, they weren't," agreed Julia. "Creative people don't like censorship of any kind. You know it's going to become kind of a game with some of these guys, writers and directors and actors alike. Living dangerously. Trying to see how far they can go without being murdered."

"I imagine so," agreed Morehouse with a wry chuckle. "It won't be a perfect arrangement, and I suspect that periodically some of your big shots are still going to wake up with a horse's head in their bed. Or a Jew head."

"How exactly would this work?" asked Julia, fascinated in spite of the fact that she knew Morehouse wasn't joking about the Jew head reference. "How will the industry know what will get them killed and what will slip under the wire?"

"I think they'll know," said Morehouse. "As I said, a large part of this hate-whitey shtick out of Hollywood has always been far more deliberate than most people realize. The Jews inadvertently stumbled upon the most perfect vehicle imaginable for expressing their ancient hatred of all non-Jewish life and all non-Talmudic values, and taking their revenge on the hated *goyim* by destroying everything we hold sacred and valuable, including our own children. There was indeed once much that was good in America, Ms. Lear,

the Old America before the Jews got their hands on Hollywood. But get hold of it they did, and for almost a hundred years they have used it as a weapon to spit on that Old America, and the race that for thousands of years has refused to accept their self-proclaimed status as the Chosen People of God. I think your bosses will know perfectly well what I am talking about, and they will know that we know. They know what they've been doing, and now they must stop or perish. But you won't be involved in that part of things, ma'am," he went on. "What I want you to do is to go back down there and speak with whoever sent you here—was it Blaustein?"

"Arnold Blaustein, yes, but there's a kind of committee or cartel as you put it," said Julia. "They all gave me my marching orders, so to speak."

"Okay, you go back and give Blaustein the general outline of what I've just told you. I also want you to give those kikes a name, the name of a man whom we would like for him to hire on as a kind of consultant. If this is going to work, first and foremost this man is to maintain a low, low profile. No gossip in *Variety,* no chatter on the internet celebrity sites, none of that crap. It will be the studio executives' responsibility to see that his privacy and identity is protected. He is to be known only to the very top people in the industry, as small a group as possible. They will understand that this is to everyone's advantage. He is to enjoy complete immunity from arrest, interrogation, investigation, surveillance, threats, bribe attempts, assassination, attempted seduction by luscious starlets to compromise him, poison in his soup, malicious and baseless lawsuits, and harassment of every kind. All Jew tricks are to be kept in the bag. This gentleman is not a member of the NVA, and he will have no contact with the NVA, so there is no point in their following him around or tapping his phone or going through his garbage. There is no way he can lead anyone to the NVA, or there won't be. He is simply someone whom we feel we can trust adequately to express our views. All he will ever give these studio moguls will be his opinions as to how he thinks we *might* react to a given situation. An educated guess. But his opinion will be a very informed one, and his guesses will be very educated indeed. We suggest in the strongest possible terms that Mr. Blaustein and his people listen to this man and comply with his suggestions. Have you got all this?"

"Yes," said Julia. "The envelope, please."

"I beg your pardon?" asked Morehouse.

"The name," said Julia. "Don't you watch the Oscars? Sorry, it was a tasteless joke in view of the circumstances."

"Actually, I watched the Oscars for the first time this year," said Morehouse with a quiet smile. "The finale was a real blast. Now *that's* a tasteless joke.

The name of this gentleman with the informed opinions is Barry Brewer. You may have heard of him."

"Barry Brewer is Erica Collingwood's agent!" exclaimed Julia. "So *that's* how—sorry. Uh, look, Red, suppose I give them Barry's name and they turn him over to the FBI, or they just have him killed. Their version of putting a horse's head in *your* bed?"

"Then he will be avenged," said Morehouse calmly. "However, before you leave I want to give you a little conversation piece. The last time you saw Mr. Blaustein, did he have to ask you the time?"

"Uh, no, not me, but he did ask his secretary," said Julia curiously. "That was just before I went to the Los Angeles airport. He said he'd lost his Rolex. He was really pissed off about it, said it was a birthday gift from his wife."

"Dorothy Blaustein, yes." Morehouse pulled a gold watch out of his short pocket and handed it to her. "Quite expensive, diamond settings. Must be worth at least 50 grand. You can see, it's inscribed on the back of the case, *To Arnie from Dotty,* and the date. It was removed from his nightstand in his Beverly Hills mansion, several nights ago, while he and his wife were both asleep. No alarm was tripped, none of his guards saw anything, and his dog didn't bark. Give this to him when you see him, and tell him it would be wise to treat Mr. Brewer with courtesy and respect, always. It's not a horse's head, but I think he'll get the message."

Zack's wireless phone bleeped. He opened it and listened for almost a minute, then closed it. A grim expression was on his face. "Damn," he said softly. He looked up at Lear. "Ted, you and I need to talk. It looks like our luck has run out."

"What do you mean?" demanded Lear.

"That was brigade," Hatfield told them. "They've confirmed that we're about to get some unwelcome tourists here in Astoria. Fattie's coming, in force."

Sheriff Ted Lear was the first to speak. "I didn't hear anything about that!" he protested.

"I know you didn't, Ted, or you wouldn't have let Julia come up here," replied Hatfield.

Morehouse spoke up. "That means that you weren't told anything by either the Oregon State Attorney General, or by the feds or anyone else, which is bad news for you. That means that the federals consider your department to be compromised, which of course it is, from their point of view. That in turn means that the FATPO aren't coming just for us. They're coming for you, and most likely for your family as well, and for anyone they consider

to be on your team. FATPO always enters an area with two lists in their pockets, Sheriff. One is a list of alleged Nationalist or NVA sympathizers. Sometimes those lists are accurate, sometimes they're not. I think you can assume that you're on that list, and maybe your mom and Julia here if the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing, which is the case more often than not with this government. The second list is one of potential Unionist collaborators, or loyal Americans as they would say, people who can be relied on to rat out any of their neighbors with Nationalist inclinations, anybody with NVA-connected family members, so forth and so on."

"We had an informant in your department from the very first, Ted . . ." Hatfield said.

"So I eventually gathered," said Lear sourly. "I was, well, disappointed in Chrissie."

"Which means that the government probably has at least one in your department as well," Hatfield went on remorselessly. "We'll find out who after you are kicked out of office and maybe interned or disappeared, and we see who gets to become the next sheriff of Clatsop County. Who has a hankering for your job, Ted? Anyone spring to mind?"

"Maybe," replied Lear with a weary sigh.

"Well, whoever it is, you can bet they know that the FATPO are coming soon, and when they take over they'll replace most local law enforcement here with politically reliable officers, most likely assorted minorities from outside the area. Same with the Astoria and Seaside PDs, you get the idea. Looks like our days of peaceful if occasionally bumpy coexistence are at an end. The shit's going to hit the fan, I'm afraid."

"Damn!" said Lear with a sigh, his shoulders sagging. "I really hoped we'd make it through somehow. What the hell should I do in the meantime?"

"Prepare to be invaded and occupied," said Morehouse levelly. "Get back to your office and start cleaning house. Destroy any and all records, correspondence, e-mails, logs, evidence, gun records, anything that the federals might use to identify local people and target them for arrest and victimization. Format all the hard drives on your computers. Release all prisoners in your jail; whatever they've done, handing them over to these body-armored federal gangsters is too much of a punishment. If anyone protests, he's probably your rat. Deal with him at your discretion. Remove all guns and ammunition and as much other equipment as you can from your armories in CSO and the local PDs, stash it all away somewhere to prevent the FATPO from seizing them and using them against the people in this county. Hide or destroy anything you have that you don't want used to do harm to the people here, because

these apes are coming to do nothing but harm. Start making calls to anyone who qualifies as a real community leader and tell them to batten down the hatches. Above all, insofar as it is at all humanly possible, *save the children.* Tell people to get their kids to safety anyway they can, even if it's out of the Northwest for a while. This is the Iron Heel, Ted, and it is coming here to crush and to maim and to destroy all resistance to the tyranny in Washington, D.C. Prepare for it like you would prepare for a tsunami. If I were you, I wouldn't be around when our new lords and masters roll up to your office in their black armored cars. They probably mean to kill you."

"Oh, God!" moaned Julia.

"Julia, getting back to your mission, we need to get you the hell out of here. Tonight," said Morehouse. "Zack, I know you've got a million things to do, but before anything else you need to give that skel Wally a call, and then get her back down to the dock and on that boat back to Portland."

"I'm on it," said Zack, opening his phone.

"I'll give her a ride," said Ted. "Looks like I have to go back to work, so it's on the way."

Morehouse looked at her gravely. "Julia, I am going to ask that you don't tell Walter Post anything specific about why you're leaving early and not spending the night. Just say you and Zack had a lover's quarrel or something." Julia couldn't help but give a feeble giggle. "We don't know whose side he's on, most probably his own, and in his hands a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. He might try to make some money by letting the Fatties know that we've been tipped off, and that can get a lot of people killed. Including your brother and including Zack."

"I won't say anything," said Julia, shaking her head. "Good thing I didn't even get a chance to unpack."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Morehouse gravely.

Zack stood up. "Okay, I'm outta here, and you'd best be rolling along as well, Red. I think the AC would want you out of the area."

"If you don't mind, I'll stick around and do anything I can to help until I'm flat out ordered to E&E," said Morehouse.

"Suit yourself. Geraldine, it's always a pleasure to see you," said Hatfield to Mrs. Lear, "And I am sorry it can't be under better circumstances."

"It will be some day, Zack," said the old lady quietly. "For now you have to do what a man has to do, as do you, Ted. I don't have to add I will be praying for you both. And you, Henry, even if you are a Nazi atheist."

"Nazi agnostic, ma'am," said Morehouse, rising.

Hatfield turned to Julia, who had also stood up. "Jules, it was really good seeing you again. Just wish it didn't have to be so brief. Let's not make it fourteen years next time." He leaned over and kissed her on the forehead. "Take care of yourself." He picked up his rifle and pulled the broad-brimmed hat down over his head, turned and headed out the door. Julia followed him and caught up with him on the porch, putting her hand on his arm. He turned to look at her and by the porch light he saw tears glistening in her eyes.

"This is just like Iraq all over again," she whispered. "I don't want you to die. I'm scared I'll do what I did back then, make myself forget about you so that when I finally heard you were dead, it wouldn't destroy me as well. Now that I've seen you I can't go through that again. It takes too long and it puts scar tissue over everything in me. I can't live like that anymore."

"Before you came tonight I was wondering whether or not I would say anything to you," replied Hatfield quietly. "Then this other stuff came up, which reminded me loud and clear of all the reasons why I shouldn't, but what the hell. If it's ever possible for us to meet again under some kind of sane circumstances, and if it seems appropriate at the time, there's some things I want to talk to you about. I guess you know what."

"Yes, I know," she told him.

"Well, that time isn't now. I meant what I said. Take care, honey." He leaned over and kissed her again, this time gently on the lips, and turned and went out into the darkness.

XXV

Comes The Dawn

The man that once did sell the lion's skin
While the beast lived was kill'd with hunting him.

King Henry V—Act IV, Scene 3

Leonard Posner was a god who walked among men. He was tall, tanned, and distinguished looking, with a blow-dried silver-tipped mane and a nose job to die for. Leonard Posner was the Fearless and Hard Hitting On The Spot Correspondent for Fox News, the Man Who's Always One Step Ahead of the Action. Arguably the biggest prima donna in a television news industry where prima donnas leaped and twirled in front of every camera, Posner traveled to the world's hot spots with an entourage that sometimes outnumbered the rest of the press party put together. Besides a whole team of sound men, camera crew, advance men, film editors and mixers, as well as a phalanx of private security goons from Blackwater, that entourage included his own personal makeup artist, a $200 per-cut hairdresser, his own personal chef, a scriptwriter, and a crew of roadies to manhandle and set up his plush air-conditioned trailer in any locality in the world from the Iraqi desert to the Oregon woods. Then there was his personal assistant, a stunning blonde with the IQ of a can of cheese whizz, who had a special Hollywood-style "personal services" clause written into her contract.

Leonard Posner wasn't just Mr. Fox News. He was Mr. News, period, regarded with some justification as the most well-known, trusted and admired face in broadcast journalism since Walter Cronkite. His nightly telecast never fell below 100 million viewers. His (more or less) off-the-cuff op-eds delivered from the field, sometimes under Iranian shellfire or in the middle of rioting

Palestinians, had been known to shape national policy, since Chelsea Clinton considered him "dreamy" and constantly puffed him to her presidential mother. Leonard Posner's salary and bonuses were larger than the budget of a medium-sized American city. His mansion in Beverly Hills had been the scene of week-long orgies of every known form of drugs, sex, and madness that had reduced the most jaded Hollywood studio executives and corporate CEOs to respectful awe and wonder. Right now, media divinity Leonard Posner was leaning over the rail of an obsolescent old car ferry, puking his guts out into the dark water of the North Pacific in the darkness before dawn.

His colleagues of the Fourth Estate were struggling with might and main to keep straight faces. "Does any man or woman among us dare to catch this on our phone cam and slip it surreptitiously onto the internet?" asked Mark Hastings from CNN in a whisper.

"I wouldn't advise it," replied the petite and sassy Sue Loomis from Reuters. "Leonard has a lot of strong points, but a sense of humor isn't among them. Be my guest, Mark, if you think a few laughs is worth a lifelong blood feud, and I do mean blood. Those Blackwater thugs are quite capable of beating the crap out of you or worse, you know. Whenever he goes out partying down in L.A. the paparazzi give him a wide berth. Leonard gives those animals personal bonuses for services rendered, and he can put a hurt on you in more ways than one."

"Haven't quite found your sea legs yet, eh Leonard?" called Randy Jensen from McClatchey Media.

"Fuck off!" moaned Posner.

"This tub was meant to haul tourist SUVs to Catalina Island in those nice balmy waters down south, not sail this far north on the open ocean," remarked Bill Baker from the Associated Press, an ex-Navy man who thereby claimed the status of resident expert on all things nautical. "Glad we won't be trying to wallow this hog across the Columbia Bar. Hell, we can't even keep up with the rest of the convoy without the tugs."

The convoy Baker referred to was a task force of six vessels. The media people were standing at the rail of the promenade deck of the S.S. *Ventura,* which had been commandeered from where it lay rusting in mothballs in the Los Angeles marine boneyard, and fitted out for this one final mission. The *Ventura* now contained a little over three hundred officers and men of the Federal Anti-Terrorist Police Organization, with full weapons and equipment, as well as over 50 vehicles including transport trucks, Humvees, armored personnel carriers, a staff car for FATPO General Roland Rollins, SUVs for the embedded media party, and of course Leonard Posner's trailer and the diesel

tractor truck that would haul it ashore. The *Ventura* was moving forward on only a quarter engine power, since she was being towed on four twelve-inch hawsers, two each attached to the ocean-going tugboats *Josephine P.* and *Clownfish.* The total FATPO force was almost 1400 men, but the rest were dispersed into two Alaska cruise ships, the *Ketchikan* and the *Kodiak Queen*, which had also been commandeered by FATPO and converted into troop transports. Escorting the whole motley flotilla was a 378-foot Coast Guard cutter, the U.S.S. *Frederick J. Higby*, a ship that was named after a former chairman of the House Armed Services Committee who had managed to cut the Coast Guard an extra hunk of federal budget money some years before.

"You know, I've always prided myself on being a feminist," said Sue Loomis, "But I have to admit, that damned rubber life raft scares me, and I want one of you big strong men to help lower me down into it."

"Piece of cake, Sue," laughed Baker. "The sea's nice and calm. It's not a life raft, though, it's an inflatable motor launch. It's quite seaworthy. You could probably sail back to Oakland in it, if the weather stays decent."

"I still don't understand why they won't let us get into the boat first before they lower it down," said Loomis with a pout.

"Just to make sure there's no accidents," said Hastings. "If that launch were to tip over in the davits, a million dollars' worth of sound and camera gear might end up in Davy Jones' locker. Frankly, it's not your no-doubt sweet little ass Rollins is concerned about, it's the gear. Got to have the gear if his moment of glory is going to be caught and preserved for posterity. You got all your pre-landing footage, or notes or whatever you ink people do?"

"I've got at least four hours on tape and digicam of Roland expounding on how he's going to smash terrorism in the Pacific Northwest at a single blow," said Sue Loomis. "He's the greatest military genius since Napoleon, of course. In case you haven't gotten the message yet."

"Oh, we get it," grunted Hastings.

Leonard Posner finally finished vomiting over the rail and staggered up to them. "Jesus, Leonard, pop a breath mint or something!" yelled Sue as the ship rolled and the world famous anchorman lurched toward her.

"Just for that, I won't sleep with you this trip," growled Posner savagely.

"The hell of it is, he really means that as a punishment," Sue told the others, rolling her eyes in disgust.

"When the hell are we going to land?" demanded Posner of Bill Baker.

"Oh, probably about an hour or so," said Baker. "Roland wants to do it right as the sun comes up, so the cameras can film him splashing ashore bathed in Mother Nature's warming glow from above."

"Sure he doesn't want to strip off and float in on a clam shell like that Venus painting from the Renaissance? Botticelli or Michelangelo or whoever the fuck?" put in Seth Goldstein from MTV. "That would sure make my job easier."

"Yeah, we only have to report this dog and pony show as an infotainment news story," said Hastings. "You have to make a rock video out of it for Teens Against Spuckies or whatever. What are you going to call it? Bad-Ass Brother Wets His Pants?"

"It's for Youth Against Hate," said Goldstein. "I don't know what I'm going to call it. Democracy's Sword of Freedom or some such poop. Unless Rollins doesn't like it, since he got full creative control from MTV. You know Rollins won't let me use the Dead Chickens for my opening? He insists on the Mormon Tabernacle Choir singing *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, of all the antiquated crap. Even insists on playing it on the speakers as he's coming ashore. This from a black guy, yet! The ghosts of Pat Boone and Kate Smith haunt this vessel."

"The Battle Hymn I can see," responded Posner. "Congressman Rollins, er, General Rollins I mean, is trying to expand his base beyond the South Side of Chicago, and that means appealing to the blue-haired country club set in both parties. Very symbolic and American and all that, and of course the fact that Roland is the descendant of slaves who were freed in the war the song was written to glorify will add a bit of poignancy. Okay, that part I get. But has anyone seriously tried to talk him out of the MacArthur impersonation with the hat and the shades and the corncob pipe? Does he really not understand that he will be making himself look damned ridiculous? Anyway, it's been done before."

"Like most Americans will even remember who Douglas MacArthur was," snorted Hastings. "Most of our wonderful viewers have difficulty remembering what they had for breakfast yesterday."

"That's Rolly's whole life," said Sue with a shrug. "He's always been out to prove that anything a white man can do, a black man can do better and Rolly Rollins can do better still. It's gotten him re-elected for six terms in Chicago, until he resigned to take over FATPO. Now he wants to add anti-racist war hero to his resumé."

"This is not a war, Ms. Loomis," Posner corrected her. "This is a law enforcement action against hatecriminals."

"Well, he *is* going to try and run for President," commented Baker.

"Rolly can dream on," said Sue. "That seat in the Oval Office is Chelsea's and the whole world knows it, and when Chelsea's done we've got a couple

more Bushes waiting in the wings. I don't know why we even bother to have elections anymore, since the White House has become a kind of time-share for two families."

"Did anybody ever figure out what the hell happened to Dawson Zucchino?" asked Maxwell Zevon from *Rolling Stone.* "The son of a bitch had my stash!"

"He probably smoked it all, or he was out getting drunk or laid or both and he slept in and missed the boat, literally," replied Sue Loomis with a sigh. "Or he just got tired of being embedded. What do you want to bet that jackass drove down here by car from Portland, probably had a completely uneventful trip and stayed plastered all the way, and he's going to meet us on the goddamned beach with a thermos of coffee and Jack Daniels? Jesus, I can't wait to get this stupid photo-shoot over with! Once we get ashore I don't care if I'm supposed to be embedded or not, I'm finding a Holiday Inn and I'm getting a nice hot shower!"

"Of course, I could change my mind and share that shower with you," leered Posner, leaning against the rail unsteadily.

"Fuck off, Leonard," said the Reuters woman mildly.

On the bridge of the *Higby*, Captain Meryl Sandoval stood in flawless naval whites, watching the low dark coast go by on the starboard side through her binoculars. Beyond the low white rim of surf she could see occasional house lights on the bluffs and headlights of vehicles going up and down Highway 101. "Steady as she goes, helmsman!" There was no need for her to say that, since the trip had been completely uneventful and there wasn't much of any way to go other than steady, but she was extremely conscious of her status as the Coast Guard's senior Hispanic female captain, and she was resolved to present a professional image, sounding nautical and shipshape at all times.

"Aye aye, ma'am!" replied the petty officer at the wheel, with just enough spit and polish to convey a smidgeon of contempt, she thought. She knew that her crew all hated her and were probably conspiring against her, and that the white males among her officers and NCOs were waiting for her to make a single misstep. Or she thought she knew that, and she acted accordingly. She prided herself on running a tight ship, charging her sailors and bringing them up on orders for the slightest infraction, and she was pleased to learn from her XO Lieutenant Hacker that she had a nickname among them: "Captain Queeg." Hacker had assured her that it meant a stern but fair disciplinarian. Another subordinate had helpfully informed her that naval tradition held that the original Captain Queeg of legend, whoever he may have been, had made a habit of grinding two ball bearings in his hand, a practice she had

adopted. Fortunately for the ship's company, Meryl Sandoval didn't watch many old movies on TV.

Now Hacker appeared at her side. "Signal from Air Dog One," he told her. "The choppers will rendezvous with us on schedule ma'am."

"Good," she said. "Everything is going according to schedule. Carry on, Number One." She had heard that term on one of the few old movies she ever had watched, and no one ever bothered to explain to her that it was a British naval expression, not an American one. But Hacker seemed disinclined to carry on. He was a lean and grizzled seaman who had come up from the ranks, with a face weather-beaten from many storms that he'd faced on deck, and not in an office or an electronic cubicle. It had taken him a while to make full lieutenant, since he had fought in Iraq for some years in the DNF (Detached Naval Force) when the government had run so short of infantry that it stripped Navy and Air Force units to turn them into grunts to patrol the streets of Baghdad and Ramadi. The draft had finally kicked in, endless cannon fodder had become available for the Ninth Crusade, and Hacker had eventually gotten back on board a ship, minus his left foot. But he retained his combat instincts, and in his mind red flags were out all over the place on this mission.

"Ma'am, when we reach the LZ, before the FATPO copters arrive, may I suggest that we launch our own helicopter and do a recon of the landing area?" he asked respectfully.

"Not unless General Rollins requests it," said Sandoval. "This is his show and he says he wants to have the copters fly in overhead while he makes his own landing on the beach, for the TV cameras. I can understand that. Propaganda is just as important as military action in winning a counter-insurgency, Lieutenant."

"Yes, ma'am," said Hacker. "I don't suggest we do anything to spoil General Rollins' grand entrance. I mean just buzz the beach once or twice to make sure everything's hunky-dory before we go in?"

Sandoval laughed, genuinely amused. "Good grief, Lieutenant, it's not like we're landing on Iwo Jima or Omaha Beach! This is a photo op, for God's sake, not a real military operation, although it does have a strategic purpose in that we're inserting a paramilitary force to re-assert government control over part of the continental United States. These aren't soldiers we're fighting or even informal militias like in Iraq or Somalia. They're just a bunch of punks who shoot unarmed Hispanic and black people in the back, and who murder movie actors and plant the occasional car bomb. They call themselves an army, but they're not, they're a bunch of inbred hillbilly peckerwoods with black

teeth who used to work in Jiffy Lubes and wash dishes for minimum wage before they became terrorists. The toughest people they've got are former members of prison gangs, and they're not good for anything other than shanking each other in the exercise yard. These people are not going to fight over a thousand armed federal officers and the United States Coast Guard!" she concluded with a snort.

Hacker debated briefly whether to push it, and decided to change tack. "Uh, certainly, ma'am. But I wonder, has General Rollins considered that he is going to be landing at dawn, with the rising sun right in his eyes, and the eyes of his men? Would it be possible for him to maybe wait until the sun gets a bit higher in the sky, do you think?"

"Lieutenant, did I not just explain to you that there is *no need?*" sighed Captain Sandoval with growing impatience.

Hacker clenched his teeth, but decided to give it one more try. "May I at least order the crew to general quarters, ma'am, just prior to the landing? As a drill, if nothing else?"

"Oh, all right, I suppose a drill wouldn't be too out of order," she said with a careless shrug. "It would keep the ship's company on their toes."

"Aye aye, ma'am. And load live ammo for the Mark 75?" pressed Hacker.

"Just who the hell do you think we're going to be shelling on the beach, Lieutenant?" snapped Sandoval. "Little old men walking their dogs and kiddies looking for sea shells? Or do you think the Northwest Volunteer Navy is going to come around the point and attack us with Exocet missiles?"

"I think, ma'am, that if they have Exocet missiles or anything like that, yes, they are quite capable of it," replied Hacker calmly, wondering if his career was now circling the bowl.

Sandoval was about to respond but then the radio crackled. "General Rollins on the horn for you from *Ventura*, ma'am," said a commo rating, holding up the phone receiver. The captain gave Hacker a poisonous look, but turned away.

"No live ammo for the gun," she ordered over her shoulder.

Lieutenant JG Charles Day leaned over and whispered, "Live ammo for the gun, sir?"

"You bet your goddamned ass!" hissed Hacker.

* * *

At that moment Zack Hatfield was crouched in a small trench or elongated foxhole dug into the ground. The hole was on the left edge of the cut in the

sand dunes that gave vehicular access to Sunset Beach from the highway, and it had been camouflaged from observation with a pile of heaped-up sand into which hundreds of carefully clipped sea oats had been inserted standing up. It wasn't the best camouflage in the world, and the ocean wind had already blown some of the sea oats down, but it provided a view of Sunset Beach and it would do for the brief use Zack intended for it. He had in his hand a small silver wireless phone. Charlie Washburn slid in beside him. A shadowy line of men hoisting picks and shovels over their backs filed past on Zack's right, coming up from the beach. "Okay, Zack, Len's got the whole enchilada armed and ready. Your basic daisy chain of Baghdad Bangers, six IEDs twenty yards apart and three feet deep, about 100 yards out. At high tide they should be under the surf. You hit speed dial on that phone, the main charge detonates. That's the Semtex. The rest of the mines with the dynamite and C4 are wired, so in theory you should get one hell of a bang and do some damage. Unless of course they decide to land a mile up the beach or a mile down, in which case we just buried most of our battalion's explosive ordnance in the ground for no reason, and we might not be able to get it back."

"I know it's just a guess that this will be the spot, Charlie," said Hatfield. "But it's an educated guess. We know they're bringing vehicles, and the vehicles can't all be dune buggies. There will be some heavy trucks and APCs, maybe Strykers, heavy enough to risk getting stuck. They'll probably lay down steel grating to offload the larger vehicles, but they'll still need to get onto a paved road as soon as possible and not go floundering around up and down the beach, and Sunset Avenue is the only access down onto the beach from the asphalt. I assume they either have someone with local knowledge, or more likely they can simply do an internet map search. If our information is correct and they're headed for Sunset Beach, then they've pretty much *got* to land right here."

"Maybe they've got wind that we're onto them and they've changed the landing site?" suggested Charlie.

"It's not dawn yet. Give 'em time. Besides, why haven't we seen a single copter floating around upstairs in the past two days? My guess is they still think they have the element of surprise. If they knew they'd lost it, we'd have whirlybirds flying around like a swarm of bees trying to find us, including gunships, and probably some kind of air insertion in here to secure the landing zone. But we've seen zip. No, those assholes have no idea we know they're coming." Zack made it a point to sound a lot more confident than he felt. "I'm more worried about air and satellite reconnaissance. I remember the U.S. Army, Charlie. They don't even go to the latrine without air cover and recon,

period, end of story, since air superiority is what always makes the difference and wins wars for America. The ones they still win, anyway."

19 year-old Lieutenant Ricky Parmenter of C Company, Third Battalion appeared out of the dim gloom and squatted down by the trench. He was a slim and intense young man, blond and baby-faced, wearing jeans and a black cowboy hat and carrying an M-16. "Cap, Ragnar just got a call from the spotter he left up on the roof of that hotel at Seaside. The guy with the infrared night vision binoculars."

"And?" asked Hatfield.

"They're coming. Pretty certain to be them, anyway. He saw the lights of four large vessels sailing together and looks like some smaller ones as well. They're making about twelve or thirteen knots, so they'll be here in about forty minutes, give or take."

"Coming in just at dawn," said Washburn. "Damn, I almost forgot to tell you! Washington Threesec contacted brigade intelligence, and they just passed it along. A lot of copters left Fort Lewis about fifteen minutes ago, heading south."

"They're coming here to rendezvous with the naval force. I wondered when they were going to show up. Come on." Hatfield and Washburn climbed up out of the trench, and the three of them walked back up the dirt road to an open Humvee parked on the side of the road, in the back of which was mounted a belt-fed Browning M2 .50-caliber machine gun. This was Zack's personal command vehicle, which the Volunteers called the "War Wagon." Standing beside the War Wagon was a tall and powerfully built auburn-haired man in denim with a beard and a braided ponytail, his chest crossed with two bandoliers of pouches containing loaded FAN rifle magazines. This was the Swedish fighter known as Ragnar Redbeard, real name Captain Dan Dalen of the Nordland Flying Column, whose normal sector was the Oregon coastline from Tillamook on down to North Bend. Behind Dalen stood an even taller and more ferociously bearded man, who in addition to his bandolier of ammunition and grenades carried a large double-edged logger's axe across his back in a sheath. This was Big Nick, another Swede. Nick didn't say much; he tended to let his axe do the talking.

"Okay, Dan, thanks for the assist," said Hatfield. "I especially appreciate the loan of your explosives. We'll greet our uninvited guests with a hell of a bang. You still gonna stick around?"

"We come to fight, we fight," said Dalen.

"Well, pick a couple of your guys and get the rest on their way," said Hatfield. "Charlie, our chosen men get here yet?"

"Up the road," said Washburn.

"Okay, I need to brief them."

They all walked up to the dirt road to where the pavement began, to a small parking lot on the right side of the notch. This was the entrance to a tiny mini-park on the north side of the road, the starting point of a hiking trail along the sand dunes, a long winding pathway green with scrub-like conifers and ferns. It was still pretty dark, but Zack was astounded to see that the small lot was filled with cars and trucks and SUVs. Along the roadside scores of armed men were standing or sitting in the sand. The rising gray light of dawn revealed a motley combination of dress and headgear and weapons. The men and a few women were wearing jeans, work clothes, surplus camouflage fatigues from half a dozen armies, even jogging sweats, along with headgear ranging from slouch hats to baseball caps to military fatigue caps. Around their waists were heavy web belts and in some cases they bore packs on their backs. They were carrying every kind of long arm from M-16s to Kalashnikovs to hunting rifles, as well as at least one pistol on each belt, and a few were armed with heavy .50-caliber sniper's rifles and belt-fed light machine guns of both Russian and American manufacture, long ammo belts draped over their shoulders or rolled into assault bags. A small handful carried the Third Battalion's carefully hoarded collection of RPGs.

"Jesus Christ!" Zack yelped. "Charlie, what the fuck is this? I told you to ask for three volunteers from each company to cover my E & E after I pop the top, and for a couple of good .50-caliber men to take out any targets of opportunity that might offer. I didn't say bring everybody and his dog! Just enough to make a gesture, no more than twenty men! Who the hell are all these people?"

"You asked for volunteers," said Washburn. "Everybody volunteered."

"Oh, for crying out loud!" shouted Hatfield. "We can't fight a pitched battle against a thousand Federal paramilitaries with naval and air support! This is insane! What, do you think we're going to charge them on the beach like a bunch of crazy hadjis screaming for Allah? I was in Iraq, God damn it all, and I've seen what happens when anybody tries that shit! We're guerrillas, remember? If we go head on against the Americans we'll be wiped out and lose everything we've spent years building here! We're trying to free our people and create a new country, not go to Paradise with seventy virgins, and not play Rambo!"

"I tried to tell them that, but I'm afraid we've been doing our work too well," explained Washburn. "The Volunteers here in Clatsop have gotten a taste of what freedom is like in these past couple of years, Zack, a taste for

not seeing faces the color of shit everywhere they look and hearing the gabble of foreign languages that don't belong here, and they like it. These bastards coming here to try and send us back to what was before have got them really, really pissed off. If I'd told some of these guys they couldn't come, I would have had a riot on my hands."

"This is our land now, Zack," said Lennart Ekstrom, who had come up and joined the conversation. "We're not giving it back to them. We want to let them know that. We don't just need to make a gesture. We need to send that message to that bitch in D.C., loud and clear."

Young Parmenter spoke up. "With all due respect sir, none of us gonna be known as the guys who hid back and left Zack Hatfield to face a thousand Fatties all alone. Don't worry, we're not fools. One good long Mad Minute and then we hook up and book. That's fine. That makes sense. But this is an important day, and we all want a shot. All of us."

"We come to fight, we fight, not run away," repeated Dalen.

Hatfield was angered and upset, certain he was looking at a major catastrophe in the making, but he understood intuitively that the Northwest Volunteers, for all the fact that they called themselves an army, were not an army in the true sense, and that straightforward military discipline was sometimes impossible. These men and women fought from their hearts, and sometimes their hearts had to be given precedence over tactical advantage and maybe even common sense. "How many?" he asked Washburn.

"By my count, including Comrade Ragnar's boys from down Newport way, 185 men. Or 160 men and 25 women, to be exact. The same number Colonel Travis had at the Alamo, if you're into historical trivia."

"That's a cheerful thought," muttered Zack. He thought for a few moments. "All right, but we have an immediate problem. We've had word their air cover is on the way down from Fort Lewis, and I don't see any way we can disguise or conceal all these vehicles from the air. One sweep over this area and they're going to know there's a lot of bodies on the ground. Charlie, Len, we've got less than an hour, maybe a lot less. I want you to get one driver from each vehicle, the one they came in, and try and disperse them as best you can. Park them up and down the roadside, move them up into Sunset itself and park them on the street, pull them off the road and cover them with brush, anything you can think of. If you can't conceal the transport, at least disperse them so it will be harder for the gunships to destroy them from the air. Ricky, get together with Chas and Gill and Sherry. You company commanders are going to have to sort out the arrangements for a quick E&E. One driver per team who knows where the vehicle is parked, and he or she

stays with that team and guides them back to the vehicle when we disperse, which we'll have to do fast, because we're going to have helicopter gunships chasing us. God *damn*, this is going to be a mess! Anyone loses their vehicle or gets separated from their crew, you're going to have to un-ass the area as best you can."

"I wish I could have brought boat," said Dalen with a sigh. When he had heard about the impending naval assault, Dalen had desperately tried to convert his famous "longship" into a torpedo boat by working up some brass torpedoes patterned after the old 1907 German pattern that had sunk the *Lusitania*, but there simply hadn't been enough time to get the technology working. "We must make this boat!" he said, slamming his fist into his palm. "We need Northwest Volunteer Navy!"

"After this I'm sure you'll be able to get the okay from the Army Council," said Hatfield. "Len, you and Ricky supervise the dispersal of the vehicles under the best concealment you can. Then get everybody back here in the parking lot in twenty minutes, and I'll tell them where I want them. One quick thing I need to know." Hatfield stepped forward and called out to the Volunteers along the roadway, "How many of you comrades did service in Iraq or anywhere else in the Middle East? Raise your hands!" At least 50 hands went up.

"Then you'll know how to dig into sand. You guys who raised your hands, you stay here. For the rest of you, I need one person per team to report back to the vehicle you came here in. You will be dispersing them so they're not sitting all in a row as targets like it was an airfield at Pearl Harbor. Remember where your vehicle is parked and make sure you can find your way back, which you will almost certainly have to do under fire. You all wanted a shot, fine, you'll get it, but so will Fattie. Charlie and Captain Dalen, come with me. I need to recon that beach and see where we can set up firing positions." Zack looked up at the bright red light of Mars, just now setting below the dark Pacific, but still visible even in the growing light. In his mind he spoke to something he vaguely thought of as God. *I have only one thing to ask of you*, he thought. *Send them here to us. Don't let them land somewhere else and catch us from behind, or from above. If these noble men and women must die, let them die as Aryans. Facing their enemy.*

* * *

"Wheeeee!" called out Sue Loomis as she was lowered over the side on a steel cable wound from a boom winch, down into the motor launch bobbing

against the *Ventura's* port side hull. The launch did indeed resemble a large rubber life raft, but she had an outboard motor and proper folding seats, the latest in collapsible maritime technology, and in her packed state was not too much larger than the 270-horsepower outboard engine. The pontoons were bright orange, and since Fox News had paid for the little vessel and the men to operate her, she flew a Fox News pennant from her rounded bow. The launch had even been given a cutesy unofficial name, the *Slitherydee*.

It was 5:15 a.m. now. The sun wasn't actually up yet, but since it was only a few days past the longest day of the year, it was well light enough to see that it was going to be a clear day, not necessarily a given on the north coast of Oregon where even the cool summer was often cloudy and overcast. "Looks like Rolly has lucked out on the weather, and he'll get his grand entrance into the Great White Homeland by the light of the rising sun," remarked Hastings to Sue as he dropped down into the *Slitherydee* and detached the harness from his life jacket.

"That all of you?" called the sailor on the outboard.

"Aye aye, skipper," replied Hastings. The rubber boat contained almost twenty people, journalists and camera crews, and there was still plenty of legroom. The crewman fired up the outboard motor and the second sailor on the bow cast off the line. Hastings began to sing the theme song from *Gilligan's Island,* and all the others joined in. "*Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale, a tale of a fateful trip, that started from this tropic port aboard this tiny ship . . .*"

The NVA men on the beach had a good view of the line of vessels that now lay about a mile off Sunset Beach, the transports hove to and resting at anchor in a column with the *Higby* bringing up the rear and about five hundred yards inshore to their starboard. From the beach Zack Hatfield, Charlie Washburn, and Len Ekstrom crouched in the camouflaged excavation they had made, watching the invaders through binoculars, screened by the waving sea oats that had been re-inserted and packed in the sand piled in front of the trench. Rather than rely on cell phones, Len had come up with enough field radio sets so that Zack could speak to his four company commanders and also to the five marksmen armed with the .50-caliber BMG rifles, who were designated by the code name Big Boppers. The Volunteers were dispersed behind the dunes along the beach over 400-yard front, by company, with A Company under Lieutenant Ricky Parmenter on the right dug in around a wooden observation deck that jutted out of the small scrubby growth of wooded area that was Sunset Beach Park, and D Company under Lieutenant Sherry Tomczak on the far left. The .50-caliber men and everyone else with

the right weapon and good enough to be classified as a sniper were hunkered down in hollowed-out firing posts along the crest of the dunes, the rest of the force lying prone on the eastern slope, sheltered from observation from the ships, but easily visible to any helicopter that should fly over.

Captain Ragnar Redbeard and Big Nick were just out of sight around the bend of the access road, with the War Wagon. Dalen had been so bitterly disappointed in his failure to rig up a torpedo boat in time that Hatfield had promised him a run on the beach to try out the War Wagon's Ma Deuce when some targets became available. Dalen and Big Nick had inserted a pole with a large blue and yellow Swedish flag into a socket on the rear of the Humvee.

Volunteer Holland Winnicki low-crawled up to the command post, cradling his M-16 in his arms. He was wearing U.S. Army surplus desert camo fatigues, a bush hat, and a blue white and green armband around his left arm. "Looks like you're one of the few of us properly attired for this terrain," commented Zack.

"I figured I'd better put this on so none of our comrades make any mistake when it hits the fan," said Winnicki, pointing to the Tricolor armband. "You wanted to see me, sir?"

"Yep," said Zack. "You're a former Navy man, right?"

"Yes, sir. Ten years on shipboard, carriers and frigates, and three with the DNF in Iraq," said Winnicki.

"Tell me what you make of that warship?" asked Zack. "Especially anything you know about the weapons systems on board." He handed Winnicki the binoculars. The ex-sailor took them and put them to his eyes, giving the enemy vessel a long look from head to stern.

"That's the *Higby*, sir," he said. "Hamilton class Coast Guard cutter, which is the largest type. Hamilton class vessels are pretty potent. That's a Mark 75, 76-millimeter auto-loading repeating cannon in that globe turret on the bow. It has a computerized fire control system that can be operated from the bridge. Can't remember the max rate of fire, but it can lob a shell every second easy, and those HE rounds can punch a hole in pretty much anything that floats. On the stern there in the revolving column turret is a Mark 15 20-millimeter Close In Weapons System. It can fire 3500 rounds per minute. It's for use against attacking aircraft, and it's also got a computerized fire control system that synchs with the ship's radar. It can be used for ground support as well, of course. It can chew up this beach into talcum powder, I know that much. I've seen them used on shore targets in Iran and Gaza. They're no fun if you're on the receiving end. You've also got two 25-mm chain guns, electric Gatling guns, on the port and starboard side."

"Can these dunes stop those rounds?" asked Hatfield.

"Dirt will stop almost anything, sir, but this is loose sand, which is fine for small arms cover, but that heavy stuff on *Higby* can literally blow the cover away. The 20-mils and 25-mils, yes, for a short time, until the dunes are literally cut down to size, leveled. Those 76-millimeter artillery shells will blow holes in them and maybe bury some of our guys, plus the concussion."

"Crap," said Hatfield. "I'd ask about vulnerable spots, but we don't have anything to fire at it. We couldn't hit it at that range with an RPG, and even if we could it would be like throwing ping-pong balls at the damned thing. Okay, Volunteer, back to your post." Winnicki crawled away, and once he was out of line of sight from the American ships, he stood up and ran back down the line to rejoin his team on the dunes.

"Lucky this is only going to be a shoot and scoot, if a big one," said Charlie.

"How many of us will that ship kill before we can E&E?" muttered Hatfield glumly. "And where the hell are those choppers? Are they going to take us from behind?"

"Let's wait for them to come in, pick off their point men and then book," said Lennart. "Only you know, Zack, looking at them now, I'm wondering how the hell they're planning on landing? Those two look like cruise ships, almost. They won't be able to get too much closer in for fear of running aground, and that other looks like a ferry pulled by tugboats, of all things. How are they planning on getting their men on shore? It would have to be in boats or landing craft of some kind. Maybe they're going to climb down cargo nets on the sides like the Marines in the South Pacific, but it would have to be into some kind of boat."

"Meaning they'll be coming ashore in small and more manageable numbers," said Zack thoughtfully. "We can outgun them on the ground, at least at first until that warship opens up, hit them from several directions at once with the old Shock and Awe trick, although with their battleship and their copters that won't do us much good. Okay, how's this for a plan? We take out the first boat that hits our land, just enough to get some of their blood on the sand and send our message. Then we skedaddle, hopefully before that big boy can do us too much damage. We break up into teams and head for our E & E points."

"I don't see anyone on shore," said Sue from Reuters as the launch with the media people headed through the breakers.

"What did you expect, a welcoming party?" asked Seth Goldstein. The first golden rays of the sun were starting to glow on the eastern horizon.

"I was hoping to see Dawson Zucchino with his thermos. But it looks empty," said Sue. "I didn't know there were any stretches of open beach like this left anywhere in the country."

"This coast has never been really all that favored by retirees," said Mark Hastings. "The water is simply too cold, as we're about to find out when we get out, and the wind is too chilly even in July."

"What the hell is that?" said Zack, scanning the launch with his binoculars. "A rubber boat or dinghy with an outboard motor. Big one, maybe twenty people on board. I don't see a single Fattie or soldier in the bunch. I don't even think those are regular swabbies piloting and steering that boat."

"Whoever they are, they're coming right for us," said Charlie.

"I don't want to waste six IEDs and half a ton of explosives on a rubber boat," said Zack. "But if they come up here they're going to walk right past us and we'll have to be satisfied with wasting them, whoever they are, then bugging out."

"Without blowing the mines?" asked Len. "After we spent all night planting the damned things?"

"Let's just see what they're up to," said Zack. He spoke into his radio. "This is Mountain Man. Whoever those people are in that rubber ducky, they're not hostiles, not armed ones anyway. Hold your fire, maintain your positions and maintain concealment. Repeat, do not fire unless I order it."

"High tide in thirty minutes," said Charlie Washburn. "Why the hell are these people landing at high tide?"

"On the up side, they'll be in closer range of our long arms than if it were low," pointed out Len.

"Vehicles," said Hatfield. "They're going to be landing heavy vehicles and if they rolled ashore in the wet sand at low tide they'd be more likely to get stuck. I'll bet you that's why they towed that ferry up here like it was a garbage scow. It's full of all their motor transport. Damn, if there was only some way we could take that ship out!"

The radio crackled briefly. "Mountain Man, this is Cowboy," came Parmenter's voice. "Helicopters sighted, southbound, maybe two miles out to sea, three or four thousand feet up."

"Copy, Cowboy. How many?"

"Hard to tell yet, sir, but over a dozen, I'd say."

"Roger, Cowboy," said Hatfield. "Keep me posted. Mountain Man out. They're not coming in over land? Why not, for God's sake?" he wondered aloud.

"Maybe they're taking the scenic route," suggested Washburn.

"That doesn't make sense," said Hatfield, shaking his head.

"You have *got* to be kidding me!" snapped Lennart Ekstrom, the binoculars to his face.

"What, Len?"

"They're on the beach and they're unloading stuff from the boat. *Television cameras!*" spluttered Len indignantly. "Those are goddamned reporters!"

"Makes sense," said Washburn. "They want to film the landing of ZOG's finest in living color, in time for Mr. and Mrs. America to watch it all at their breakfast table before they head off to their wonderful careers shoveling the Jews' shit. They did that in Somalia in '92, sent the media in before the troops, so they could film the Marines storming ashore on an empty beach."

"And it never occurred to them at all that we might be waiting for them?" whispered Hatfield, a slow rage beginning to bubble and boil deep inside him. "They just assumed that they could stroll right in here, and we would just let them, that we would never raise a hand to defend ourselves or our land and our homes?"

"They think this is Iraq in 2003," said Len.

"Why should they?" asked Washburn flatly. "Until three years ago, white men never resisted before. I still don't think they can wrap their minds around it."

"Dear God, what breathtaking arrogance! What contempt they must feel for us!" In a black, cold, deadly rage he picked up his radio. "This is Mountain Man to all Straw Bosses and Big Boppers. I assume you all see what we're seeing. Everybody stay down and under cover. We don't want them to make us. If any of them get curious and wander up toward your positions, try to take them down silently. When the shit hits the fan, kill those media lice. All of them." He got a brief chorus of "Roger that."

"They're setting up their gear," said Ekstrom. There was a brief whirr out on the beach as one of Leonard Posner's crew started up the portable generator. "They're unfolding stands for lights, it looks like, setting up cameras on tripods. And look *where* they're setting up, Zack! 70 yards right in front of us! That must mean that one of the boats will be landing right on top of our daisy chain! You were right!"

"Looks like we'll get to pop the top and you can see the results of your long night's work after all, Len. I wonder if they've got a live feed?" Zack asked himself out loud. "Maybe we can give Mr. and Mrs. America a show that will make them choke on their breakfast Eggos."

"Why do they need those lights?" asked Washburn curiously. "Sun's going to be up in a couple of minutes."

The reporters needed the lights to do their preliminary lead-ins. Posner was up first, of course. Fox was always the ranking news network in any journalistic pecking order since it was the official government news medium. Even his most lukewarm fans, meaning all the other newshounds and hens, had to admire the way Posner slid right into character. He was wearing a canvas windbreaker and canvas trousers, L.L. Bean boots and a plaid shirt open just enough to show his hairy chest, and although his makeup girl had just finished with him no one would never know he had a speck of powder or rouge on his face. The sea wind tousled his hair, he looked rugged and relaxed, and his voice was deep and authoritative. "I am standing here on a deserted beach somewhere on the Oregon coast, where in a few minutes General Roland Rollins, officer commanding of the Federal Anti-Terrorist Police Organization, will be landing with a large force of highly trained and motivated men and women who are determined to take a big bite out of racist terror today. In a stunning and daring move, General Rollins has taken to the high seas in a brilliant flanking movement in order to insert some major American muscle right into the heart of NVA bandit country, a part of the United States that has seen little law and less order for the past several years. It's a part of our country where people of color, Latino people, gay people, and anyone whose heart isn't filled with hate have been afraid to set foot for a long time. This is the stomping ground of the self-styled Captain Zack Hatfield and his Wild Bunch. Well, we're going to see just how wild 'Captain' Hatfield and his bunch are. We'll be bringing you the landing live as soon as General Rollins steps ashore. Back to you in the studio, Tom."

"Mountain Man, this is Cowboy," came Parmenter's voice on the radio. "You should be able to see the choppers now. They're coming in."

"Great," sighed Hatfield. "Maybe they're going to secure the landing zone after all, but they're just late."

"I see them," said Ekstrom, looking through the field glasses. "Yes, they're heading toward the shore."

"Straw Bosses and Big Boppers, this is Mountain Man," said Hatfield into the radio. "When those choppers come in over the beach, if any of them is low enough and you know you can get a hit, take the shot. Ragnar, that little toy you guys have in my ride might come in useful there. Whizz Bangers, if there are any boats in the water and you're sure you can hit them, give 'em a rocket in their pocket. Once the choppers see us, we're going to have to beat feet. On my command word *freedom* you open up on those media down there, terminate them and anything else you can hit, and then proceed to E&E. Confirm."

"Copy, Mountain Man, roger that, Mountain Man," came the confirmations.

"The choppers are circling," said Washburn.

"What?" said Hatfield. He snapped the binoculars up to his eyes.

"They're in what looks like some kind of holding pattern a mile out just beyond the ships," said Ekstrom. "Just circling."

"What in God's name are they doing?" asked Hatfield, flabbergasted.

"What in God's name are they doing?" asked Coast Guard Lieutenant Donald Hacker on the bridge of the *Higby*, staring at fourteen black helicopters, Blackhawks and Apaches and transports, that were flying in circles off to the port side like children's toys, round and round.

Captain Sandoval turned to him. "I told you before, Number One, General Rollins wants them to do a flyover just as he steps ashore through the surf," she said. "They're waiting for the *Ventura* to beach which should be—ah, there she goes." The ferryboat was under way, turning hard to starboard.

"I still can't quite wrap my mind around this business of deliberately running a large vessel aground for a photo-op, Captain," said Hacker. "Especially at high tide where she'll be stranded for half the day. *Ventura* is not some World War Two LST. What if the tugs can't pull her off the beach after she's unloaded?"

"Then we just leave her there," said Sandoval. "The hulk will become a national monument one day. I guess you're just not media-savvy, Number One."

"I guess not, ma'am," agreed Hacker.

"That ferry is coming in to shore," Ekstrom told Hatfield in the dugout.

"How are they going to get their vehicles off?" asked Charlie.

"My guess, they're just going to run the whole damned ship right up on the beach and lower the ramp," said Hatfield.

"At high tide?" asked Ekstrom. "Stranding the ship?"

"Hey, when you've got all the money in the world, you can afford to break some of your toys," said Hatfield. "But why are those choppers just loafing around out there? What the hell are these assholes up to? This doesn't make any sense. They *can't* really be this careless!"

"Have you considered the obvious?" asked Washburn. "Have you considered that they may just be bird-brained, stupid and incompetent, and they haven't got a clue what the fuck they're doing? This government and the Pentagon have been fighting a bunch of barefoot brown ragheads in the Middle East for almost a generation now, and they still haven't figured out how to beat *them.* We're ruled by idiots."

"What happens in a system when you promote people into important jobs and positions based on the color of their skin or the fact that they've got tits on 'em, instead of on their ability to do the job?" asked Ekstrom rhetorically. "You get disaster after disaster, like in the Middle East. Like here. Zack, we may have more of a chance to do some damage here than you think. Apparently that vehicle ferry is coming in first, and coming in alone."

"My God, the whole thing is a sound byte! It's nothing but one big photo-op to these people!" gasped Zack in sudden comprehension. "I'll bet you dollars to donuts that they're going to lower the ferry ramp, and the first person to step off will be that nigger Congressman Roland Rollins, grinning like an egg-suck dog, and behind him will come all kinds of marching men and Strykers and Hummers, and right about then those damned copters will come flying overhead! I'd heard that chimp was planning on challenging Chelsea Clinton for the presidency, and this is going to be his first campaign appearance, stepping onto our land like he was some kind of monkoid Jesus!"

"I believe Custer was planning on running for president as well," commented Washburn. "We're a funny-looking bunch of Indians, though."

Hatfield picked up his radio. "Big Boppers, when that thing hits the shore a ramp is going to drop and almost certainly, the monkoid Roland Rollins is going to exit the vessel. Keep your sights on him and all five of you open up on my command." He got five copies. The men sounded excited. Washburn chuckled. "What's so funny?" asked Hatfield.

"I'm thinking about seeing Cat Lockhart's face when I run all this by him, and him not being here!" Washburn replied.

While the media party waited idly for the fast approaching *Ventura*, Seth Goldstein was growing increasingly uncomfortable. "Hey man, I gotta drain the snake," he said to Hastings. "If I take a whizz in the surf here will you promise not to film it?"

"No promises," laughed Hastings. "We are already working on our outtakes and bloopers reel for this shoot. Go up behind the dunes."

"It's too far to walk," complained Goldstein.

"So go down the beach and whip it out," Hastings told him. "I think we all know you're circumcised, Seth. I won't tell the camera crew. Honest Injun."

Goldstein looked at him and said "Bullshit, you won't," and he started shuffling toward the access road entrance.

On the bridge of the *Higby* Lieutenant JG Day told Executive Officer Lieutenant Hacker, "One of the shore party is leaving the group, sir."

Hacker picked up the radio hand mike. "*Slitherydee*, this is Mama Bear. Who's that walking away from you and where is he going?"

The sailor with the radio came back after a moment. "That's the MTV guy, Mama Bear. He had to take a leak. Didn't want to do it on the beach since we have female personnel here."

"Okay, well, make sure you keep an eye on him." ordered Hacker.

"Keep an eye on him yourself, asshole, I ain't in the Navy no more," muttered the sailor, sticking the radio back into its holster and resuming his attempt to flirt with Leonard Posner's makeup girl.

"One of them is coming this way," said Ekstrom.

"Damn!" cursed Hatfield. "Hunker down, guys, maybe he won't see us."

Goldstein trudged up the apparently empty beach toward the roadway, looking for a nice concealed spot to urinate where his merry colleagues wouldn't film him and preserve it for the ages. He saw a low rise of sand and sea oats at the base of the right-hand berm that looked promising. He reached the mound, unzipped his trousers and unlimbered his circumcised *schwanze*, and stepped around the mound of sea oats preparatory to emptying his bladder. He looked down and saw three men in a shallow dugout pointing rifles at him, two Kalashnikovs and a Winchester. Goldstein's thick-lipped jaw dropped and he turned to run, but Zack Hatfield reached up, grabbed the protuberance at his waist and pulled him into the hole.

"What was that?" said Lieutenant Day suddenly, taking the binoculars down.

"What?" asked Hacker.

"I thought I saw something just now," said Day. "And that guy who went off by himself to take a piss is gone."

"We have no jurisdiction over civilian personnel, Lieutenant," snapped Captain Sandoval irritably. "They can relieve themselves where they want."

"Yes, ma'am," replied Day.

One of the men slapped his hand over Seth's mouth and the third grabbed and pinioned his arms. Goldstein tried to shriek in pain and terror. He recognized Hatfield, who leaned over him, studying Goldstein's camel face, his acned skin and fleshy nose and frizzy hair. "A Jew," Hatfield said, soft and low, his voice filled with loathing. "A goddamned Jew." Goldstein screamed under the iron hand clamped over his mouth and writhed in terror, knowing that the ancient enemy of his race was upon him and seeing doom in blue eyes as so many of his kind had done before, down through the ages. Hatfield leaned over and cupped Goldstein's round head in his hands, and whispered

the single word *"Dresden!"* in his ear before snapping his neck like a pretzel. Seth Goldstein kicked and flopped and shit and died. "We don't dare kick him out," said Hatfield. "He might be seen."

"Great, now we have to stand on a dead Jew with shit in his pants," groused Charlie.

There was a grinding noise from the beach as the S. S. *Ventura* ground ashore, piling up mounds of dripping sand like gigantic sand castles on either side of the bow. Zack studied the scene through his binoculars. "My God, they've fucked up again!" he hissed in amazement.

"What do you mean?" asked Ekstrom.

"The ship! Look at where it's come ashore!" said Hatfield, pointing through the sea oats. "I don't believe it! I just don't believe it!"

"Right on top of our Semtex IED, our main charge," said Ekstrom. "If the charge hasn't been too shaken up and it detonates, we can do enough damage to wreck the loading ramp, and they won't be able to get their vehicles off. Maybe we can even disable the whole ship!"

"That's not all," pointed out Charlie. "Check out the relative positions of the transport and the warship! Everybody to our right down to A Company in the park will have that big hunk of ferryboat *between* them and the cutter's guns."

Zack snatched up his radio. "Queen of Hearts and Pigpen, this is Mountain Man. Listen up. You need to change positions. Get your people down on the ground on the east side of the berm and then move north, cross the road, and take up positions reinforcing Alpha and Bravo companies. This does *not* apply to Big Boppers and other marksmen. You guys have to stay in place where you are, because we have to cover the kill zone from every angle, so stay low in your blinds and try not to get spotted. Cowboy and Guitar Man, get somebody down to the roadway and guide Charlie and Delta Companies in to your locations. We need to try and keep that ship that just grounded itself *between* us and the battlewagon, to act as a shield. You got all that, comrades?"

"Got it," said Sherry Tomczak. "Delta on our way. Queen of Hearts out."

"Roger, Mountain Man," said Parmenter.

"We're running out of time," said Hatfield. "That monkoid is going to be strutting his stuff off that ship any minute now and once it's show time we need to be shooting, not running around in the backfield. *Move!*"

The media people on the beach had backed up a bit and were repositioning their cameras. Posner was talking on his phone with someone inside the

vessel. Sue Loomis looked around in awe and pleasure as the golden rays of the rising sun suddenly lit up the beach in soft warm amber light. "Well, I have to admit this will be an impressive byte," she said. "I might even vote for Rollins myself."

"What's the hold-up?" asked Bob Baker.

"Waiting on Fox and CNN live satellite feeds, and once we get those we have to give the copters about four minutes notice," explained Hastings. "Ah, okay. There was go. We have live feed. Cue the choppers, Leonard?" There was a grinding noise of metal on metal as the loading ramp of the *Ventura* began to slowly lower itself toward the surf.

"The ship's loading ramp is starting to come down," said Hatfield into his radio. "Let's move it, boys and girls."

"Cue the choppers," said Leonard Posner. The three minute delay waiting on the helicopters' arrival gave the NVA just barely enough time to move off down the far side of the dunes, trot across the road, and then take up new firing positions on the north side of the road, being careful not to be seen. Not that any of the media party were even looking back toward the dunes; all cameras and eyes were on the slowly descending ramp.

"Set," came the voices of the Third Battalion company commanders.

"Choppers coming inshore, Captain," said Washburn, looking through his binoculars.

Zack spoke into the radio. "Okay, listen up, Straw Bosses, and pass this on to your troops. I'd lay bets and give odds that bubble-lip Rollins will be first out. After you Big Fifty guys waste him I'm going to pop the top on the daisy chain, after which we open up. But no Mad Minute. Mark your targets, aim, and make every shot count, because this thing may well go on for longer than we anticipated and I don't want us to run out of ammo. Big Boppers, after you take down that nigger, engage the copters. Try to hit a rotor gear housing or some other vulnerable spot. A .50-cal BMG round can bring down a whirlybird if you hit right, plus if they know they're being shot at by fifties, they'll bob and weave and get up high to get out of range. But for now keep your scopes on that beach and lock in on Rollins the minute he shows his nappy head. Fire on my command."

The roar and flap and whuppa whuppa of the slowly approaching helicopters could be heard above the surf now. The ramp was down. Suddenly a series of large stereophonic speakers mounted on the decks of the Ventura crashed into a thunderous opening with full brass, followed by the thousand voices of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the Coming of the Lord,
He is trampling out the vintage where the Grapes of Wrath are stored,
He has loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword,
His truth is marching on!

"Aaand . . . . cue General Rollins!" shouted Leonard Posner. Two columns of FATPO men in full body armor, wearing their almost black blue serge Kevlar and cloth and armed with M-16s and light machine guns and grenade launchers, tumbled out of the *Ventura's* hold. They formed two files, and between them stepped General Roland Rollins, a huge and powerfully built, very black man with a medium Afro and blinding white teeth.

Rollins was wearing his full FATPO uniform of blue serge, but he was also wearing across his chest and torso a bright red sash of some kind, and over his left pocket sparkled a riotous array of campaign ribbons, six rows of them, none of which Rollins had earned. He had selected them because he liked their colors. They included every Middle Eastern campaign medal, the Vietnam Service medal, a Purple Heart with cluster, a British Distinguished Flying Cross from the Second World War, the Navy submarine service ribbon, and a black ribbon with a black fist in a silver heart that he had designed and made himself. On his right chest were several full medals, including a Bronze Star, a Silver Star, the French Legion of Honor and the Catholic Order of the Sacred Heart. His advisers had finally persuaded him not to wear a Congressional Medal of Honor around his neck. Instead they gave him instead a large jewel-encrusted Maltese Cross of blue and black borrowed from a Hollywood movie set in 19th century Vienna, which meant nothing at all. Some costume designer had made it up. His chest was further covered with gold braided cord and lanyards, again meaning nothing. He was wearing his FATPO uniform cap, dark wrap-around shades, and a corncob pipe was jutting from his mouth.

Charlie Washburn stared at this apparition through his binoculars. "What on earth? Is that Idi Amin or Douglas MacArthur?" he asked, fascinated.

Rollins strode forth energetically through the surf, which reached up to his knees as he stepped off the ramp. His FATPO escorts slogged soggily along with him on either side. The rousing chorus of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* thundered overhead. "Ready!" snapped Hatfield into the radio. To the surprise of both Ekstrom and Washburn, Hatfield stepped up out of the dug out and walked several paces toward the beach, upright, totally visible.

All cameras and almost 200 million pairs of eyes around the world were now turned on Roland Rollins as he came to the edge of the beach, took the pipe from his mouth and placed his hands on his hips, bemedaled and beribboned chest thrust forth. He had elected to fracture not one but two famous white men, MacArthur and Julius Caesar, and steal their words as closely as he could. Roland Rollins announced to the world, "I have come, I will see, and I shall conquer!"

Higher up on Sunset Beach, Zack Hatfield raised his radio to his lips and shouted into the handset the command to fire. *"Freedom!"*

200 million viewers around the globe saw the body of Roland Rollins torn to pieces as five .50-caliber slugs smashed into him, and sent him twirling and whirling head over heels high into the air like a popped balloon, knocking him into the sea where he floated like a sack of gaudy, dirty laundry.

* * *

Roland Rollins died at 5:45 a.m. exactly, or 0545 hours to use military time, just as the golden sunrise flooded the beach with glowing amber light. Among the 200 million viewers who saw him die were Captain Meryl Sandoval and Lieutenant Donald Hacker, who were monitoring the raw feed transmission on the bridge of the *Higby*. Both of them stared at the screen as Rollins whirled away into the air flapping like a scarecrow in the wind. Simultaneously they heard a popping and snapping rattle from the shore, almost like a big sheet of cardboard being shredded. On the TV monitor they could see sparks flying on the steel of the ship's hull and high spatters of sand and water as bullets popped into the beach and the surf. Then the camera was knocked over and all they saw was a stretch of beach and the frothing edge of the incoming tide, with the occasional spurting round strike zipping and splatting. About one minute later a dead hand flopped in front of the camera; there was no way to tell who it belonged to.

0546 hours: "Shore party reports receiving ground fire, Captain," Lieutenant Hacker said with a snappy salute that only a dunce would not have recognized as sarcastic contempt. "Looks like there was something waiting for us on that beach besides sand dollars after all, ma'am. And you sailed right into it. Congratulations."

Sandoval had sense enough to keep her cool, understanding that right now she needed to get out of this crisis before devoting the rest of her career to exculpating herself and nailing Hacker's hide to the hatchway door. She snatched up the radio handset, and called for the bridge of the beleaguered

ferry. "*Ventura*, this is Captain Sandoval," she said. "Captain Mulvaney, what is your situation?"

"Our situation is there's a lot of people on the beach shooting at us," replied Mulvaney in a dry voice. "Mostly small arms so far, although someone just blew off the bow capstan with an RPG." Sandoval and Hacker could hear clangs and ricochets, and they could tell that the bridge was taking bullets. "Not that we'll need any of our anchors, since for some strange reason I seem to have deliberately run my own ship aground, against all common sense and thousands of years of basic seamanship. Now I wonder what black jackass ordered me to do that? And what Coast Guard she-jackass wouldn't back me up when I tried to explain to him what a stupid thing that was to do?"

"Recriminations later, Captain," snapped Sandoval, fighting the rising panic in her mind. Surely *she* wouldn't be blamed for this? "What do you want us to do to assist you, *Ventura*?"

"What do I want you to do?" came Mulvaney's voice, heavy with disbelief. *"What do I want you to . . . ?"* Hacker could almost see the veins on Mulvaney's head and neck bursting with rage, and he hoped his own were not quite so visible. "Well, *Captain* Sandoval," Mulvaney continued, obviously making a major effort to get a grip on himself, "Let's think about this. Armed insurgents are shooting at my ship and the people on it. Since thanks to your boneheaded orders we can't get under way and get the hell out of range, and seeing as how you have an armed combat vessel sitting there with all kinds of gun-type thingies that go bang on board, do you think it might be possible, ma'am, for you to, ah, how can I put this? Maybe *shoot at those motherfuckers on the beach?*"

"I believe it is customary to return fire in military situations, ma'am," said Hacker with a deadpan straight face.

"Oh, for God's sake, put Hacker on!" roared Captain Mulvaney's voice from the radio. Hacker grabbed the hand mike away from the stunned Sandoval without asking her permission. He figured as the senior white male on board he was going to get court-martialed anyway, so he might as well try and save the situation while he was at it.

"Derek, this is Don," he said into the radio. "Can you tell where it's coming from and give me any idea how many of them there are?"

"No idea, Don, but there are a *lot* of the bastards," said Mulvaney. "Well over a hundred if there's a single one. Light weapons mostly, a lot of AKs by the sound of them, but also Mike Sixteens and at least a few LMGs of some kind, plus RPGs and God knows what else. Most of it seems to be coming from the dune line about 100 yards in, 45-degree angle or so off the port

bow. Can't see any of them. They must be dug in pretty good. Some of the FATPO guys are returning fire from the deck with their own small arms, so we're keeping their heads down, but stuck on the goddamned beach like this we're just sitting here taking it. Even if you could get the tugs in, by the time we got the cables back up and secured, under fire, they couldn't pull us off because by then the tide will have turned and we'll be too high and dry. You need to get those guns of yours going and sweep this beach, get Jerry Reb to back off, but you'll need to get clear of our stern so you can get a shot at them."

0547 hours: "Sound general quarters!" screamed Meryl Sandoval into the ship's public address system.

"Ah, ma'am, the ship's company has been at general quarters for the past twenty minutes," Lieutenant JG Day reminded her. "The drill, remember?"

"Well open fire, then!" shrieked Sandoval.

"Open fire on what, ma'am?" asked Lieutenant Day.

"They're using the *Ventura* itself as a shield, trying to keep her between us and them," said Hacker grimly. "There don't seem to be any hostiles on the south side of the beach. We have to clear *Ventura* and then knock them back off the shoreline. Helmsman, ahead slow. Fire control, ship's gun stand by."

"Wait, you have to bring up the live shells from the magazine first," insisted Sandoval.

"The Mark 75 is already loaded with live shells," said Hacker. The resultant screaming match over Hacker's insubordination could probably have been heard on shore had it not been for the gunfire and explosions.

Day interrupted. "Ma'am, Air Dog One is calling. Colonel Westerbrook wants to know if we need assistance."

"Yes, we damned well need assistance!" snapped Hacker. "Tell him to get his gunships in here and start pounding that damned beach!"

"What do you think you're doing?" screeched Sandoval. "I'm in command now that General Rollins is . . ."

"Deflated?" said Hacker brutally. "Very well, ma'am, we've got air support standing by. What do you suggest they do?"

"Tell them to hold their position!" ordered Sandoval.

"What? *Why,* for God's sake?" demanded Hacker, astounded.

"We don't know how many of the enemy there are, or where they are!" yelled Sandoval. The bridge crew all stared at her.

"No, ma'am, we don't," said Hacker gently, wondering if the captain was on the brink of some kind of hissy fit. "If you'll recall, that's why I suggested

that we recon the landing zone from the air beforehand. That is why we need to get some choppers in the air over the beach, and look down and *see* how the hell many of them there are, and where they are."

"Oh," said the captain, suddenly acutely aware of the fact that she was screwing up and everyone knew it. "You're right of course, Lieutenant. Tell Colonel Westerbrook to send in his gunships to support the *Ventura*."

0548 hours: On the beach most of the media party had gone down in the first hail of NVA bullets, as per Hatfield's orders, and were now either lying very still on the sand in sodden red puddles or crawling along blindly like squashed and bleeding beetles. Hastings and Bob Baker and several camera crew members were killed outright in the first fusillade. Sue Loomis was hit twice in the back and neck. She tried to crawl out of the line of fire for about thirty yards, and then passed out on her stomach with her face in a small tidal depression, that was slowly filling up with sea water as the tide completed its advance. She eventually drowned before she could bleed to death.

Leonard Posner, to give him fair due, died while trying to do his job. He jerked the camera back up into a standing position on its tripod, leveled it and made sure it was on, and then stepped in front of it with a microphone, his face ghastly. "This is Leonard Posner on Sunset Beach in Oregon. Just now the world was shocked and horrified to witness the death of General Roland Rollins at the hand of the fascist beasts, who are now firing at the men and women of the FATPO and the S. S. *Ventura* from entrenched positions along the beach here. Somehow or other we have been lured into a bloody ambush. There are bullets flying all around me, but the brave men and women of FATPO are resisting and preparing to . . ." The world would never know what Posner claimed the brave men and women of FATPO were about to do, because at that moment a .50-caliber BMG slug decapitated him, and his headless blood-gushing corpse slid down out of the camera's view like a special effect from a zombie movie.

0549 hours: Inside the vehicle bay of the *Ventura*, FATPO Captain Melvin Rogers from Tulsa, Oklahoma crouched behind one of the armored Strykers, looking out and trying to see what was going on outside on the beach. Rogers was a former Marine and Pentecostal lay preacher. He had felt called by God to take up the sword of righteousness and kill his fellow white people in the Northwest in Jesus' name, so they would stop hating their fellow man. Now, looking around him, he saw that the ship and the decreasing number of FATPO troopers in his command were in serious danger. Two columns of vehicles had been queued up to roll down the ramp and onto the beach like parade floats after Rollins' spectacular advent. The second vehicle in the

left-hand column was an eighteen-wheeler, a full gasoline tanker, and it was exposed to small arms fire from the beach, a head-on shot or a ricochet or even worse, an RPG. "We've got to get that tanker truck off the ship," he yelled to Sergeant Leon Ramos. It did not occur to him to try and raise the ramp to shield the truck from the hail of gunfire, and in any case even if it had occurred to him, he didn't know how.

"Yeah, man, I see dat!" yelled back the Mexican. "If it goes up inside the deck here we'll be cooked like fajitas, man! But who's gonna be fucking stupid enough to drive a gas tanker right into a bunch of flying bullets, essay?"

Rogers didn't bother to inform Sergeant Ramos that "man" was not the correct form of address to an officer; he understood the situation was a bit informal. "I will," he said.

"A tracer slug punches through that tank and you gonna be one crispy critter, essay!" said Ramos disbelievingly.

"That doesn't matter," said Rogers. "When the Rapture comes, Jesus will take me up into the sky anyway. But someone has to go ahead of me, to get that Humvee out of the way so I can get the truck off the ship and away from here. Will you take the Humvee?"

"Sure, what the fuck, *vato*, might as well die out there in the fresh air as in here," said Ramos with a shrug.

0549:30 hours: In the scraped-out command post Hatfield was watching the fighting through binoculars, which consisted by this point of Volunteers behind the cover of the dunes and some of the trees in the little hiking park plinking away at anything they saw moving on the huge looming decks of the *Ventura*, as well as FATPO on the decks covering behind anything metal and spraying wild bursts of fire toward the sand dunes. He yelled into his radio, "Mark your targets, dammit, you guys! Straw Bosses, tell your people don't waste ammo! Fire only when you've got something to fire at! You're just making a lot of dents in the hull!"

"Can we toss out this damned dead Jew now? And when are you going to blow the daisy chain?" Charlie Washburn shouted in his ear.

"Affirmative on the kike toss, and I'll be popping the top to cover our disengage and E&E," Zack replied.

"And when will that be?" asked Ekstrom.

"When the copters arrive and open up on us, or else when that Coast Guard cutter quits fucking around and starts plastering us," said Zack. "What the hell are those swabbies doing out there? Taking a vote?" A black-painted Humvee driven by Sergeant Ramos came roaring down the ramp and onto the beach, rolling over a number of prone bodes of media and fallen FATPOs.

"Shit! They're bringing out their vehicles! They're going to charge us!" Hatfield yelled. On top of that, he heard the whuppa whuppa whuppa of helicopters coming in fast and low. "Choppers incoming!" Then there was an inarticulate shout from both Washburn and Ekstrom as an eighteen-wheeler drawing a long silver tank lurched rumbling and roaring out onto the ramp.

"That's it, Zack, that's perfect!" bellowed Washburn. "Do it! Blow it now!" Zack whipped out the cell phone and flipped it open. He said a quick and silent prayer that the detonation device fitted together by Len Ekstrom in the dark would work and that the charge hadn't been damaged or disconnected somehow by all the vibration, and he hit speed dial.

0550 hours: The earth and the sea shook beneath them all. Six huge explosions in a row hurled a massive, eccentrically shaped sheet of sand and water a hundred feet in the air. The *Ventura's* bow leaped into the air and the ship came crashing back down, an immense tear ripped into her belly that made her forever unseaworthy from that moment on. There would be no pulling her back out to sea now; Sunset Beach was her grave. The unsecured vehicles in her belly were tossed over one another like kiddie toys in a sandbox, and in many cases their fuel tanks ruptured and gushed gasoline and diesel fuel. The gasoline tanker flowered into a bright orange blossom and then a column of fire that leaped into the sky, wreathing the *Ventura's* forward decks in flame. Captain Melvin Rogers got his Rapture. He was called up into the sky to whatever Paradise awaits the brave but stupid, and hopefully he was not too displeased by what he found there.

The explosion sheared off part of a stainless steel railing from the *Ventura's* forward promenade deck and hurled it high and straight and fast into the air, ripping through the bottom of a FATPO Blackhawk helicopter that was flying over at just the wrong moment. The railing transfixed the body of Colonel Edward Westerbrook, the senior pilot commander of the entire FATPO corps, and pinned him to the back of his seat, killing him instantly. It also severed the control cables in the cockpit. The Blackhawk flipped over and arched downward, crashing and bursting into flames, hurling metal and still-twirling rotors up and down the beach. The other three gunships broke away in panic, also pelted with earth and debris from the IED explosions. One of the Apaches had a main rotor hit by shrapnel knocked off plumb, and it became hard to control; the pilot veered away to the north, radioing to the *Higby* that he would try for an emergency landing further down the beach out of the kill zone.

0550:15 hours: A number of secondary explosions of ammunition and vehicle fuel tanks began to detonate on the main car deck of the *Ventura*

as FATPO Humvees, trucks, and other items began to pop like a string of Chinese firecrackers. A number of burning FATPOs ran screaming out onto the beach, rolling in the surf to put themselves out. The NVA gunners in the dunes chopped them all down with bursts of rifle and machine gun fire. The Humvee driven by Ramos was still rolling around the beach like a scurrying beetle; an RPG round snaked out from the dunes in a sinuous vapor trail and smashed into its side. The Humvee was blown off its wheels, rolling over several times before coming to rest upside down in a tidal pool.

0550:30 hours: *"Madre de Dios*, what's that?" screamed Meryl Sandoval on the bridge of the *Higby.*

Hacker for once was at a loss for a snappy retort. "I don't know," he admitted. "But something big as hell just went up on board *Ventura.*"

"Jesus Christ, they brought down a Blackhawk!" shouted Day in amazement. "That's Westerbrook's bird!"

"Captain Mulvaney, do you read?" Hacker spoke urgently into his radio. "Are you all right? What the hell happened, Derek?"

"Damned if I know," came Mulvaney's reply, his voice shaky and dazed. "If I didn't know better I'd say we were torpedoed, or hit a mine. Whatever it was blew the ship's bow into the air and we landed on our side. We're listing to port, almost twenty degrees, God damn it!"

"Damage?" demanded Hacker.

"Sensors say we've got fire on the car deck and the crew reports say we have fire on the forward decks," said Mulvaney. "I'd order abandon ship, but those maniacs on shore are still trying to kill us. Is that beaner bitch planning on giving us *any* supporting fire at all? Or are you guys just going to eat popcorn and watch the show?"

"We're coming astern of you now, Derek," said Hacker. "One more minute and we'll be able to sight in the 76-millimeter and the starboard chain gun on the enemy positions, and clear that beach of hostiles. Then you can evacuate."

"I think I just did," said Mulvaney. "Don't worry, the boy will stand on the burning deck. Now *fuck up those goots* for me!"

"My pleasure. Out. Mr. Day, can you make out the enemy?"

"Uh, just a few muzzle flashes in the dunes, sir," said Day, looking through his binoculars. "They're dug in real good, looks like."

"You learn how in Iraq," said Hacker. He looked at Captain Sandoval. "You see, ma'am, these people we're today fighting aren't white trash gangsters and thugs like you said. They're Americans, a lot of them veterans of this goddamned war without end that Jug-Ears started back in '01. A few years

ago I was fighting on the same side as some of these men. I may even have met some of them over there. They know what they're doing, and your underestimating them out of politically correct arrogance has gotten a lot of people killed today."

0551 hours: "Fire control?" said Sandoval.

"Ma'am?" said the E-5 at the console.

"Open fire!" she shouted.

"Uh, open fire where and how, ma'am?" asked the rating, rolling his eyes.

Hacker stepped forward. "Fire control officer, Mark 75 gun, at 800 yards starboard range, one-second interval fire, lay down a moving barrage along the bottom of the dune line, starboard to port from ninety degrees to seventy-five degrees and back again." He clicked the intercom. "Starboard chain gun."

"Sir!" came the response from the sailor who was strapped in behind the multi-barreled machine gun.

"On my command see if you can shave about a foot off the top of those sand dunes, ninety degrees to seventy-five degrees, then back again, until I tell you to cease fire."

"Aye, sir."

"Gunners, sight in."

"Sighted, sir," said the petty officer.

"Fire!" shouted Hacker. The *Higby's* single automatic cannon barrel boomed and flame spat from its muzzle, and the starboard Gatling gun began to spew heavy 25-millimeter slugs onto the shore, tracer rounds leaping from the rolling multiple barrels. Shell bursts on the beach hurled mushrooms of sand into the air.

0551:15 hours: Zack Hatfield shouted, "Okay, move out!" into his radio. "Plan B, Straw Bosses, like we talked about!" The Volunteers hastily abandoned their foxholes and impromptu firing blinds as the Coast Guard shells started slamming into the sand around them, pelting back away toward the road.

On the bridge of the *Higby*, Hacker heard on the radio "Mama Bear, this is Air Dog Six. I see them, they're on the move! Must be a couple of hundred of them, moving in and out among the trees and the dunes. They're abandoning their positions on the north side of the *Ventura* and they're moving south. I see RPGs and some belt-fed LMGs, and there seem to be some vehicles on a road leading up to the main highway that have people in back with LMGs and at least one Ma Deuce on a Humvee, looks like that character Hatfield's famous ride he's supposed to roll around town in."

"Air Dog Six, are the hostiles departing the area?" asked Hacker.

"Negative, Mama Bear. They're crossing the road and looks like they're covering down in the dunes on the south side of *Ventura* so they can keep on blasting away at her. I'll rocket their asses."

"Roger that, Air Dog Six."

"Why the hell aren't they running away?" Sandoval wondered out loud.

0552 hours: The Apache gunship roared over the far end of Sunset Beach, turned in a tight arc and came in on a strafing run, the co-pilot inclining the twin rocket launchers and the forward Gatling gun and sighting in to blast a trench through the middle of the dunes. "Air Dog Four, I'll do a run and then you do one from the north," radioed the pilot.

"Roger, Air Dog Six," came the reply.

Zack Hatfield got on his radio. "Bandits coming in from both sides," he shouted. "Present arms to the south! Remember, *lead* them! On my command. Wait for it!" The Apache pilot was no fool and he came in fairly high, almost five hundred feet, and fast. The Gatling gun began to spew death in a steady stream down into the sand dunes. *"Now! Rip him!"* shouted Hatfield. Streams of automatic and semi-automatic fire rose in flickering plumes from the beach into the sky. One marksman could never have hit the flying machine coming at them at over 150 miles per hour, but 180 guns firing in unison wove a screen of bullets that the copter had to fly through, and Zack could see sparks from the round strikes on the fuselage and bottom of the Apache. One anonymous bullet struck the warhead of a rocket in the millisecond before the co-pilot fired the launcher, and detonated it. The helicopter exploded in mid-air and chunks of hot metal and human body parts were hurled slamming down into the ground.

0552:30 hours: "Now the other one," said Hatfield into his radio. "Everybody present arms to the north." Air Dog Four had seen what happened to Air Dog Six, turned, and hovered for a bit, ready to take off northward at top speed, but from the ground below came a deadly *chunka-chunka-chunka* sound. A dozen .50-caliber armor-piercing rounds from the M2 Browning machine gun mounted on the back of Zack's War Wagon, fired by Big Nick the Swede, punched through the skin of the Apache. One of them blew off the pilot's right leg, and a second exited though the roof, sheared the main gear housing beneath the rotors in half. The copter seemed to flutter briefly, and then it simply dropped like a stone onto the access road.

0553 hours: "God in Heaven, they brought down all four copters!" gasped Meryl Sandoval in shock.

"Some gangsters and thugs!" growled Hacker. "Plus they've bugged out and put the *Ventura* between us and them again! All weapons systems, cease

fire! We're just plowing up empty beach now." He got on to the radio. "Air Dog commander, whoever that is now, this is Mama Bear. The hostiles have taken down all four of the gunships. Do you have any more?"

"Negatory, Mama Bear," came the reply. "We're all transports, and truth to tell, we're running low on fuel. We were expecting to refuel at the Astoria airport but I guess that's no longer an option. We need to head for Portland."

"For crying out loud, you've got ten choppers left out there, and you must have door gunners or some kind of armament!" yelled Hacker. "You're saying you can't give us *any* air support? What the fuck?"

"You military guys stuck your hands into this hornet's nest, you can pull yourselves out," said the pilot carelessly. "We ain't military, we're special federal officers. Later, dudes. It's been a real slice." The copters leveled out into formation and began flying northward well out to sea. Hacker was able to live up to sailors' reputation for salty language, but the copters were soon gone off the radar.

"All right, what do we do now?" asked Sandoval. She was seething with rage, but she still maintained a sufficient grasp on reality to understand that her executive officer was better at this than she was, and she needed him to get her out of the mess before she figured out how to blame him for it. "Launch our own copter? Reverse course and try to get back in range?"

"I think we need to save our copter for recon over a new landing site, ma'am. We don't know how long he'll have to stay in the air, and he's not armed. We could sail up and down this beach all day and they'd simply scuttle back and forth like a school of minnows, always keeping *Ventura* between our main guns and them. God *damn*, whose idiotic idea was it to run a huge vessel like that aground that provides anybody on the beach with a shield?" demanded Hacker. "Never mind. We need to evacuate everybody off the *Ventura.* She's starting to burn pretty good and when the fire hits the main diesel tanks and the turbine boiler she may blow sky high, never mind all the extra ordnance and fuel that hasn't detonated yet. We have to get them off the beach, and then we find another landing place, maybe down by that headland, and we put the men ashore under full cover from our weapons systems. Helmsman, stop engines, then reverse slow."

"I thought you said we weren't going to chase them up and down the beach?" demanded Sandoval.

"We're not. We're just backing up a bit," said Hacker. "We'll cover the north side and Mulvaney can get everybody down on the beach. We'll need our own boats and the landing craft from *Ketchikan* and *Kodiak Queen* to move in, assuming our FATPO guests on those vessels will condescend to take orders from

mere United States military officers. They'll pick up survivors, always staying to the north side of the wreck so if the goots want to fire on them they'll have to move into our line of fire. This business of using the *Ventura* as a shield cuts both ways. Day, tell them to start getting those boats in the water." He picked up the radio. "Derek, what's your casualty situation like?"

"I can see maybe a hundred or so POs on the decks here, shooting at the beach. I think maybe half my crew is accounted for," replied Mulvaney. "We're not going to be able to stay here much longer. The fire down below is out of control and the smoke is starting to get really intense up here. The chief engineer also says that explosion ruptured the fuel tanks in the engine room, and we're awash down there with thousands of gallons of diesel. Once that gets ignited there will be nothing but a hole in the sand."

"Okay, start getting everybody you can over the port side and onto the beach," ordered Hacker. "Get down however you can. Once you're down set up a defensive perimeter as far away from your ship as possible, in case it does blow. We're sending boats from *Higby* and the other two vessels to pick you up. Our guns will cover the north beach for you."

"Roger wilco," said Mulvaney.

0554 hours: "Could we fire *over* the *Ventura*, at a high angle, and shell the fascists on the south beach that way?" demanded Captain Sandoval.

"Might hit a few private houses, and any civilians that are still hanging around after all these fireworks," warned Hacker.

"Fuck 'em," said Sandoval. "If they're still here after three years of insurrection they're probably fascists themselves."

Hacker shrugged. "Fire control, compute an angle to drop shells in about a three-hundred yard arc along the dune lines and about a hundred yards behind and to the south of *Ventura.*"

"Working on it, sir," said the E-5, tapping on his keyboard.

0556 hours: On board the *Kodiak Queen* reporters Edgar Roberts from the BBC and Marsha Meinertzhagen from TV-Euro in Brussels had been thoroughly infuriated at being left out of the shore party based on the *Ventura*, lowly foreigners that they were. Now they were queasily aware that they might have had a lucky escape, judging from what they could see going down on Sunset Beach. But journalists they were, and they could no more avoid browbeating and haggling with the *Queen's* captain, William Worley, demanding to go along in one of the rescue boats, than they could avoid breathing. Finally Worley agreed to let them record the no doubt heroic actions of his crew. He avoided mentioning the fact that he'd had to promise the men triple time for the whole trip to get them to volunteer to man the boats.

The *Kodiak Queen* launched a total of six boats, three motorized lifeboats and three inflatables similar to the ill-fated *Slitherydee.* These had already been in the davits and ready to go to ferry FATPO troops to shore. Now there were two sailors in each boat, and a two-man FATPO machine gun crew with an M-60 and a grenade launcher in each one, and in one of the inflatables rode Roberts and Meinertzhagen with one cameraman each, cameramen and journalists both green at the gills with fear but willing to risk their lives for a story. They began heading inshore toward the burning wreck of the *Ventura*, from which a huge column of black smoke now ascended high into the sky. The rattle of hundreds of weapons from the beach sounded like the static on some monstrous radio, with intermittent muffled explosions, and even from this far out they could see the beach littered with silent, still black figures.

0557 hours: "Okay, I see what he's doing," muttered Hatfield. "He's getting everybody off the port side of the ferry and he's going to cover them from the warship while they are recovered from the beach by those boats."

"Getting about time to be on our way, Cap?" asked Washburn.

"Yeah, we've made a hell of a splash here today, quite literally, but there's such a thing as pushing your luck," agreed Hatfield. "No way I'm exposing our people to that damned cannon and those Gatling guns."

"They're raising the barrel," pointed out Ekstrom. The barrel of the 76-millimeter gun was indeed rising up to a sharp upward angle, and the turret moved to the right.

"Shit!" cursed Hatfield, "They're going to use it like a mortar!" He picked up the radio. "Straw Bosses, Boppers and Bangers, listen up. They're going to be lobbing shells over the burning vessel onto your positions, any moment now. Beat feet, comrades! Don't just scatter like quail, though. Keep it orderly. Company commanders, move your people back to the staging area in sections and those sections that aren't moving, stay prone until your turn comes to move. Low-crawl wherever possible. Shrapnel flies high, so keep your butts down." The gun thundered and spat fire and a shell arched into the air, and a moment later screamed down into the dunes. Then the gun fell silent.

0558 hours: "What the hell?" shouted Hacker. "Why isn't it firing?"

"Sensors from the turret just say misfire, sir," said the fire control officer.

"A fucking *dud!*" raged Hacker. "God damned Israeli crap! Clear the stoppage, kick the dud into the spank bank and reload!"

"Not responding, sir," said the E-5. "Do you want me to reboot the system? It will take a minute, but the reboot should automatically clear the chamber and eject the bad shell."

Meryl Sandoval saw a chance to re-assert herself, regain control of the situation and come out of the whole mess a hero to boot. Maybe even cop herself a Congressional Medal of Honor. "No time! We have to clear it and reload manually," she said forcefully. "I'll do it! Carry on, Number One! I'll call you on the intercom from the turret when the stoppage is clear!" She scampered off the bridge.

"I've never even seen her inside that turret since I came on board!" exclaimed Hacker. "Not once. Does she even know *how* to clear it manually?" He looked at Day and the fire control officer. They both threw up their hands and shrugged.

Sandoval ran down the deck, broke open the hatch into the gun cupola, and stepped inside. She saw the breech of the 76-millimeter cannon lying in its cradle, oddly upright at its high angle. She reached up and grabbed the lever for the breech lock, pulled it down and around and swung the breech open. Unfortunately, that was not what she should have done. She should have hit the manual eject lever and jacked the dud shell into the extractor tube, then very carefully removed it from the tube and inserted it into one of the padded cylinders on a rack along the bulkhead which were placed there for the purpose of containing misfires for later disposal. When Meryl Sandoval opened the breech the dud shell fell out onto the deck with sufficient force so that this time it exploded, detonating the three other exposed shells in the loading cage to the left of the breech. The pressure burst cracked the armored turret and sent the gun itself spinning like a top high into the air, descending into the sea with a mighty splash. Meryl Sandoval's pulverized body, every bone broken, was sent whirling backwards out of the open door of the turret and rolling along the deck like a meatball, leaving a red smear behind it, finally coming to rest in an unrecognizable heap by a hatchway entrance.

0559 hours: "What the hell was that?" asked Hatfield, stunned, looking at the ruined gun turret that was now pouring smoke. "Did we do that?" He got on his radio. "Uh, guys, did somebody have a Exocet missile or something they forgot to tell me about, and did any of you just blow up the gun turret on that Coast Guard cutter?" There were wild cheers and laughter from behind them as the message was relayed to the Volunteers.

"You know what? I think they did that to themselves," said Len Ekstrom, staring through his own binoculars. "Don't ask me how. We seem to be fighting the Three Stooges."

"Niggers," said Washburn. "Some nigger fucked up."

The entire bridge crew of the *Higby* were staring out at the shattered deck and turret and looking down at the sodden mess of meat that had been their

captain a minute before. "This isn't happening!" muttered Hacker in horror. *"How? What the hell did she do?"*

"Jesus God in Heaven!" moaned Day.

Hacker got on the PA system. "Damage and firefighting parties to the main turret!" he bellowed. "On the double, God damn it! Every swinging dick on this ship get your ass on the bow with every hose, every extinguisher, and get that damned fire out! Body recovery party to the number two hatchway."

Day spoke up. "Sir, those 76-millimeters are armor piercing shells. They detonate at thousands of degrees, hot enough to actually burn through armor plating on an enemy vessel. I see flames inside that turret, blue and white flames. The very metal of the wiring and the consoles could be on fire."

"Fire control, how many shells were still in the loading magazine?" demanded Hacker.

The rating gulped. "Seventy-six, sir."

"An interesting bit of naval history, gentlemen," said Hacker philosophically. "Does anyone remember how the German battleship *Bismarck* sank the British battleship *Hood* with a lucky shot to the magazine?"

0559:30 hours: A mighty explosion lifted the front half of the U.S.S. *Frederick J. Higby* clear of the water, and the front bow section from the turret forward broke off. The *Higby* settled down and began to sink rapidly in about 130 feet of water. On board the incoming boat from *Kodiak Queen*, which the sailor at the outboard diverted to rescue survivors from the *Higby* after some argument with the black FATPO lieutenant who wanted to continue on to the beach to pick up his buddies, Roberts and Meinertzhagen's cameramen recorded the sinking and the abandoning of the ship, the Coast Guard sailors floating in the cold water of the Northwestern sea, clinging to bits and pieces of debris, some of them badly burned.

0600 hours: Hatfield and the other two leaped from their dugout. All of a sudden they were all mad, in a frenzy of long-suppressed hatred and bloodlust, all thought of caution and tactics thrown to the wind. Hatfield hollered into the radio, "The cutter's going down! We sank it, or they sank it, or the gods themselves sank it, but now they've got no more choppers and no more warship! Every Northwest Volunteer, there's pork on the beach and I'm ringing the dinner bell! Move in by sections, fire and maneuver. *Kill them all!*"

0601 hours: The men busy clambering down the side of the *Ventura* or lowering themselves down on davit lines or rope ladders heard wild cheering coming from the beach. It was the last thing they ever heard, other than the rattling gunfire from the weapons that killed them. Captain Derek

Mulvaney was knocked from the sloping deck of his burning vessel by a .50-caliber round; the FATPOs and crew who made it onto the beach were trapped between the burning ship and the encircling Volunteers who cut them down. The War Wagon roared onto the beach and opened fire with the .50-caliber Browning machine gun on the boats from the other ships that dared to approach the beach, sinking two of the inflatables and one of the aluminum motor launches, and riddling the rest with holes and dead men. The Volunteers moved in slowly, under covering fire from their comrades, until they got in close enough to the disorganized and panicking Americans to use their pistols and knives when they finally ran out of ammunition for their long arms.

The media later informed a stunned nation that not one single American invader who set foot on Sunset Beach that day survived. The last two American casualties occurred at three o'clock in the afternoon, when the two crewmen from the damaged Apache helicopter that crash-landed near Warrenton were seen by an NVA party trying to hitch a ride on Highway 101 South. Captain Ragnar Redbeard and his boys took their heads back to Newport with them as souvenirs. The NVA suffered three Volunteers killed and fourteen wounded, among the dead being Lieutenant Charles Washburn, who was struck in the hip by a 40-millimeter grenade fired from one of the boats that actually made it to the beach and attempted to retrieve survivors. Charlie died immediately afterward in the arms of his two lifelong friends and comrades, Zack Hatfield and Lennart Ekstrom. Zack went berserk and waded into the surf up to his hips, firing his Winchester. None of the boat's crew survived.

Lieutenant JG Charles Day was pulled from the sea by one of the boats and ended up assuming command of the ill-fated expedition, but Captain Worley of the *Kodiak Queen* ignored his plea to radio for a more senior officer to be helicoptered in. Worley and the captains of the *Ketchikan* and the tugboats had had enough, and by eight o'clock in the morning the depleted flotilla was sailing back south to San Francisco. Worley and Day spent several official inquiries and most of the rest of their lives blaming each other for the inglorious retreat.

One of the boats that made it back to the *Kodiak Queen* was the inflatable containing the two shell-shocked European reporters and their cameramen. Eric Roberts and Marsha Meinertzhagen later collaborated on a best-selling book, *Sunrise on Sunset Beach*, and went on the Euro talk-show circuit. For now, they were both gibbering with terror and exhaustion. Almost as an afterthought, just before their inflatable turned back to the ship with their boatload of survivors from the *Higby*, both cameramen had taken one last

sweep of the beach though their telephoto lenses, and for the second time the First Portland Brigade provided posterity with an immortal sound and video byte.

The image that went out to hundreds of millions of television viewers, the image that appeared on the cover of both *Time* and *Newsweek* and that went down in history, was Zack Hatfield standing on Sunset Beach, dozens of armed figures standing scattered behind him wreathed in black smoke from the burning ship, dark and sinister and indistinct, like an escort of devils. The beach at their feet was scattered with corpses and visibly red with blood. Zack stood in his feathered slouch hat, his duster flapping in the sea breeze, and he held his Winchester rifle high over his head, an epic gesture of photogenic defiance that became one of the enduring symbols of the Northwest War of Independence.

* * *

The media were not completely correct in their reports of no survivors. One American military man did make it past the beach alive. Lieutenant Donald Hacker was always a strong swimmer, despite his prosthetic foot, and he also knew that if he went back to California his head was on the chopping block. He decided to pass, and so when he hit the water he struck out northward, sometimes diving and swimming under water to dodge bullets. Finally he crawled ashore at the edge of Sunset Beach Park. He was creeping through the park trying to make it to the roadway when he was confronted by a young boy and young girl of age 12 and 10 respectively, the son and daughter of Lieutenant Sherry Tomczak, who had been unable to find a baby-sitter on short notice and brought them along with instructions to hide in the woods and stay out of trouble. They were both armed with .22-caliber bolt-action rifles, and they marched an thoroughly chagrined and embarrassed Hacker with his hands up right to their mother.

When Hatfield showed up, Hacker was sitting on the ground being guarded by the two solemn children with their .22s, no one saying anything. "You got to be Hatfield in that getup," said the Coast Guard lieutenant.

"Yah," said Hatfield. "You off that cutter?"

"The executive officer, believe it or not," said Hacker in disgust.

"What the hell happened with that gun turret of yours blowing up?" asked Zack curiously. "I don't think that was us."

Hacker scowled. "Our bird-brained excuse for a captain was an affirmative action quota promotion, a mami who couldn't sail a rubber duck in a bathtub.

Somehow, I have no idea how, she managed to blow up the turret and sink her own ship, if you can believe that. Now I've been captured by the Sesame Street gang here, and turned over to a female officer of some kind who offered me a peanut butter and jelly sandwich she made in her own kitchen before coming out here to commit treason and armed insurrection against the United States. I keep hoping this is all a bad dream, and I'll wake up in a nice, quiet loony bin somewhere. Hatfield, I've been looking over your crew here. I see kids. I see middle-aged fat guys. I see women, I see Larry the Cable Guy and Dilbert. Some of them are obviously vets from the way they carry themselves and their weapons, but most of them seem to be just average people. How the hell did you do this?"

Hatfield reached down, took Hacker's hand, and pulled him to his feet. "Come and meet some of them. I'll show you."

* * *

The official press briefing in Washington, D.C., took place at noon Pacific time, three o'clock p.m. Eastern Daylight time. The footage from Sunset Beach was now all over the world, and the bloody death of General Rollins had been replayed on the air at least a thousand times already in the United States alone. The White House press secretary came out to address the assembled media, standing at the podium with an ashen face. He was ashen because he had just come from the Oval Office where he had been on the receiving end of one of Hillary Clinton's deranged and hysterical tirades. These tirades sometimes ended with Hillary pushing a button beneath her desk, summoning her picked bodyguard of black and Hispanic Secret Service agents, pointing at some unfortunate bureaucrat or other recipient of her ire and commanding, "Take that traitor away!" His predecessor as press secretary had suffered such a fate. The man's body was found several days later in a public park in northern Virginia, an alleged suicide in the classic Vince Foster manner. Hillary didn't believe in changing a winning formula. The press secretary opened a sheet of paper and read a prepared statement in a dull monotone into the microphone:

"The Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security regret to announce that a disastrous engagement has taken place between elements of the Federal Anti-Terrorist Police Organization, the United States Coast Guard, and the terrorist Northwest Volunteer Army, on Sunset Beach in the state of Oregon. The terrorists, in overwhelming numbers, launched a highly disciplined assault, which has resulted in the loss of the Coast Guard

cutter U.S.S. *Frederick J. Higby*, the civilian-contracted transport ship S.S. *Ventura*, and the death or capture of 457 men and women of the FATPO, the Coast Guard, civilian contractors, and representatives of the media, notably the officer commanding General Roland Rollins, and Mr. Leonard Posner of Fox News. There have also been a number of wounded. The remaining vessels in the expeditionary force are returning to base." He then turned and walked off stage, ignoring the frantic shouting and demands that he answer questions.

The NVA's official response was simpler and even more dramatic. That afternoon over two thousand journalists, television stations, newspapers, and news outlets across America received an e-mail containing a special confirmation code word. The message consisted solely of three short lines from Shakespeare's *King Henry V,* Act IV, Scene 8:

O God, thy arm was here,
And not to us, but to thy arm alone
Ascribe we all.

XXVI

The Producers

A second Daniel, a Daniel, Jew!
Now, infidel, I have thee on the hip.

The Merchant of Venice—Act IV, Scene 1

Julia Lear was delayed for almost a full day in Portland, due to increased security measures surrounding pre-flight background and documentation checks by the Department of Homeland Security. The tickets from Paradigm Studios must have carried a high clearance on somebody's computer, because Julia was ushered immediately through security and ensconced in the PDX VIP lounge with a complimentary drink from the bar and profuse apologies from the airline, but apparently some of the other passengers on her flight were mere peasants who had to be checked out six ways to Sunday, and who held up the works. The NVA had never yet hijacked or blown up an airliner or attacked an airport, but there was a first time for everything and everybody was extra skittish, possibly because of the impending attack on Clatsop County which as worried as she was for her family, Julia kept her lip firmly zipped about.

In the past, whenever she had gotten held over in Portland for any length of time she never missed a chance to go shopping and clubbing and generally taking in the scene in the City of Roses, but this time she stayed in the VIP suite and watched old movies on TV. She checked the news broadcasts regularly, but there was nothing out of Clatsop County. She ordered her meals brought in, and stayed out of the restaurants and especially the bars in the terminal, because the whole place was full of swaggering, uniformed FATPO

officers whom she didn't want to encounter without the helpful Wally Post and his special little card at her side. The result was that she got back into Los Angeles late and slept in the next day, so she was sound asleep when the battle began on Sunset Beach.

She had a 10 o'clock appointment that morning with Arnold Blaustein at the Bunker, which in a late-sleeping executive culture like Hollywood's was the crack of dawn. Fortunately for Julia, she turned on the TV to catch up with the news when she got out of the shower, so she wasn't caught completely unawares by the news out of the north. She was stunned to encounter every channel showing a burning ship on a beach littered with what appeared to be dead bodies, replay after replay of Roland Rollins getting blown away into the surf like a beach ball, and again and again she saw the long pan shot of Zack Hatfield in his flapping duster and broad-brimmed slouch hat standing on the bloody beach, with his Winchester raised in defiance like the closing scene of some post-apocalyptic Western. Julia had deliberately not asked Zack for a number where he could be reached, since she understood that the mere knowledge of such a number would get her many years in prison, and in any case he probably wouldn't have given her one. But now the urge to call someone was overwhelming, and so she called her mother. Surely the FBI wouldn't arrest her and torture her for calling her own mother. Would they?

Julia half expected the phone lines to Clatsop County to be out, but after a few rings her mother picked up the phone. "Mom, this is Julie."

"Oh, hi, Julie, how was your flight back?"

"The flight itself was fine, but I got held up for a long time at Portland Airport. Mom, are you all right?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, dear, I'm quite well. No need to shout," said Mrs. Lear.

"And our—our guests from the other night? Are they all right?"

"Ted is fine, dear. He wasn't involved with all that fooferall this morning, he was here in town where he should have been, doing his job."

"And the other guests?" demanded Julia.

"The one you're concerned about is all right, so far as I know, dear," said her mother. Julia noticed that her mother was canny enough not to say Zack's name on the phone. "I'm sure the other gentlemen are fine as well. Nothing's going on here, Julie. It's just a nice summer morning, and thanks to the Boys it's going to stay that way. I've told you before, I'm far more concerned about your safety down in that horrible place where you live than you should be about mine." For the rest of her life, Julia Lear would always think of the Battle of Sunset Beach as "all that fooferall."

Julia debated whether or not to keep her appointment at The Bunker, in view of the events of the morning and the probable exponential increase in Jewish paranoia, but decided she didn't have any choice. During the limo ride over to Paradigm Studios she wondered if she would be arrested and "disappeared" if it became known that she had been with Zack Hatfield only thirty-three hours before the battle, and she decided to withhold as much information from the studio bosses as possible as to the actual details of her visit. Now that she had done what they asked, they might consider her to have become expendable.

She changed her mind when she was ushered into the same meeting room as before. A giant plasma screen TV had been wheeled in on casters, plugged into the satellite cable and set up in one corner, while half a dozen multi-millionaire entertainment industry executives were sitting like zombies, staring fascinated at the burning wreck of the *Ventura* and the smoke-wreathed, demonic figure of Zack Hatfield flourishing his rifle at them, like so many rabbits with a snake. They practically leaped to attention when she walked into the room and fell all over themselves offering her coffee, an armchair, brunch from the buffet, a drink, practically plumping the cushions of her chair for her. All of a sudden something dawned on Julia. *They're afraid of me,* she thought. *They think Zack is my lover or my attack dog or something, and they are terrified I can sic him on them at will. They're afraid of Zack because they know he is not afraid of them, and they think I can command and control him.* Julia remembered a little-known but canny saying of Winston Churchill's from his pre-Zionist days in the 1920s: "The Jew is always either at your throat, or at your feet." Julia had them at her feet now, and she decided to rub it in with a dramatic gesture.

She pulled the Rolex watch from her purse, leaned over and handed it to Arnold Blaustein. "He sent you a message," she said, nodding to where Zack stood on the television screen with upraised weapon. "I think it's so you'll know that I did see him, and that what I have to say to you is straight up. He didn't say what the message was, he just said to give you this, and you'd understand."

The spectacular result made up for all the weeks of trauma Julia had suffered during her time on the Hollywood blacklist. Blaustein turned white as a sheet, literally, as the blood drained from his florid face. He sank onto the sofa, sweat beading on his forehead, the watch in his hand shaking as if he had delirium tremens. *"Gottenyu gevalt!"* he moaned. "Mine watch! This watch disappeared from the nightstand in the bedroom, vile mine wife and I were asleep! They were there! *They were in mine house!*"

"I guess that's the message, then," said Julia with a shrug. She almost made some comment about better than finding a horse's head in his bed, but she figured that would be overdoing it. There was no need. She could tell from the appalled faces of all the men in the room that they did indeed get the message.

"You were with him just before . . . before all *that* happened?" asked Moshe Feinstein, gesturing toward the television screen.

"Not just before, no, sir. I met with Zack and a representative from the NVA Army Council in Astoria night before last," Julia told them. "Mr. Post was very helpful, by the way. I couldn't have done it without him. I was actually there when Zack got the call telling him that Clatsop County was about to be invaded by that new strong-arm force of Hillary's. That's a bad move, by the way. Those goons were all over the Portland airport and I can tell you that the local people already fear them and despise them. You might mention that next time any of you get invited to the White House, although I doubt she'll listen. The meeting broke up, then, but I think I got done what you wanted me to do. I have a general idea of what they want, but I won't be doing the negotiating, thank God. I do have a name for you, though. Someone who can speak for them authoritatively down here."

"Wait, wait," spoke up Moshe Feinstein. "You say somebody called him and told him the government boys were coming?"

"They seem to know pretty much everything they need to know," Julia told them. "You shouldn't underestimate them. You saw what happens to people who do that," she added with another nod at the screen. She was enjoying this.

Blaustein stared at the watch in his trembling hand. "So I see. You said you had a name for us, Julia?"

"Yes." She hesitated briefly. "I need to tell you that I was told if anything bad happened to this person, he would be avenged. I guess you know they're not kidding, what with what's been going on in the past few months, and now this little beach party back home."

"We get it, Ms. Lear," said David Danziger heavily. "The name?"

"He's an agent from out in the Valley. Barry Brewer," Julia told them. "I have no idea what his actual status is with the NVA, but they say talk to him, and whatever he says goes."

Blaustein nodded. "Erica Collingwood's agent. Of course. They were in it together. I don't suppose they told you where Erica is now?"

"I didn't ask, and even if they knew, they wouldn't have told me."

"What are their demands?" asked Danziger.

"Basically, I think it will be livable," said Julia with a shrug. "No money, apparently. Just concentrate on movies and programming with schmaltz and sleaze, nix on the constant petty needling like you—well, like Hollywood does when they don't like somebody, and no big epics about fighting evil racism in the Northwest. I don't know if you gentlemen can live with that, but speaking as one of the hundreds of thousands of people employed in the entertainment industry, I think all of us who want our paychecks back can live with it."

"Tell me, Julia," asked Arnold Blaustein, still trembling "What do you think your, ah, boyfriend and his associates would take for the movie rights to this morning's events?"

My God, thought Julia in bemused surprise, *Is there anything they won't try to make money from?*

* * *

It took almost a week to set up the meeting with the studio executives, but on a hot California night with an oven-like Santa Ana wind blowing down from the mountains and brush fires glowing on the distant Hollywood Hills like goblin lights on Halloween, Barry Brewer stood in a Culver City motel room with his best suit on, and a briefcase in his hand. The briefcase was just for show, empty except for a yellow legal pad and a pen, and the wireless microphone hidden in the lining.

"I wish we had the necessary skills to put the GPI actually into your body, subcutaneous," said Oscar in a worried tone of voice. "I understand the feds can do that now."

"You've got three on me now," said Brewer. "The briefcase plus one in my shoe and one on the back of my wrist watch. I could stick a another one up my butt if you like."

"That won't be necessary, Mr. Ripley," said Charlie Randall. "We're using suspenders and belt in case you're searched. We figure if they run a metal detector over you, the one in your watch will beep first. You look sheepish and hand over the watch, and then maybe they'll figure they found it and they won't keep on down to your shoes. The microphone may set off the detector, but that's why we chose the briefcase with the stainless steel fittings and trim. May fool them, may not, depending on how dumb their security guards are."

"You know, we're violating the no-tricks rule I stipulated with Blaustein," said Brewer.

"As if they're going to keep to the rules? These are Jews, and according to their own Kol Nidre they consider any oaths or agreements made with Gentiles to be non-binding," Oscar reminded him. "You can bet they're going to be recording this whole thing with state of the art hidden cameras and microphones. I only wish we could get some kind of visual on this so if they break the agreement somewhere down the line, we can drop a dime on them to Homeland Security and all of their rivals and competitors in the media, of course, letting them know who among the Chosen has been playing footsie with Jerry Reb to gain an unfair advantage. One last time, Barry, are you sure about this?" Oscar asked him keenly. "You know this whole thing could be a trap. You could be walking right into the arms of the FBI and FATPO. Christina, Jimmy, and Kicky are in place to monitor and record whatever we can get, but if it goes bad there's no way we can assault that fortress they've built and pull you out, not with what we've got. I think you know what they will do to you in order to get you to talk."

"I know," said Brewer soberly. "I've spent the past week handing everything over to Christina, and she's run with it, as she always does. That girl would have made a hell of an executive. Right now I don't have the slightest idea where a single safe house or a single item of NVA equipment is, nor the whereabouts of a single Northwest Volunteer other than you two. My own office and home have been sanitized from top to bottom and all my financials are as clean as a hound's tooth. I'm ready to swear there's no paper trail anywhere. I don't have a single relevant item of information to tell them, even when they start clipping the electrical thingies onto my balls."

"You also understand that it will be a long time before we can re-establish two-way contact?" asked Charlie. "We have to assume that from the moment you leave the meeting, if you leave it at all, you will be followed, surveilled, wiretapped, and electronically monitored everywhere you go by the enemy, either the government or these people's private spy network, hunting for some connection between you and the Army they can pick up and unravel like a loose thread on a garment. You're going to be on your own for a long time, and everything you do, you're going to have to wing it."

"I can do that," said Brewer with a nod. "I do have the one number you gave me memorized."

"Yeah, but for any one of a dozen reasons, by the time you need to use it, that number may no longer be valid," warned Charlie. "If that happens, you're fucked. You've got that one number and that one authentication code word. They may try and set you up by pretending to be us, or pretending to be a Volunteer in distress or something like that. If they don't have that code

word, you don't respond, not at all. You tell whoever it is to shoot through and hang up. Got it?"

"Got it," said Brewer.

"Me and Oscar here are the only ones who know that word," continued Charlie. "If both of us buy the farm, then you're well and truly buggered, because you'll have no way to authenticate. I have to admit, I'm not happy about leaving you turning slowly in the wind like this, but it's the only way this will work. You will be the only sure NVA man whose identity and location they know about, at least you'd damned well better be the only one. We can't risk them using you to start working up the chain."

"Got it," said Brewer. "I'm down for this, don't worry. I've been helping you guys all this time, but I still have this feeling I'm not doing enough. I'm not brave like you. I couldn't do what you guys do, or what our friends did up on that beach in Oregon, but I know Tinsel Town inside and out, and this I can do."

"You're about to walk alone and unarmed into a room with some of the most powerful Jews in the world, all of whom will want to tear you limb from limb and none of whose word you can trust farther than you can throw them," said Oscar. "I'd say that's pretty courageous, comrade."

"I suppose I should be worried or afraid, but I'm not," said Brewer with a shrug. "It's just that at long last, I can help do something to *fix* this goddamned mess, or at least my part of it. You guys don't have show business in your blood. I do. This town and this industry are my life. With all the new technology and skills we've developed, we could do such good here, make such beautiful and enduring works of art. It just makes me want to weep and scream and bang my fists against the wall when I see what these, these *people* are using all this power and potential for. The potential for beauty and greatness has always been here, and sometimes it comes out in spite of everything when a truly great picture is made, but there's always been this undercurrent of filth and poison running through it all. I just can't live with it anymore. This is something that has to be done."

"Sure you don't want a ride down there?" asked Oscar.

"No, you guys need to take it on the arches now. I'll call a cab."

"Good luck, comrade," they said, shaking hands for the last time before Oscar and Charlie moved out into the searing neon night of Los Angeles.

As it happened, the studio executives kept their word, at least visibly. Brewer arrived at the Paradigm studios gate in his cab and identified himself to the heavily armed guards there. He was picked up by a silent flunky in a golf cart and driven to the Bunker with no frisking or metal detectors. It

was almost midnight when he walked into the meeting. This one was being held in the formal conference room, and over a dozen men sat waiting for him seated around a long mahogany table. All were Jewish, and at least half were wearing yarmulkes. The air was frigid as ice, and not just from the air conditioning that rumbled full blast from the air vents. The eyes of the Jews at the table bored into Brewer with a concentrated, pure hatred that was almost radioactive; Brewer knew full well that every man there wanted him dead, and they were all thinking of ways that might be accomplished, preferably tonight, right here in this room, and as bloodily as possible. For him there was no offer of refreshment, no schmoozing, no polite small talk, not even a water pitcher and glass on the table. Brewer walked to the far end of the table and without a word sat down, opened his briefcase, and took out the yellow legal pad and pen, which he placed before him. Somehow the very paucity of the briefcase's contents seemed to add to their anger and their sense of insult; the scowls deepened and there was a low sound almost like the growling of beasts. Brewer looked up at them calmly and began to speak.

"First off, about myself. No one should ever ask, but if anyone does, I am officially a consultant. You will be employing my services on certain sensitive matters because you find my input to be valuable, and that is all that should ever be said. You needn't pay me anything. While I am performing this service for our community I will be living off my life's savings and accumulated assets, and also off my talent agency business. Please refrain from fucking with me in that regard or blacklisting my clients. That will be regarded as a hostile act, and some of my friends don't handle hostility well. My clients are all talented actors and actresses. With one obvious exception they know nothing about any of this, and they don't deserve ill treatment."

"Why?" grated Arnold Blaustein, his voice like metal scraping on metal. "This town made you. *We* made you. All your life we have put every crumb of food on your table, bought every mai tai you ever drank in Trader Vic's, bought every car you ever drove, paid every penny of your mortgage, and for this you have spat the blood of God's Chosen People in our faces. Why have you done this, Barry?"

"And that's all you see, isn't it?" said Brewer. "Money. Material things. Life as a balance sheet drawn up with double-entry bookkeeping, profit and loss. It's all any of you *can* see, isn't it? Never mind. I have done it because it had to be done, and no one else would. Beyond that I won't be making any speeches or harangues, and I recommend the same course to you. We have business to settle. Now can we get on with this? I assure you gentlemen that

your company is just as distasteful to me as mine is to you, so the sooner we get done the sooner we can depart."

"I agree. Get on with it," snarled Moshe Feinstein from Dreamworks-Disney. He lit a huge cigar, his hands trembling so bad in impotent rage he could barely flick the $4,500 platinum Zippo lighter into a flame.

"There is a war going on in the Pacific Northwest," said Brewer. "Up until now Hollywood and the entertainment industry as a whole have supported one side in that war, the United States of America and its government. That support ends tonight, and Hollywood will become neutral. Not openly, just in practice. No one expects you to make any public declarations or dramatic announcements. Assuming you accept the terms I will lay out for you, when the active service unit is withdrawn and military operations cease on our part, and certain kinds of material ceases to issue forth from your studios and your networks, then I'm sure people will draw their own conclusions. Conclusions that you may of course deny or simply meet with a no-comment as you choose. It will be obvious to anyone with two brain cells to rub together that a deal has been struck, make no mistake. But I recommend that your attitude be one of least said, soonest mended. Just get back to work, make your movies and your inane sitcoms and your ridiculous reality shows and your sleazy soft porn, and you'll be amazed at how quickly the short American attention span kicks in and the events of this Oscar night become ancient history. It only took the great American public a few years to forget about 9/11."

"And this neutrality that you speak of involves our doing what, exactly?" demanded Dave Danziger coldly.

"Not much, but it does entail an extensive list of things which you will *not* do," said Brewer. "We're realistic. We understand that we can't bring back the Hayes Office and stop you from spewing forth the kind of perverted filth and mindless rubbish that you always have. You have spent the past three generations creating a market for that sewage, it's what the brain-dead public now wants, and it sells. When there is a public demand for something, someone is going to provide it, as witness Prohibition and the drug situation. We don't demand that you fire all your non-white or sodomitic employees, nothing like that. You will be able to get back to business as usual, and soon the shekels will be rolling in once more. But certain specific topics are henceforth off limits, or else they need to be handled very, very carefully, lest it piss off some people with itchy trigger fingers who would like nothing better than to catch you trying to slither around our little agreement, come down here again and give you another lesson in manners."

"And those topics would be?" asked Sam Glaser from TriVision.

"To begin with, there will be no movies or television episodes produced that, in the guise of drama, are nothing more than U.S. government propaganda directed against the NVA and the Party in the Northwest. There will be no more incitement of hatred against the NVA or the Northwest independence movement. This also applies to such personages as wise-ass late night talk show hosts, potty-mouthed stand-up comedians, and cable news show talking heads. We have shown our willingness to kill and to die ourselves for our freedom and our integrity as a people. That is the way that men earn respect, and from now on you will damned well show us that respect. There will be no more snide little needling jokes, no more vilification and insulting portrayals of Northwest Volunteers as psychos and cretins and generally bad people."

Walt Wexler from World Artists spoke up. "Uh, sorry, Barry, I've got to ask. Did you actually *see* what you and your—your friends did on Oscar night? I did, because I was there, although by the grace of God all I got was a slight wound. How in the name of God can you say that the perpetrators of that horror are not bad people? What would you call that unspeakable slaughter if not psychopathic?"

"I would call it an act of war just as much as any engagement between soldiers. In case you've missed the past century, Walt, that's how wars have been fought since 1914," said Brewer in a level voice. "Combatants no longer need carry a rifle. In fact, the most effective combatants in modern warfare carry briefcases or slide rules or laptops. Or video and film cameras. This entire industry consists mostly of active and purposeful combatants against Western civilization, and has almost since its inception. What happened at the Awards ceremonies was horrible, yes, but it was no more horrible than the kind of thing your Israel and our own government have been doing to Muslim peoples throughout the Middle East for decades. It's just that this time we got a good close-up in our living rooms of all the blood and the brains. Multiply Oscar night by ten thousand times, and you have the story of American foreign policy for the past seventy years. If those people had been Palestinians crushed by Israeli tanks or Iraqis killed by American bombs, none of you men in this room would have batted an eye and most of you would have laughed. The only reason you give a damn now is because your own ox is being gored. You're all bent out of shape because you finally got a dose of your own medicine. I'm sorry, I know I promised no harangues, but you asked."

"Sorry I asked," mumbled Wexler.

Brewer continued. "Secondly, Hollywood's moratorium on anti-white plots, characters, imagery, and polemics in general will not just apply to the

Northwest conflict or the NVA. Anti-white incitement and group defamation from Hollywood and the television industry, directed against Gentile people of European ancestry, will cease forthwith. This isn't just a matter of common decency or fairness; we wouldn't be so naïve. It's so you can't sneak in anti-NVA propaganda in the guise of historical films or apparently unrelated plot lines in TV series, etcetera. There are to be no more fat Southern sheriffs beating on poor defenseless white liberals. There are to be no more evil Nazis acting as clownish foils for your infantile action heroes. There are to be no more evil Confederates flogging black women, no more Ku Klux Klansmen raping and lynching, no more stereotyped redneck villains getting beaten up by clever wisecracking niggers, no more equating a woman having blond hair with being an idiot and a slut. No more racial or cultural stereotyping of any kind directed against white people. I don't have to spell this out for you, gentlemen. You all know damned well what you've been doing for the past century, and please do not insult my intelligence by trying to deny that you don't understand me perfectly well. Now you're going to *stop it.* As the events of the past few months have proven, making a career and a fortune out of insulting white men and degrading white women is no longer a viable proposition. Your people have always been very practical, I'll give you that. The white man now has an armed deterrent, and we can no longer be pissed on at your pleasure. Accept the new reality. Learn to live with it and work with it."

"We get it," said Blaustein with a nod.

"Thank you. The third point may be the hardest for you to swallow, but I need to emphasize that these terms are a complete package, not a buffet. It's all or nothing." Brewer took a deep breath. "All Holocaust propaganda comes to a screeching halt. Now, and that includes that piece of dreck your people are over in Poland filming now, Mr. Feinstein."

"What? *Ashes of Auschwitz?* You're telling me I can't commemorate the Shoah, where one hundred and thirty-seven of mine family vas gassed by Hitler? How dare you? *Chillul HaShem!*" shrieked Feinstein, turning purple and waving his fists in the air, spittle flying from his lips as the burning cigar fell down into his lap unheeded.

"Crap," said Brewer succinctly. "It's crap, it was always crap, and you've milked it long enough. For three generations you people have squeezed an endless river of gold out of something that never happened, at least not in any way, shape, or form resembling your official version. Now you are going to *stop it*, just like you're going to stop insulting and degrading white people as a whole. Germans are white people and they are most distinctly covered in the no-defamation and no-lying clauses of our little *entente* here. No one

expects you to admit that you've been defrauding the world for 75 years. Like I've said, we're realistic. But you've already got enough of that horseshit in circulation to keep you rolling in royalties for the next 75 years. You're going to shut down the Holocaust sector of the entertainment industry now, as much as that's possible. No more movies, no more TV specials, no more long moans in black and white with cellos in the background, and your palms out for money and sympathy you don't deserve. *No more of that crap!* My God, the FBI already arrests anyone who questions the official version anyway under the hatecrime laws, and sends them off to re-education camps to have their brains washed squeaky clean like Winston Smith in *1984.* Isn't that enough for you? We understand that the mountain of Holocaust shit already reaches to the sky, and it's going to take generations to undo the damage you've done to humanity's psyche with your lies, but you're not going to be allowed to throw one more shovel-load of shit on the heap. Hear what I say, gentlemen, or by God, we *will* show you a Holocaust, and we have demonstrated that we have the capability to do just that."

Feinstein screamed again like a woman, not just in rage, but because the burning cigar he dropped had set his pants on fire. Dave Danziger grabbed a water carafe from a sideboard and dumped it in Feinstein's lap. Feinstein began to shout and curse in Yiddish, but Blaustein cut him off with a gesture.

"Zip it, Moe," he said dejectedly. "Hey, there's no business like Shoah business, and we've all had a good run on that one. But all good things must come to an end sometime, and we need to get back to work."

"Mr. Brewer," spoke up Ira Einhorn from Fox Network, "You understand that while we might agree to—redirect our creative energies elsewhere, let us say, in return for you people re-directing your homicidal energies elsewhere, we can't do anything about an entire repertoire of films and television that goes back almost a century. What, we're supposed to track down and burn every copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Winds of War*? You're talking about thousands of films and television episodes, on film, on DVD, in digital libraries . . ."

"We understand that an apparatus of defamation and deceit such as your culture has created over such a length of time can't be dismantled overnight, and that's not what we expect of you," Brewer explained. "We're not trying to de-Judaize the entire movie and entertainment industries. We know that's not possible. What we are trying to do is neutralize those industries as a weapon in the hands of the occupying power in the Northwest. We don't expect you openly to oppose them or support us. We simply expect you to stop acting as the United States' cheering section, in the Northwest, in the Middle East, in

every way. You must stop giving aid and comfort to our enemies. We know that we're dealing with a very complex structure, and stopping it will be about like stopping a speeding train. It can't be done simply by hitting the brakes. But we expect you to start applying those brakes and start steering the train onto a different track. It will take time, especially since you will be doing it reluctantly and under duress, and there will be all kinds of questions and issues and glitches. That is the purpose of retaining me as a consultant. Your rule of thumb needs to be when in doubt, ask. Don't try to be clever dicks and see what you can slip past us. That's a good way to find yourselves floating in your own swimming pool face down."

"Look here," spoke up Peter Shenker from CBS, "You opened up tonight by saying there is a war going on in the Northwest. That's true, it *is* a war, even if the government chooses not to so call it for PR reasons. It's on the news every day. The NVA is on the news every day. We are in the business of helping people escape from reality, true, but that's only half of it. The other half of our mandate, if you want to call it that, is to portray reality in an artistic and entertaining form. I don't see how you can ask us to simply bee-bop forward from now on as if nothing at all is happening in the Northwest, nobody's getting killed and no bombs are going off in Seattle and Portland and Spokane. How can we do that? If nothing else, it will soon become ridiculously obvious to our audiences that we've caved in to your violence, and we will lose a lot of our credibility. Hell, that business on Sunset Beach the other day has made-for-TV movie written all over it, and you're telling us we can't touch it?"

"I didn't say you couldn't cover the Northwest War of Independence, or make movies or TV episodes about it," explained Brewer patiently. "You're right, it would be kind of ridiculous to pretend nothing is happening, although you guys did all right with that during the run up to the Americans' attacks on Iran and Saudi Arabia. You want to make a movie about the war in the Northwest, fine. You want to do a TV drama episode or even a whole series about the rebellion, knock yourselves out. But there will be no hatchet jobs like those obscene things you were planning on, *Homeland* and *Great White North.* You want to show the violence and bloodshed, sure, you've got to in order to be accurate. But we expect to see *balance.* We expect you to show the torture chambers in the Portland Justice Center and the FATPO barracks as well as NVA bombs and kneecappings. We expect you to show bad FBI and U.S. Attorneys as well as bad NVA men, and when you do portray Volunteers we expect them to be normal, human characters, not one-dimensional stereotypes or clowns or racist villains out of central casting. We expect you

to deal extensively with *why* the Volunteers are doing what they're doing, and I don't mean your usual horseshit about 'hate'. We expect you to portray a terrible but complex and highly nuanced situation as just that, complex and difficult with the good and the bad evenly distributed on both sides. We don't expect you to make NVA propaganda movies. We're starting to do that ourselves in a small way, and after independence the Republic will produce enough of those on our own. But we expect *balance.*"

"And who defines balance?" demanded Rafi Eitam from MGM.

"I do. I'm your consultant, remember. The guy who makes sure that when you go into your swimming pool it's just for a dip. You'll have my number. If you're going to deal with the Northwest in even a tangential way, I expect to see a script with a full treatment, before the first klieg switches on and the first camera rolls. If there is anything that might be even a little iffy, you call me, we'll discuss the problem or project, and I will give you an opinion."

"An opinion backed up by bullets and explosives," said Wexler bitterly.

"Precisely," agreed Brewer with a chilly smile. "The kind of opinion that it will behoove you to listen to. The *only* kind of opinion it seems the Jewish people are inclined to listen to."

XXVII

Two On The Bounce

Arm you, I pray you, to this speedy voyage;
For we will fetters put upon this fear
Which now goes too free-footed.

Hamlet—Act II, Scene 3

On an unseasonably warm afternoon in October, Eric Sellars and Annette Ridgeway sat at a corner table in the Food for Thought Café, the student-run eatery in the Smith Memorial Student Union on the campus at Portland State University. Eric was wearing baggy canvas trousers and a T-shirt with a rock band logo on it, Annette was wearing a green wool pullover blouse and jeans, and both of them were wearing the obligatory American baseball caps on their heads. They had double lattés, small plates of politically correct vegetarian quiche, and open books in front of them. They looked for all the world like a couple of college kids on a normal snack and study date. In actual fact, they were studying their fellow students.

Although full-fledged Volunteers with A Company, little of their work for the NVA had so far involved hands-on active service. Annette's brief Lorelei stint as "Mary Jones" and the subsequent interrogation of Dawson Zucchino were as close as they had personally gotten so far to the wet work, other than when they had dispatched the late and unlamented Lucius Flammus. Most of their activity for the Army, as the rebellion in the Northwest entered its fourth year, consisted of intelligence gathering and surveillance as well as a few special sabotage and monkey-wrenching assignments. For example, they had used the school's computers and a black student's password to upload a

series of viruses into the IT systems at places like the *Oregonian,* the local IRS office, the Portland public school system, and even one database they were able to access at the feared Justice Center itself. Because their privileged status tended to give the two of them access to places, people, and events on a level of society denied to other Volunteers, Tom and Becky had proven to be an invaluable asset not only to their original company commander and now First Brigade commandant, Billy Jackson, but also to Oscar in the Third Section. Jackson had recently succeeded to the commandant slot when Tommy Coyle had gone over to Second Brigade following the death of Harry Hannon in a gun battle at a FATPO checkpoint six weeks before. The new A Company CO was Lieutenant Jimmy Wingo, just returned from the successful Operation We Are Not Amused down in Los Angeles.

Portland State was one of the few full-blown, radical left-wing campuses remaining in the Northwest, with such appurtenances as an African-American Students' Union, a Hispanic Students' Association, and functioning chapters of Anti-Racist Action and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance. In most other parts of the Homeland, these groups had withered away on campus and elsewhere for lack of participation, as the NVA either rubbed out their participants or their members saw the handwriting on the wall and relocated to sunnier and less hostile climes. But Portland State was right in the middle of a city saturated with ZOG police, FATPO and private security, and surrounded by a still significant urban minority population as muds and faggots fled from other areas of the Northwest to cower and rage impotently in Portland from behind the cover of the FATPO guns. Up in Washington, the Puget Sound area was much larger and more spread out, and contained more Volunteers, and so Seattle and environs had been very largely cleaned up by now and was barely one percent non-white. Portland was far more concentrated and densely populated, and therefore easier for the regime to lock down with a concentration of men and firepower. It was difficult to believe that not thirty miles to the west one entered the Third Battalion's Bandit Country, a liberated zone where not a dark skin or a federal badge was to be seen. But Portland itself remained a left-liberal stronghold, one of the few real bastions of government support remaining in the Northwest, and Portland State University was a hotbed of political correctness and anti-racist hysteria.

Eric and Annette had spent their freshman year and summer school tracking all of this activity, identifying the ringleaders and major players, clocking their movements, cataloging their habits and known associates, watching everyone from the faculty and the student body on down to the custodial staff and numerous rent-a-cops on the security force, one of whom

was also a Northwest Volunteer. Eric and Annette had no idea who their comrade on the security staff was; they had an e-mail address and a series of codes, and nothing more. They were to make contact only in the event they needed somehow to disable or blindside the security cameras and other school surveillance systems that followed the students everywhere they went. Eric would send an e-mail through a special connection on his wireless laptop, using both coded content and an NVA-designed encryption system, which everyone hoped like hell the federals were either unaware of or couldn't break if they were. Tom and Becky described what they needed done and when, and within a few hours whoever it was would get back to them giving them a yea or nay as to whether or not it could be done. Whoever was on the other end was presumably as ignorant of their identities as they were of his or hers.

This was how they had twice managed to take down the electronic surveillance and disable certain alarms long enough for an EOD delivery team to get onto campus and plant two small but powerful bombs. One was in the Administration building, in the office of the Dean of Diversity, an East Indian with a doctorate in Multicultural Studies named Patel. The wog opened his desk drawer one morning and a stick of C-4 blew him through his own bulletproof picture window and onto the quad below. The second device, disguised as an orange traffic bollard, had detonated on the exit ramp in Parking Building Number One, killing the Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, his driver, and two of his U.S. Marshal bodyguards. They were leaving campus after a Careers Day presentation wherein he was attempting to recruit gay and minority personnel for the many new facilities that were opening in places like Nevada and North Dakota, especially the mass relocation camps that now received the populations of entire small towns in the Northwest whose loyalty to the United States was considered suspect. The feds were especially looking for gay prison guards. Historically speaking, homosexual sadists have always been the worst and most cruel torturers.

The Tom and Becky duo had also managed to set up over a dozen of their teachers and classmates for NVA hits and punishment beatings, mostly off campus but two that took place on the grounds. They had repeatedly volunteered to do these jobs themselves, but Jackson always vetoed it. "No, you two are far too valuable operating above ground for us to risk blowing your cover," he told them. "I will give you as much advance warning as I can before any operation you have assisted with, so that you can make sure you are both very visible and you can account for every second of your time if you're questioned. I don't want you caught." Annette and Eric knew they weren't just valuable as spies on a lefty but minor college campus. They

provided a special window for the NVA into the world of the West Coast's political and corporate power élite, simply by keeping their ears open around the house and socializing with their parents' set whenever the opportunity offered. Both still hung in their families' wealthy and well-connected circles and passed on volumes of information from those circles, and also on some occasions the names of some of their friends and acquaintances, and their parents' friends and acquaintances, who showed signs of being dangerously fed up with the way America was going and who in their opinion might possibly be approachable by the NVA.

The two young people been compelled to become actors, on stage at all times, and they had managed to convince the college authorities, their fellow students, and so far the small army of FBI and FATPO snitches on campus that their minds were neat and clean and free of any taint of wicked racism or doubt. They each took several diversity and minority related classes; their test scores were always perfect and their exam papers pure PC orthodoxy. Both of them had been approached by the campus wing of the Young Democrats, and they had joined with alacrity. Eric was now head of the YD debating team and Annette was the chapter secretary with access and control of all the files and membership info, all of which she passed on to Oscar as soon as she got it. Their membership in the YDs and their impeccable family backgrounds got them invitations to local meetings, parties and functions (always held in heavily fortified locations) and also got them drafted to serve as waiters and ushers at the Governor's New Year's Eve ball, into which Eric was able to smuggle a mini camcorder and record all kinds of interesting people and snippets of conversation.

Periodically Jackson would question them, politely but comprehensively, as to how they were holding up under the stress. "To be frank, sir, we're thriving on it," Eric confessed to him. "We know we're doing something of historical importance. We have a purpose in life, which almost none of these other kids have. As corny as this sounds, we feel *alive,* like we're hitting on all cylinders."

"A purpose in life will have that effect, yes," Jackson replied.

There was only one thing that worried them now they were entering their sophomore year. Their monogamous, heterosexual, and racially homogenous relationship was becoming a bit noticeable, and they were both under pressure to demonstrate their commitment to diversity in the traditional American collegiate way, through casual and promiscuous sexual behavior. Especially Annette. "They're starting to call us Brad and Janet, after the white bread couple in the Rocky Horror Picture Show," she told Wingo in their first

briefing with him as company commander early in September. The two of them met with Wingo and Kicky McGee in the kitchen of a private home in McMinnville. They could heard odd rattling and cranking noises from the basement, and once a man they'd never seen entered the room and handed Wingo several sheets of 11 X 17 paper with large block printing on it, which he looked over, nodded, and handed back. Apparently the Party had a good old-fashioned underground, illegal printing press going downstairs.

"And how many slimy kikes have come on to you wanting to be your Dr. Frankenfurter?" asked Kicky.

"A few," admitted Annette. "And a few wogs as well, Bengalis or Indonesians or something of the kind. They really go for blondes."

"With me it's high-yellow mulatto chicks and this one goddamned faggot," muttered Eric. "I'm scared I'm going to lose my temper and slug him."

"Make sure you don't," ordered Wingo. "That's a hatecrime in itself and even if you can talk your way out of formal charges, it will draw the kind of attention that will make you useless as an undercover. You know the drill. One single offhand remark, one small action that indicates to the people watching you that someone's mind is not completely under control, and they start a file on you. What worries me is that your refusal to act like dogs in heat may draw the same kind of attention. It's a break in the pattern for proper Amurrican white kids of your age, and one so unusual as to be noticeable to someone who's paying attention, and you'd better believe somebody on that campus is on the FBI or FATPO payroll and they're paying attention. From their point of view, you should both be fucking anything with a pulse, drinking yourselves paralytic every night, and smoking, injecting, or snorting every known drug into your systems. Eventually some government snoop is going to wonder why you're not, and mention you to someone somewhere in the security apparatus. I want you both to keep your antennae on high reception, and let me know the minute you pick up on anything at all that indicates that you are under surveillance or investigation, however quietly. In the meantime, keep on with what you're doing. By the way, the word has gotten around, and I've been asked by Captain Hatfield and the boys from Third Batt to convey their thanks for the heads up back in June and a 21-gun salute to the both of you, especially Comrade Becky."

Now they sat at the table in the Food For Thought, quietly noting the comings and goings of their classmates. Eric had his laptop open to WordPad, and occasionally he made a cryptic note on thermodynamics that was in fact a reminder to himself to do something that had nothing to do with heat resistance. "There's Keisha Spease," Annette said quietly, glancing in the

direction of a black female student who was vocal in a number of left-wing causes.

"I've been keeping my ears open to pick up on anything about her, but apparently she never sets foot anywhere off campus," said Eric, also *sotto voce.*

"The niggers are finally learning," said Annette. "God knows, it's taken them long enough. We must have at least four hundred of them hiding here. Thank God you and I are still living at home and we're not here in the dorms all night. I keep having this fantasy of a big midnight raid with about twenty of the Boys, locked and loaded, just going through the quad and through the dorms blasting."

Eric nodded. "I tried to interest the new CO in my old idea of dropping some chug-chugs or whizz-bangs on this shithole one midnight, but I got the same answer. Even after dark, there are too many white kids around, too much potential for collateral damage."

"He hasn't seen some of these so-called white kids," muttered Annette. "These are even worse whiggers than some of those dweebs we had at Ashdown. Lottie Rosenfeld, over there by the salad bar."

"Miss Bull Dyke of PSU. I'm surprised she hasn't tried to hit on you."

"She did, I think," said Annette. "Once in BA class, once here, and once in Young Dems. I dumbed up and just plain refused to follow where she was leading, hoping she'd get the message. She must think I really am stupid."

"This is America. One doesn't dumb up, one dumbs down," pointed out Eric. "If it's possible to dumb any downer. I can't believe that they're not teaching logarithms in math classes here. They claim it would be unfair to minority students because logs are an artificial construction of Dead White European Males. Apparently math can be racist too. I wouldn't want to drive over any bridge these coons and wogs design or fly in any airplane they've worked on, that's for sure. What's Lottie been up to lately?"

"Putting the moves on that little freshman girl Wendy Sykes, and getting her pissed off enough so I think Wendy might be approachable. I wish they'd let us do some recruiting ourselves. Lottie's also on the YD Gay and Lesbian Committee, and they're throwing some kind of social at the Convention Center for Thanksgiving. That might be a good place for her to meet up with our tattooed lady friend and her main man."

"Something like that is going to be guarded like Fort Knox, maybe even a deliberate Fattie trap using the pervs as bait," said Eric. "But yeah, it needs passing along, especially now that Cat Lockhart is back in town. See if you can worm the details out of Lottie without getting groped, will you? She won't

give me the time of day. There's Dr. Thompson. Did we ever confirm if he was banging that Sheila girl from his graduate student class?"

"Yeah, but she's old enough, and she's white."

"Still, his wife might not appreciate it, and it could be used to put pressure on him if we ever need anything from him," said Eric. "Oh, before I forget, I noticed they've got a new beverage vendor in here, a Pepsi distributor from Corvallis according to the truck. Wonder what happened to the old one?"

"I can ask Mercy Prowse. She works in the kitchen," replied Annette.

"And, in comes Dean Pinella. Wonder how bad he's sweating now he's handling Dr. Patel's old Diversity portfolio?" asked Eric with a soft chuckle.

"I hear he's so scared to step off campus he's sleeping on a cot in his office," Annette told him.

"Any ideas on how we can get the card for the Monkoid Student Union building? I'd like to see about giving those bubble-lips a wake-up call."

"We might not need to," said Annette. "I was going by there yesterday and I saw one of the basement windows that was open a crack. I'm sure we could get it open and toss a package inside, or one of the comrades could, but the trouble is there's a damned CCTV camera panning right in front of it. We can ask our friend to take it out once we've worked out all the other details, but I know he has to be careful. This has happened twice now and I'm sure somebody's wondering why the security cams seem to fail exactly at the crucial moment."

"We better scoot," said Eric, looking at his watch. "We've got Young Dems upstairs at four. A couple of state legislators are supposed to be speaking and telling us all about the wonders of democracy, plus dangling a few minimum-wage internships in Salem for next summer in front of us. Bet you get a one of those offers and I don't."

"Bet you get offered one by the Republicans and I don't," riposted Annette.

"Let's see what kind of a line we can get on them and check out how thoroughly they're guarded. They're supposed to be using mercs now, because the state police are spread too thin. State hacks should be fairly low on the totem pole and easier targets for us than the really big politicians." He picked up the check. "I'll get this."

Annette went out into the huge main lobby, glancing back at Eric where he stood at the cash register. Just outside the door of the Food For Thought Café hung a huge cork bulletin board with all the usual kinds of notices and flyers on it, for everything from nightclubs to special classes, apartments to share, items for sale, etc. She was studying the junk on the bulletin board when

someone grabbed her from behind, twisted her left arm viciously behind her back, and slammed her into the wall. She felt the cold metal of a gun barrel pressing into her neck just below her right ear. "Hello again, Mary," said a sibilant voice behind her.

"What? Who are you? What the fuck are you doing?" gasped Annette.

"You remember me, Mary, or whatever your name is," said the voice. "We met briefly last June, outside the Benson Hotel. You were with Dawson Zucchino, who subsequently disappeared for several days and then showed up down in Los Angeles with a wild story about how he had been kidnapped and tortured by godless neo-Nazis. I was supposed to be guarding Zucchino. You embarrassed me, Mary. I don't like being embarrassed by Nazi whores." The man whirled her around, held his Glock under her chin, and pinned her to the wall with his knee in an obscene embrace, while with his free hand he ripped off her student ID from the chain around her neck. It was Perry, the security contractor who had interrupted her and Zucchino on the sidewalk that night. He was wearing a blue nylon jacket and baseball cap with the Blackwater logo on them. The Blackwater insignia as familiar and fearful to all the students as FATPO or police uniform, and Annette saw to her anger and her shame that all the white kids in the student union were simply glancing their way, turning their heads, and walking on rapidly, all of them pretending they saw nothing. The exceptions were a number of black and brown students who were standing and watching in sullen silence, slowly comprehending that some sort of policeman might have detected one of the evil white racists right here in their midst. None of the white kids dared to interfere and possibly be branded an evil racist as well; the building began rapidly emptying out of all its white occupants, terrified of becoming involved. "The Lord seems to have decided to give me another crack at you, *Annette,*" Perry said, studying the card and then staring into her eyes with loathing.

"Please take that gun out of my face. I don't know who you think I am, but you've got the wrong person," she said, trying to keep her voice calm. She didn't dare look back into the café to see where Eric was, or whether Eric saw that she was in trouble.

"I don't think so," said Perry. "I never forget a face, even if the hair and the clothes are different. I'm on the security detail for some members of the state legislature who are speaking here this afternoon, I was doing a preliminary check of the area, I saw you standing here and I recognized you immediately. You're an NVA slut and you're under arrest."

"On what charge! You can't arrest me! You're not a cop!" yelled Annette.

"Don't be stupid. I'm a paid employee of the state, and since September 11th, 2001 I can do any damned thing I want!"

Annette never saw Eric come out the door of the café, but all of a sudden he was behind the mercenary, lifting his closed laptop high. Annette twisted to her right and managed to knock the pistol away from her face with her left hand. Eric smashed the computer notebook down in an overhead chop that would have broken the man's neck if it had connected, but someone in the standing group of black and brown spectators yelled "Look out behind you, man!" and Perry turned just before the laptop crashed into his head. The blow was a glancing one, but it was delivered with all Eric's strength. It knocked Perry to the floor and dazed him. The pistol clattered down to the floor and Eric dove for it, simultaneously tossing the laptop to Annette. It had things on it that were none of ZOG's business. Eric came up with the gun in his hand and whirled. He and Annette found themselves facing a group of about forty other students, all black or Asian or some variation of mud. They were starting to move forward menacingly in clumps.

"You a NVA, bitch?" demanded one huge Samoan threateningly, apparently undeterred by the gun in Eric's hand, or else he was simply too stupid for it to register. Eric cocked the pistol, raised it, and shot the Samoan dead center. He ooged and aarghed and crumpled bleeding to the floor. All the others screamed and trampled out of the building along with everyone who hadn't snuck out already when they saw the trouble starting. Annette saw Perry staggering to his feet and tugging a stainless steel snub-nosed .38 revolver from his ankle holster. "*Eric!*" she screamed. Eric turned and shot the Blackwater thug right between the eyes at close range. Apparently Perry loaded his weapon with hollow points or fulminate-capped exploding bullets, because the entire back of his head was blown out. He stood wobbling for a second or two, his face a bloody mask, and the two of them could literally see daylight and the wall beyond through the dead man's eye sockets. Then he collapsed as well and they were standing there alone with two corpses. They looked up and saw the red lights glowing on at least two closed-circuit television cameras; the whole thing had been recorded.

"I don't think we can talk our way out of this one," said Annette. "What do we do now?"

"Running might be a good idea," suggested Eric.

"Yes," agreed Annette. "Run where?"

"Not out any of the doors," he said. "Sky bridge to the School of Ed first. Grab soldier boy's holdout piece." Annette picked up the .38 and stuck it in her purse, and Eric pulled two extra ammunition clips out of the pouches

on Perry's belt and stuck them in his back pockets. While they were running upstairs, he called back, "Anything in the car that you absolutely for sure have to recover?"

"No," she said.

"Okay, I think we'd better do this on foot. A car will be too easy for them to spot and track, and there's too much traffic downtown. We could get boxed in too easy. Let's see if we can make it to Ninth Avenue, then downtown, then onto a Trimet or MAX station to our E&E point." Eric reached up and forcibly ripped one of the upstairs security cameras off the wall. "Now they'll have to guess which way we've gone." He stuck the gun under his shirt and they strolled calmly hand in hand over the glassed-in archway connecting the buildings, and then down through the School of Education, Annette with the laptop on a strap over her shoulder. They managed to leave by a side exit and get out onto the sidewalks campus. They could hear the sounds of a crowd and now police sirens behind them.

"Procedure says we should split up," said Annette in a low voice.

"I know," replied Eric. "To hell with procedure. I'm not leaving you."

"Me neither," she said.

"Unless our unknown comrade has somehow managed to give us a hand we don't know about, they're probably tracking us on the cameras," said Eric. "We need to get off campus and away from those things. Head for Ninth Avenue and Market Street."

"There's a security shack at the gate there."

"Yeah, but I know a way through the hedge." They were able to crawl through and jump down onto Ninth. Traffic wasn't too bad, the afternoon rush not having begun yet, but it was sufficiently crowded on the street and the sidewalk so that they could blend in. They jaywalked across the street, turned left on Park, and then right on Market. Eric pulled out his NVA cell phone and dialed. After several rings Jimmy Wingo's voice answered. "Yeah?"

"Is this Sliders Bar and Grill?" asked Eric.

"Yeah, that's right."

"You still got Texas Tea?"

Wingo was silent for a moment. "Yeah, we got it. You want to try some?"

"Sure do. Got a real hankering for it. What time do you close?" asked Eric.

"One in the morning. Call ahead to book a table."

"I will. See you later." Eric closed his phone. "Okay, he wants us to go to location one, not our own E&E point, which means they'll retrieve us. That would be . . . shit! I can never remember all this stuff."

"The downtown post office, Hoyt Street side," Annette reminded him.

"Thanks. Anyway, he wants another call when we're there."

"You know they got the whole thing on digital from those damned cameras in the student union," said Annette calmly. "That's it, we're toast."

"Eric Sellars and Annette Ridgeway are toast," said Eric. "Tom and Becky will live on to fight another day. Many another day."

"Mmmm, not if we get spotted on the street," said Annette. "They've got to have an APB out on us by now, with a description of what we're wearing."

They were passing by a trendy and overpriced boutique. "Feel like stopping for a little shopping?" suggested Eric. "We use our plastic in here they'll eventually pick up on it, but it may buy us some time."

Fifteen minutes later they emerged from the store clad in new outerwear. Eric was clad in a warm shepherd's coat and Annette a brown corduroy jacket. They had lost the baseball caps; Eric now boasted a black cowboy hat and Annette a dark worsted pork-pie cap. They continued walking on down Broadway. There were sirens screaming somewhere, and twice the two of them turned and looked into a store window while a FATPO armored truck rumbled by. It was starting to grow dark now, and the neons and streetlights were blinking on in the murky dusk. They were walking by a yuppie fern bar with a large plasma TV on over the bar when Annette glanced up. "Oh, shit!" she exclaimed, grabbing Eric's arm. He turned and through the window, on the television screen inside, he saw a large and distorted grainy picture of the entrance to the Food for Thought Café. It was CNN. Perry was just slamming Annette into the wall and poking the gun into her neck. Along with all the patrons in the bar they watched while Eric attacked the Blackwater goon with his laptop, then shot the Samoan, then shot the goon. They couldn't hear any sound, but didn't need to.

"Boy, that was quick. They must be after us hot and heavy to get it on the air so fast. Us First Brigade boys are really photogenic," said Eric dryly. "First the CO and those guys on Flanders Street, then Cat leading the band on Oscar night, then Cap Hatfield and the Wild Bunch on Sunset Beach, now us. We're giving the media all kinds of exciting footage."

"Hopefully these new threads will disguise us until we can get picked up," said Annette. They turned and walked on. "Well, this is it. Our old lives are gone now. Any regrets?"

"Not a one," Eric told her.

"Me neither."

"Annette, I want you to listen to me and not give me any feminist bullshit or backtalk," Eric continued, quietly but firmly. "If things break bad, I will

hold off whoever it is and draw them off onto me. I want you to run, run like hell, and don't look back."

"You did pretty good with nothing but this laptop back there in the student union," she reminded him.

"I was lucky, and there was only one of them. We won't have that kind of luck again. I mean it, Annette. You're a woman, and your life is more important to the future of the race than mine, as pompous as that sounds. You can give life to those who will come after. Like you said, we're supposed to split up anyway. If anything goes down I want you to run. I'll be fine, I can take care of myself."

"Fuck you," said Annette, tears rolling down her cheeks. "No. And any babies I have are going to be yours."

"There won't be any meaning to any of this if you die," said Eric gently.

"I said no. I'm coming with you, always. Now be quiet. We're supposed to be escaping and evading."

They walked on in silence for the rest of the way, and made it to Hoyt Street. Dark was falling rapidly now, it was getting chilly, and they were glad of the new coats they had gotten. Their old ones were back in the car in the parking deck at PSU, probably being pawed over by now by all kinds of cops and Fatties. Eric dialed again. "Hey, I'd like a table for tonight."

"I'm kind of busy right now," said Wingo. "I've got a busted hosepipe in the kitchen. Can you call back in five?"

"Sure." Eric closed his phone. "ETA in about five minutes. Authentication is hosepipe, in case it's someone we don't know, but my guess is they'll probably send Lavonne."

"Is she back?" asked Annette.

"Yeah. Don't know where she went, but I imagine she needed some time off after Sunset. You heard what they did to her man in prison?"

"Yeah," said Annette bitterly. "How many of our guys did they murder in retaliation for the Wild Bunch embarrassing them like that?"

"Near as we can figure about forty, before the stink got too bad even for Hillary and she called it off," said Eric. "Well, there's one silver lining, although I'd never say that to Lavonne."

"How can there be a silver lining to forty men being dragged from their cells in the middle of the night, strapped onto a gurney and injected with poison before they even know what's happening?" demanded Annette.

"We know we're going to win now," said Eric confidently. "Any government that does things like that is weak, terrified, in a panic. They're losing and they

know it, and so they're just lashing out in all directions. They've lost their cool, we've still got ours. We're going to win."

They were standing under a streetlight when a dark maroon Lincoln Town Car pulled up beside them. The power window rolled down, and Ray Ridgeway looked out at them. "Hi, kids!" he called out cheerfully. "Just happened to be driving by and saw you standing there. Almost didn't recognize you with those jackets on. Must be new. Where's the Lexus? Hop in, I'll drive you back to campus."

"Oh God, no!" whispered Annette to herself.

"What will we do if he's still here when Vonnie or whoever shows up to collect us?" whispered Eric.

"Come on," she said. They went over to the car, and Annette leaned down to speak to her father. "Dad," she said softly, "I'm going to have to ask you to do something for me now. Please listen to me, don't say anything, just do it. I want you to roll up the window and go home, and do it without any questions or argument. I have to ask you to trust me and believe me when I say that it has to be this way. Eric and I are all right, someone's coming for us."

"Yes, I know," said Ridgeway. "I'm coming for you. Oh, I forgot. I'm supposed to say 'hosepipe.' I'm not too familiar with this street-level stuff, I'm afraid." Eric and Annette stared at one another, their mouths open. "Get in, please," said Ray. "We're holding up traffic."

Annette and Eric got in the back, the Lincoln pulled away, and they rode in silence for a minute or so. "Well, this is weird," said Eric eventually.

"How long have you known? I mean when did you . . . ?" asked Annette, not knowing where to begin.

"A few months after you two," said Ridgeway. "After Flanders Street, as I recall. As to how long I've known, you don't really think I'm so unobservant as not to notice when one of my handguns goes missing, do you? First, I want you to tell me what happened today, exactly. Don't worry, this is business. I've got a couple of wanted Volunteers in my car and I need to know just how hot you are."

"Pretty damned hot," confessed Annette. "Obviously you haven't checked CNN in the past thirty minutes." She took a deep breath and filled her father in on the events of the afternoon. She told him the Blackwater thug Perry had recognized her from a previous mission, but she did not say what the mission was or what she had been doing, and her father impressed her by not pressing for details. He had picked up the Volunteer code, right enough. When she had finished she asked, "How did you hook up with the Army?"

"I knew you'd killed Flammus. The only thing I didn't know was whether or not you'd actually succeeded in finding and joining the NVA," said Ray. "I considered simply confronting you both, since I knew both of you would be involved, but I didn't know what I'd do if you simply lied to me and denied it. I had no proof, after all, and that might have spooked you and driven you away, out of the house and away from home to somewhere I could do even less to protect you. After a while I was pretty sure I saw signs that something was up. Your mother, and I assume Eric's folks as well, thought that when you two were out at all hours you were just off canoodling somewhere like teenagers do. But that never quite gelled for me. You're both very serious young people and I couldn't imagine you spending quite so much time on that part of your lives. No offense."

"Well, we *were* canoodling *some* of the time," said Annette defensively.

"No longer my concern since you turned eighteen," Ray told them. "Anyway, I racked my brains trying to think of what to do. I was absolutely sure you were in the process of destroying your lives, but having already lost one daughter to this horror show we call a society, I had to be very careful about how I intervened, since I knew that one slip could make things infinitely worse. To make a long story short, I knew someone who knew someone else who knew someone else in turn, multiply that by about ten more relays and you get the idea. One evening I sat down in an undisclosed location and I had a long talk with one of the most fascinating and brilliant men I've ever met, a fellow named Henry Morehouse, aka Red Morehouse, aka Mr. Chips. Have you met him?"

"We know the name," said Eric. "He's supposed to be AC."

"Close enough. Anyway, Red has the most incredible ability to look you right in the eye and say out loud things that you've been thinking all your life but never dared to speak, thoughts you hardly dared to acknowledge even to yourself. I came to him to try and find out if my daughter and her boyfriend were involved with what I viewed as a gang of criminals. I stayed to listen, and to my own surprise I ended up offering to help. I was then put in touch with another fascinating and brilliant young man who goes by the name of Oscar."

"Now him, we know," admitted Annette.

"Yes, he told me." Annette noticed they were now on Highway 30 headed west, and assumed they were going into Bandit Country. "Oscar made me no promises, except that he would inform me if anything happened to either of you, and by then I accepted that because I knew that's how it had to be. There's a war on, and winning it has to take precedence over personal considerations.

It took actually meeting with these NVA men to show me who they were and what they were about, and to understand that you are now both adults and you're capable of making your own decisions. You have been an adult for a long time, of course, Annette. If your sister had lived, I doubt if she ever would have been. But as worried and as fearful as I was about you both, and still am, I realize that whether I like it or not, history has caught up with all of us, bitten us in the ass, and tag, we're it."

"Uh, sir, may I ask what your role in the Army is? In a general way?" asked Eric. Ray turned off onto a side road.

"We're coming up on where the first Fattie checkpoints usually start," he said casually. Annette still couldn't get over having her father smack in the middle of her and Eric's secret life; it was almost like seeing an elephant in church. "As to what I do for the Army," he went on, "It's a little bit of this and a little bit of that, a lot of intelligence gathering, some of which I understand you two have actually been duplicating. But mostly I am now working in one of the most little known and yet in its own way vital aspects of any war or revolution, the economic side of things. Not just contacts and moving money, although some of that—I'm the first full-fledged banker to sign on, and they were overjoyed to get me—but actual economic *planning* for the future Northwest Republic to come. The Army Council is aware of the risks of too quick a victory, as odd as that may sound. They know that if all of a sudden the American authority collapses like it did in the former Soviet Union, they don't want to find themselves as a bunch of gunmen who only know how to pull triggers and rig detonators, sitting on top of a situation they don't know how to control or work with. It is possible to win the war and lose the peace. They mean to hit the ground running so they can actually build a functioning state, a viable economy, and a sane and stable society based on real productivity and economic sanity. That's a mighty tall order, and I have to say, I'm loving every minute of it."

"Would you have joined if it hadn't been for Jan?" asked Annette.

"Count on you to cut right to the nub," chuckled her father. "Yes, I think so, if the opportunity had offered. Annette, I don't have to tell you what Jan's death did to me and to your mother. But this isn't about avenging your sister, although for a while I thought maybe it was. It's not about Jan, it's about me, about becoming the kind of man I should have become long ago. Remember a conversation we had in the den the night of the funeral, honey? When I was giving you that whole spiel about how you have to go along to get along, all that tripe? I sensed that I dropped in your estimation that night, and that ate at me, because I knew I *should* have diminished in your regard, that what I

was saying was basically nothing more than the elaborate excuse of a coward. Someone who believes himself to be a coward is not a happy man, I can tell you. Then Flammus got his. I knew perfectly well that you two had done it, and I had to face the fact that a pair of 17-year-olds had shown me up, had done what I lacked the physical and moral courage to do. I can't undo the past or change the man I was, honey, but I can change the man I will be in the future, and I intend to."

"Have you said anything to Mom, about either of us?" asked Annette.

"Oh, good God, no! Here we are."

Annette didn't know what road they were on, but her father pulled the car into the driveway of a house with white weatherproof siding house and a concrete driveway. He parked and they got out. Ray walked up to the door and gave a series of knocks, and Lieutenant Jimmy Wingo opened the door. When they got into the living room, Oscar rose to greet them. "I've been watching your television debut," he said, indicating the TV. One of the local stations was running the security camera footage from the student union again, and they all watched the short, violent episode play out, Ray Ridgeway's face expressionless as he watched one of Zion's dogs hurl his daughter up against a wall and point a loaded pistol at her head. "Usually we want a full debriefing when something like this happens, but I'd say that film clip pretty much says it all. Anything to add?"

"We're grateful for the retrieval, but we were a bit surprised when we saw who the driver was," said Eric, nodding at Ray Ridgeway. "How did he come to be there, sir?"

"Jim reported to me when you guys yelled Texas Tea, and I happened to be with Comrade Ridgeway senior going over a few things when the call came in," said Oscar. "Technically I suppose it was need to know, and he didn't need to know, but sometimes common decency has to trump procedure, so I told him you guys were in the wind and he volunteered to make the recovery run."

"Do you need me anymore tonight, Oscar?" asked Ray.

"No. We need to plot a new career path for our two recently unemployed comrades here," said Oscar. "In view of your relationship, of course, you can sit in if you like."

"What I don't know, I can't tell," said Ray. "I expect I'll find FBI or Fatties or both at my house when I get back. Thank God my wife is out of town visiting her sister, although that probably means she's going to learn about Annette from seeing her on TV. That's bad, but better than if armed niggers in body armor simply kicked in the door without warning. I will of course be

utterly shocked and appalled at the news of my daughter's wicked ways, but they may not buy it and they might decide to take me to one of those cellars in the Justice Center for a little physical experimentation."

"Can't you pull him under as well, sir?" asked Annette in alarm.

"That's not possible, honey," said Ray. "In order for me to be of any use to the movement I *must* stay where I am. No one else can do what I'm doing right now. Don't worry, I'm sufficiently well connected so they'll tread lightly with me. I hope. But if I'm wrong and they do try to break me, I cannot, *must not* know anything about your whereabouts or what you are doing. I would die before knowingly betraying you, but we all know these bastards have their dirty ways of getting anything out of anyone. I couldn't live with that. You'll be changing locations right away, Oscar?"

"They'll be miles away before you get back to town, Ray," Oscar assured him. "Actually, I was going to ask them if they would be interested in coming on board officially with Third Section. Lieutenant Wingo's scowl tells us he doesn't like us cherry-picking his best people. Few line companies do. But you two have shown a talent for the work, and we can use you in areas besides Portland, which will be too hot to hold you for a time."

"Well, this is it, then," said Ray with a sigh. "I don't know when I will be seeing either of you again, but I presume I need not tell you that you will both be in my thoughts and my prayers, always." He solemnly shook hands with Eric, then leaned over and kissed his daughter on the forehead. "I'll do my best to help your mother through this, and if anything happens to either of us, Oscar here will get word to you. Mind how you go, comrades," he said gently.

"You too, Dad," replied Annette.

XXVIII

The Butcher's Bill

Cowards die many times before their deaths,
The valiant never taste of death but once.

Julius Caesar—Act II, Scene 2

Portland in the winter was never a cheery place at the best of times, but in this fourth winter of The Trouble it was a grim and haggard zone of concrete berms and razor wire, bombed-out storefronts and buildings, and sullen people hurrying silently through rainy streets while trying to avoid the constant FATPO patrols and checkpoints that seemed to lurk around every corner in the central part of the city. Even citizens who had nothing to do with the NVA and who supported the government politically tried to avoid the body-armored thugs, who had quickly gained an evil reputation for corruption, bullying, brutality, and sudden outbursts of mindless violence. Those wealthy Unionists who could afford to do so were quietly finding excuses to leave the city for places outside the Northwest, not wanting to expose themselves and their families to the NVA, but also out of a desire to avoid the attentions and exactions of their federal "protectors" as well.

Overall, things were going badly for the Americans. Chelsea Clinton's accession to the White House a few days before had been a low-key affair, her inaugural speech televised from the Oval Office because the Secret Service didn't dare let the President of the United States show her face in public for fear of assassination. Chelsea's whole presidency was being greeted with what might be termed polite skepticism by the media and the country as a whole. It was an open secret that her Sea Hag of a mother was still calling the shots

and running the United States government from behind the scenes. Hillary hadn't even bothered to move out of the White House. Even old man Bill was still to be seen on occasion, shambling the corridors in a drug-induced stupor in flip-flops, sometimes wearing an old bathrobe and sometimes in his underwear, setting off security alarms when he forgot his limited-access swipe card.

The American empire was clearly on the verge of collapse. Despite the annual draft of over a million young people, the United States simply couldn't maintain the huge armies required to fight low-level insurgencies in a dozen countries. The casualty rate of over ten thousand dead per month was finally beginning to bite, even in a country the size of the U.S.A. Despite every effort to sweep them out of public view and hide them away, the streets and malls of America were now full of mangled veterans who were missing arms and legs or who had been driven insane, begging for small change, talking to themselves.

In the Northwest itself, an odd and unstable situation had developed. Wide swaths of the countryside, mountains and high desert and deep forests, farmlands and seaside hamlets, and even some medium-sized towns, were essentially liberated territory. This included Clatsop County and the Oregon coastal environs. There were hundreds of communities, now all white, that had developed ways to self-sustain and take care of their own in the increasing absence of any help or support from the cities or from the federal authority. Local government under men like Sheriff Ted Lear and countless other small towns' mayors, police chiefs, and city councils now actually meant something once again. One could always tell when one was in such a free zone, because the flagpoles on government buildings and schools were bare, or sometimes flew only a state flag. They didn't dare fly the Stars and Stripes, and the NVA was sufficiently diplomatic not to demand they fly the Northwest Tricolor just yet.

The cities themselves still contained concentrations of federal troops and at least a partially functioning civil administration. Up and down the Puget Sound metroplex, in a few remaining islands of federal control such as Spokane, Boise, Eugene, and of course Portland, the writ of the D.C. government still ran. Sometimes. Periodically FATPO and whatever military was available back on brief rotation from the Middle East would descend by air on some rural district and conduct wide sweeps through the area, making arrests off lists of real and suspected NVA sympathizers, demolishing people's homes with bulldozers, and in some cases rounding up whole neighborhoods and towns for deportation to the camps in Nevada and North Dakota. The

NVA would melt before them and then begin nipping at the Americans' heels and extremities, sniping, cutting off patrols and wiping them out, demolishing vehicles and sometimes whole convoys with IEDs, assassinating local Unionist collaborators and local officials who assisted the government forces, and sometimes staging lightning attacks on FATPO bases and camps. The Pacific Northwest was incredibly immense, and the United States simply did not have enough armed manpower to put a soldier behind every tree.

Those who resisted the concept of armed struggle before the war had always claimed that ZOG's immense technological advantages prohibited guerrilla warfare in North America, but it turned out that this simply wasn't the case. True, the government was fairly competent at tracking many NVA movements around the Homeland via satellite. What they lacked was the manpower and the capability to *do* anything about such movements. They tried things like unmanned assassination drones, pinpoint bombing, and even Cruise missiles, but the results were poor and collateral damage to civilians was always great, sowing more hatred against the United States government, just as such strikes had done throughout the Middle East. America's "smart" military technology was never by any means as smart as it was made out to be. The feds tried dropping Special Forces A-Teams and larger Ranger-style companies into small towns and mountainous areas to hunt down and destroy NVA flying columns and base camps, and there were frequent fierce fire-fights and skirmishes far from civilization that the NVA did not always win, such as the complete annihilation of the famous Olympic Flying Column under Commandant Tom Murdock and his famous partner, the beautiful Melanie Young. But the ultimate effect always fell far short of what the authorities anticipated, because they simply no longer had the resources to follow up on their local victories, and the rebels always came seeping back into areas that had been allegedly pacified the month before. It wasn't that the Americans had learned nothing from Iraq and Iran; it was simply that they had not yet figured out any way to use their superior materials and technology to break the human spirit.

Of all the NVA tactics used so far during the rebellion, the most effective and the one which struck the most terror into the established order in urban terrain was the use of snipers. It was the fear of sniper attacks that actually drove the non-whites off the streets and into their tightly-packed neighborhoods, and which caused the American security forces their biggest headaches in protecting their own personnel, keeping them jittery, off-balance and paranoid so that they never were quite able to mount a full court press offensive against Jerry Reb.

When the war had begun, most sniping had been a matter of floating, an almost casual seizing of any target that offered by anybody with a rifle. A Volunteer cruised around with his weapon in the back seat or the trunk and took any opportunity to bag a monkoid or two, or pop a round at a cop, and then he hauled ass. Those days were gone. There were few lone wolves left in the game. Sniper teams were now carefully assembled and trained and moved around by NVA field commanders like chess pieces on a board. They consisted of three people, a marksman, a spotter who served as a backup marksman, and a driver who also served as rear guard, watching the first two's backs while they took position, sighted in, and took their shot. Sometimes the shooters could be lying on a rooftop or up a tree or in a culvert for hours waiting for a target to appear. There weren't as many of the hunters as were generally believed. Successful hunting in cities that were chock full of security cameras on every corner, helicopters overhead, a population where informing was still an ever-present risk, and an overwhelming enemy response force within close distance of any given point at any given time, was a lot harder than the media made it seem. Any fool could shoot somebody down on the street, but given the speed with which FATPO could chopper in stop-groups and seal off an area, getting away and living to fire another day was the problem. Successful hunting day in and day out in the cramped confines of Portland was like trying to spearfish in a massive school of sharks who would turn and strike the moment they smelled blood.

The pool of available targets had shrunk considerably since the war began, as mass paranoia set in among the city's blacks, Mexicans, liberals, bureaucrats and journalists. They stayed in their own neighborhoods, guarded not only by cops and Fatties, but by private security forces in the wealthier enclaves and by neighborhood watches in the ghettos and barrios that warned of any strange white faces on the streets. Anyone white driving into predominantly black, Hispanic, rich, or sodomitic parts of town was certain to be repeatedly stopped, searched and harassed, and maybe given a good beating behind a FATPO Stryker for good measure if they protested. Employed blacks, Hispanics, Asians and other potential targets were ferried back and forth to work by armored vans and buses. Windows in office buildings and stores were either steel-shuttered or replaced by bulletproof Plexiglass. Open areas and squares in the town, the public parks, and up and down the highways where potential targets might be spotted on foot or coming in and out of facilities were either fortified with Bremer walls, or else screened with huge fences comprised of opaque nylon netting in order to obscure visibility. For example, most shopping mall parking lots that weren't underground were

now enclosed in perimeters of this tennis-net type fence, making it difficult to find a good firing position in the surrounding area that gave a clear view of the lot. So were all open areas in the integrated public schools or anywhere else that minorities might still be found. Major target areas like the Justice Center had become self-contained cities with hotel-like living quarters and apartments, as well as facilities such as grocery stores, banks, gyms, bars and restaurants, a Mighty Mart, and day care centers inside the Bremer walls.

The NVA countered by emphasizing quality as opposed to quantity, by setting teams to locate, track, and take down specific targets in areas where they believed themselves to be safe. It was important to keep the Americans off balance and to maintain the psychological upper hand, as well as interfere with their movements and slow them down as much as possible. More than IEDs, more than ambushes, more than bombing and arson and computer viruses, the sniping campaign slowed the "War On Domestic Terror" to a molasses-like crawl, while the NVA floated like a butterfly and stung like a bee. But lethal danger was always just around the corner.

* * *

On a raw and misty morning in January, a large blue panel truck marked Apex Dry Cleaning rolled through a suburban neighborhood in Beaverton. The blue trucks were well known in the metropolitan area. One of the growth sectors in Portland during The Trouble had been home delivery of every kind, since more and more people had become afraid to leave their houses or immediate neighborhoods even for essential services. Anyone who could telecommute to his job by computer did so, and one could now place orders for almost anything online or by phone. Every professional from the few remaining lawyers, to CPAs, to veterinarians and barbers now made house calls. Virtually every store would now deliver groceries, furniture, children's toys, hardware items, office supplies, pet supplies, liquor, and of course dry cleaning and laundry to their customers. Several media outlets had commented that street traffic in Portland these days seemed to consist of nothing but FATPO and police patrols, and delivery vehicles of every make and model.

Apex was the most popular and extensive home dry cleaning and laundry pick up and delivery service in town. It was also an NVA front company, bought out from the previous owners with a large sum of cash from several Indian casino robberies, and clinched with a little knee-capping to ensure confidentiality. Apex trucks went all over the city, and could be seen anywhere without exciting much comment or suspicion. The trucks rolled through the

ring of suburbs on their regular daily rounds, picking up and delivering sealed black bags of laundry and dry-cleaned suits and shirts and other garments on hangers. A few of the sealed black bags contained items other than laundry, since the Apex trucks were invaluable as conveyance between Volunteer safe houses and arms dumps as well. Virtually all of these were now located in the far suburbs ringing the city; the Portland command had made the decision that contact with the enemy in the crowded confines of the city center itself was simply too risky and had pulled back, more or less out of Portland itself, much to the glee of the Centcom who trumpeted the allegedly successful "elimination of terrorism" from downtown as a mighty victory.

On a cold and nasty morning, Cat-Eyes Lockhart was breaking in a new spotter, 18-year-old Volunteer Scott Gardner. Gardner had received his draft notice right out of high school, and he'd decided that if he had to fight it would be for his own people and his own country, and so he had gone AWOL and hooked up with the NVA through his aunt, a little old lady in tennis shoes type whom the rest of his family had always considered to be crack-brained. He had demonstrated a good marksman's eye and a steady hand and had made his bones in a simple General Order Number Four enforcement action wherein he shot down two Mexicans on the floor of a meat packing plant in Milwaukie, and he'd been assigned sniper duty to replace a Volunteer who had been killed resisting arrest.

The two of them were riding in the back of the truck, with their weapons clamped into brackets built into the front bulkhead, watching events on the passing streets through several small cell phone video cams that had been carefully mounted and concealed on the exterior of the vehicle, and which fed wirelessly into a laptop inside the rear of the truck. They had a four-way split screen, showing them a 360-degree view of the front, back, and sides of the vehicle. They could maximize any of those screens and zoom in on anything of interest. "That's the one thing I don't like about these trucks, is having to rely on electronic eyes," Cat told Gardner. "I like a window I can look out of, but the trouble is that windows imply passengers inside, and we want them to think there's nothing but laundry in here." Up front, Volunteer Joseph Mohr, a middle-aged man dressed in blue coveralls and wearing a blue baseball cap, was driving. He and Cat could speak to one another via two inexpensive hand-held radios, children's toys from Mighty Mart in fact, but good enough for short range communications. The truck had some special modifications that were carefully camouflaged, and would be difficult to detect in a casual once-over at a checkpoint. On each side and in the rear doors were narrow flip-up panels that allowed a rifle barrel to be inserted

through the aperture and a shot fired. A trap door opened downward and allowed access to the roof as a firing platform, and the truck's cab and panels were inlaid with molded Bakelite forms by way of bullet-proofing, which were effective while not weighing the vehicle down as much as steel plating would have done.

"Okay, here's the procedure," said Lockhart to Gardner. "These Apex runs are primarily for scouting purposes. You'd be amazed at how much information of all kinds you can pick up by just riding around, a lot of which we pass on to Third Section for analysis."

"Like what, sir?" asked Gardner.

"Don't call me sir, I'm just a Volunteer like you," said Lockhart. "You can just call me Jesse or Jess. Or Cat-Eyes, like everybody and his kid brother seems to do these days."

"Uh, if you don't mind my asking, why *aren't* you an officer, sir, I mean Jesse?" asked Gardner. "You're one of the most famous Volunteers of all, so why are you still a Volunteer, so to speak?"

"They keep threatening to promote me, but I've managed to hold them off so far," replied Lockhart. "I got no desire for all the hassles and responsibility. I just like to be out here on the street, shooting things that need to be shot. A lot of guys want to make good in the NVA so they can be politicians or military officers under the Republic, and there's nothing wrong with that, I suppose. People are always ambitious, and we can't all be starry-eyed idealists. Me, after the war I may go back to Astoria and become a drunk again, or I may not. Haven't decided yet."

"So what kind of information are we scouting for?" asked Gardner.

"Just interesting things we see and hear," Lockhart told him. "Like who's parking what vehicles where, who's getting hassled by Fatties and might be sufficiently resentful to help us out, which storefronts and properties are newly vacant, which ones are newly occupied and who's moved in, places where we can stash things, you name it. But mainly we're looking for any likely target anywhere along the route, and we're finding some. Mostly what we're finding are affirmative action niggers and Mexicans who got affluent enough to get into some of these houses. Now they think they're hiding in plain sight, so to speak, because we won't be hunting them in Brady Bunch territory. We're also looking for anyone we can identify as having anything to do with the police, the government, the media, the bureaucracy, Jews, anyone responsible for employing any of the above, in short anybody who needs removal. But unless someone really big like the governor or a military general or someone on that order pops up on the street in front of us, this

is not shoot on sight. We need to be careful and remember all the bad guys who are out there after us, just like we're after them. Even if we see a nigger or someone whom we know to be hostile, we don't just blast away like we used to do back in the day. We make a note of the location, and then we send a recon team in to check out the situation, see what the lay of the land is like, see how many there are, try and get a scope on exactly who they are and how important they are in the scheme of things. Above all, we make sure they're not some kind of FATPO setup. Fatties are starting to use our targeted people as bait, with or without their knowledge and permission. Blacks and homos and couples race-mixing in public, that kind of thing, trying to lure us into attacking when and where they're waiting for us. Our guys in Seattle and Spokane and a couple of other places have walked into those. Nobody in Portland has yet, and I don't intend to be the first. If we see anyone who looks like a likely candidate, we'll come back after dark, in two cars, and very carefully scope the whole area, the terrain, and otherwise learn what we can. We want to make sure that the target actually lives in the house where we think he lives, or else he actually makes an appearance at whatever place at such and such a time every day, and that he doesn't have any unfriendly company hanging around."

"Sounds like it can get boring," said Gardner.

"Boring as hell," agreed Lockhart. "Most parts of a war are. Tell you what, next week I'm making a little trip down to Salem hunting liberal legislators, who are now an endangered species in Oregon. I'll take you and some of the other new people along, and we'll see if we can't help make the breed completely extinct. You and some of the others might get to take your first combat shots there."

"Out fucking standing!" said Gardner enthusiastically.

"First stop coming up, guys," said Mohr's voice on the Mighty Mart radio.

"Got it," said Lockhart. "Okay, when Joe makes his pickups and deliveries, he has to open the back here and come in, and he has to leave the doors open to make it look right to anyone watching, so we duck down behind this coat rack here just in case anyone gets curious and looks inside. We monitor what he's doing at the front door on the laptop and see who he's talking with, who will be mostly homeowners and female, but we check out the whole house and everything our cameras can get in a 180-degree sweep. Check for anything that looks out of place, could be anything from a police car to a black or brown face in the window, anything that indicates there might be something of interest to the Army going on."

"Got it," said Gardner.

For an hour the two of them crouched in the back of the truck and watched Volunteer Mohr make routine pickups and deliveries of laundry and dry-cleaned clothing on hangers. Then Cat got a call on his cell phone. He spoke with the person on the other end, and then picked up the radio. "Joe, can we cut this short and get over to the Barnes Road exit off 26, chop-chop, without pissing off too many Apex customers who need their underwear?"

"Yeah, we can swing back later and get the few stops we have left," replied Mohr. "What's up, Cat?"

"I just got a call from Brigade. Threesec picked up on a special military jet landing at PDX at four a.m., arriving from an undisclosed location, cleared concourse and all very hush-hush, and then a chopper coming in at the Justice Center heliport at five this morning, possibly from PDX. Now they report an enemy convoy coming out the gates of the Justice Center, Strykers fore and aft, couple of APCs that are presumably full of Fatties, one CNN truck and one Fox News, and in the middle of it all a string of three staff cars, plus two Fattie helicopter gunships overhead. The three staff cars tell us they don't want us to know which one to hit, so one of them is carrying somebody they know we'll want to take out. Looks like a drop-in. They're moving westward up U.S. 26, and Oscar wants us to check it out. Not shoot, just see if we can give them a once-over and see who the hell it is and what's going on, then maybe we can figure out some way to rain on the parade."

"Okay, we should be there in maybe four minutes," said Mohr. "They have a big service road in front of St. Vincent Medical Center and I can cruise around or park there."

"That may actually be where they're headed," said Lockhart. "Not sure why. I'm trying to think what's out that way, anywhere they could be planning a photo-op. Could you get into the parking lot at St. Vincent, Joe?"

"Not without going through a full search, plus it's gated and enclosed now, Cat," said Mohr. "Bremer walls and razor wire and sniper netting. That's the hospital where they send a lot of wounded Fatties and ZOG bigwigs, and so it's pretty much on lockdown, Blackwater on the floors and Fatties on the perimeter. Heard they've even got a couple of twin .50s mounted on the roof, although that may be bullshit. Even if I could bluff our way in and we could park, we couldn't get out if the shit hit the fan."

"Well, maybe they're going to the hospital for their drop-in, visiting the wounded heroes of Zion and all, or maybe not. Get us there and we'll see if we can pick 'em up and tag along." Lockhart put the radio back in its sheath.

"What's a drop-in, sir, I mean Jesse?" asked Gardner.

"That's when some really big Zoggie politician or general or celebrity decides to make a little propaganda hay off us evil racist dudes," explained Lockhart. "They suddenly drop in on an operational area, literally fall out of the sky. Once on the ground they stroll around shaking hands and making little speeches and kissing any babies that haven't been blown away, trade a few back-slapping jokes with the village idiot, that kind of dog and pony show. They want to show the folks back home how safe it all is, and how the forces of truth, justice, and the Amurrican way are winning, and victory is just around the corner, you get the idea. All the unfriendly locals and the dead bodies and the burned-out vehicles have been swept off the streets, and the whole time the big shots are surrounded by a whole battalion of men and machines and heavy weapons to guard them, but the TV cameras crop those out of the picture, of course. Then they vanish away back into the sky and the shooting starts again. Bush Two and Hillary used to do that crap all the time to us in Iraq. Drop-ins are a real pain in the ass. Everybody's jumpy as hell. That big throw-down me and Jimmy Wingo and Kicky McGee got into downtown on Flanders Street a few years ago was because of a drop-in, the Vice President. To make matters worse, we didn't even get him. Never got close."

"So who could be dropping in on us?" asked Gardner.

"No idea."

"Chelsea?" suggested the young Volunteer eagerly.

"We should have such luck! That's what we need to find out, but if it's someone big enough so clipping him will help bring a White nation any closer into being born, I'm going to try for him, and I'm going to need your help." Lockhart grinned at him. "Who knows? You may get in your first combat shot as a marksman a lot sooner than you think."

The truck arrived on the access road and cruised up it slowly, passing the entrance to St. Vincent Hospital, which was now fortified with two steel-shuttered concrete pillar-bunkers on either side, and a heavy steel rolling door. Inside one of the pillboxes, Blackwater Security Lieutenant Roy Dow was instructing a new guard, a turbaned Sikh named Gupta Sayyid Singh, in the use of the CCTV system. "We keep the gates open during the hours of daylight," Dow told him. "We were getting too many complaints from the medical staff about ambulances being delayed going in and coming out, not to mention employees, so we just use the boom arms on both the entrance and exits during the daytime. At night, the steel doors are shut and they stay shut, opening and closing one vehicle at a time as they are checked out and passed. No exceptions. You'll be handling the exit today. You log every vehicle

out individually and you make sure you look inside, get the license number, and make a notation of the occupants on the day sheet. Access control on the entrance is even more tightly controlled. I don't care if it's an ambulance heading for a ten-car pileup or a bombing site, you do not let anybody in or out without making sure you know who they are and what their business is. Whatever's happened, they're just going to have to bleed or stroke out or whatever until security regulations are complied with. We are *not* letting any of these sinners in here to do bad acts." Dow was another evangelical of the type Blackwater so favored, and he had already irritated the Sikh officer by slipping small Christian comic books into his locker and his lunch bag in the security command post refrigerator. "The cameras command the full length of the access road right down to the on-ramp; make sure that at all times you are aware of what traffic is on that road."

"Very good, sah," said Singh. "I should like to be pointing out that blue lorry has just turned around at the end of the access road and is coming back this way."

"Yeah, so I see," said Dow, peering into the television monitor. "Okay, we'll use that as a test vehicle. Probably nothing, you see Apex trucks all over Portland these days since the fascists have terrorized decent people so badly they're scared to drop off their own dry cleaning, but for all we know the NVA could have hijacked that truck and it could be filled with a fertilizer bomb big as the one that took out the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City. So when you see something like that, or anything suspicious, you click on the suspect vehicle or person using your mouse, like this . . ." Dow demonstrated, "Then you get the little hourglass icon for about ten seconds and you have to hit F3, like this. The cameras have multiple lenses and what you do there is you lock one lens onto the target and you get a split screen that follows the target anywhere, there, see? You now have a separate screen that has all the functions and capabilities of the main screen, like there, see? Okay, it's coming up to our position. If it slows down or does anything else hinky, you hit the code orange button. That flashes in the other gatehouse as well, so the other guards will know to pay attention, something's up. They can see your split screen as well. Okay, they're not slowing down, they're going on by. Probably took the wrong exit off 26 and they'll be going back on the highway."

"Then why are they slowing down and pulling over?" asked Singh.

"I don't know," said Dow with a frown, peering into the monitor.

The truck was slowing down because they had sighted the FATPO convoy coming down Highway 26 from the city below them and to their rear, but they needed a few extra moments. "Okay, Joe, I want you to get in behind them,

but not too close, just close enough to keep them in sight," said Cat-Eyes through the radio. "At least three vehicles behind the last Stryker."

"We won't be able to see shit," said Mohr. "Especially since the three civilian cars ahead of us will be giving them a lot of space, if they have any sense."

"I know, but right now we just want to see where they're going," replied Cat. In order to give the Federals a sufficient lead, Mohr had to slow down and ease the truck toward the right shoulder of the road a bit, almost as if he were about to pull off. It was a slight movement, and normally it would not have been noticed except by the driver immediately behind him, but Singh had sharp eyes, and Dow saw it too.

In the gatehouse a radio crackled. "Pilgrim, this is the Doc Shop," said the Blackwater watch commander, speaking to the convoy on the radio. "We have you on visual. All clear."

"Roger that, Doc Shop," came a voice from one of the staff cars.

Dow frowned and picked up the radio. "Doc Shop, this is Post Four. We have a possible bad boy on the access road, blue Apex Dry Cleaning truck. You see them?"

"Yeah, I see 'em, Roy," said the control room operator inside the hospital. "What's bad about 'em?"

"Probably nothing, but it looks to me like they're hanging back, waiting for that Priority One movement to pass by, maybe so they can fall in," said Dow.

"Mmmm, okay, I'll alert Pilgrim," replied the control room man.

"Always better to be safe than sorry," Dow lectured Singh. "The devil's minions are clever and sneaky. They can come at you from anywhere, any time, just like the temptation to sin. Okay, there they go. They're getting on to the highway and following the Priority One. Doc Shop, you see that?"

"Affirmative," came the response. "Pilgrim, this is Doc Shop. Be advised we have a possible suspect vehicle on your tail, blue panel truck marked Apex Dry Cleaning, just pulled onto 26 about three cars behind you. May be nothing but somebody's shirts and suits, but thought you should be made aware."

"Roger that, Doc Shop," said whoever was in the convoy. The voice belonged to Major Wallace Reid of the FATPO, a career Marine who had been seconded to the paramilitary organization over his protests because, as he put it to his superiors, he did not wish to command scum. He was told that the fact that the FATPO were scum was the primary reason they needed to be commanded by properly trained military officers, and he could take that or a seventh tour in the Middle East, this time in Saudi Arabia. Reid had almost taken the seventh tour, but by this time the perpetual 130-degree heat

was driving him very nearly insane, and the thought of a winter of freezing Northwest rain seemed to him to be a dream of purest nirvana. Even now, cold and wet as it was, Reid wanted to lower his power window, but the Ambassador would no doubt object. Reid clicked to another channel on his radio. "Pilgrim to Cormorant One."

"This is Cormorant One. Go ahead, Pilgrim," came the voice of a pilot in one of the Apache helicopters above them.

"Check out a blue Apex Dry Cleaning truck about three cars back behind us, just got on back at the last exit," ordered Reid. "You see him?"

"That's affirmative, Pilgrim."

"Keep an eye on him and let me know if he turns off," said Reid.

"Possible bad boy?" asked the pilot.

"I don't know," replied Reid. "Probably not, but we'll be going through checkpoint Foxtrot 20 up here in a bit, and if they follow us off the highway, I want them not just stopped but opened up and searched thoroughly."

"Roger, Pilgrim," said the pilot. "I'm on it. Cormorant One out."

In the Apex truck Volunteer Gardner asked, "You got any idea where they may be headed yet, Jesse?"

"Mmm, since it's not St. Vincent, maybe Beaverton Mall, to that Mighty Mart that got leveled by EOD a couple of years ago. They've done a couple of minor agitprop broadcasts from there, swearing to rebuild the place, although I notice they haven't even cleared away the debris yet. It's become a symbol of Portland's struggle against wicked racism and all that moo."

"The Red Baron blew that one at three o'clock in the morning, didn't he?" asked Gardner. "Nobody was killed or even hurt, if I remember correctly. Why would they want to make a symbol out of an empty department store that got blown up because they wouldn't hire American citizens?"

"Amurrica's pride got hurt," chuckled Cat. "Those places are the official Temple of Mammon, kind of, and we desecrated Amurrica's temple. If Mighty Mart isn't safe from the mean old NVA, who is? Besides, the ruins and the twisted girders and all look very picturesque. There's this one kiddie's doll in a box half sticking out of the rubble, and every time they go out there the cameras always show a close-up of that crumpled doll. The unspoken implication is that children were killed in the bombing, when in actual fact, as you pointed out, no one was killed at all. It's one of the many ways the media lie without actually lying, if you get me. I'll give the kikes this much, they're expert at creating propaganda." Lockhart's wireless phone bleeped. He answered it and muttered in the odd, stilted code the NVA was forced to use on the air via cell sites, then closed the phone. He picked up the radio.

"Okay, if I could understand correctly what Oscar was saying through all the doubletalk, we've got a make on the bigwig occupant of the convoy ahead. Chaim Lieberman, Israeli Ambassador to the United States."

"Shit," said Gardner. "What the hell is he doing here?"

"Probably a drop-in photo op thing, like I said," answered Lockhart. "The Israelis are really ginning up their PR machine in this country. The word seems to be that the Muslims are finally going to quit fooling around with the various American occupation garrisons in their assorted countries and they're going to launch some kind of mass offensive aimed at Israel, no one is quite sure how, but that's the buzz. The Jews are worried, judging from the money they're throwing around Washington, D.C. like it was confetti, and judging from the way the damned TV preachers are calling down the spirit for Israel even more than they ever have before. This is probably part of their campaign to pressure the United States into finally nuking Mecca."

"Jesus Christ," muttered Gardner. "I'm not a Muslim, but even I know that will simply make any peace between us and them impossible, forever."

"I think that's the idea," said Lockhart dryly. "Make damned good and *sure* we can never call this madness off. Just like in Iraq, where our so-called advisors from the Mossad forced us to bury any hadjis we killed in pig skins, or failing that with bacon in their body bags, a deliberate insult to their religion, unforgivable. Then they flew off in their damned choppers and left us to face the rage and the hate of the rest of them. Speaking of choppers," he picked up the radio, "Joe, are those copters still overhead?"

"Yeah," said Mohr.

"Let me know if they move out and appear to be scouting out in some direction. That might give us a clue as to where they're going."

"Got it."

"You know they call Lieberman the Butcher of Jericho?" ruminated Cat. "When he was a general in charge of the Jewish occupation on the West Bank, some kikes in a settlement got shot up real bad, and Lieberman decided to make an example of a whole Palestinian city, Jericho. You know, where the Bible says Joshua fit the battle and the walls come tumbling down, all that stuff? He cordons off the whole city in a night maneuver and then about four in the morning he sends over helicopters with feathered engines and drops gas bombs. Good old fashioned mustard gas. Thousands of people died in agony in their sleep, men, women, children, babies, everybody. The ones who survived are all blind or their lungs are shot for life. Hillary actually called the Israeli prime minister to congratulate him on the bold strike against terror." Lockhart sighed. "I've always felt bad about what we've done to those people.

A lot of guys came back from the Middle East hating them all, mindlessly, and considering some of the things they did to us, the beheadings and all, I can understand that. But we started it, back in 1948 when we turned those filthy Jews loose on them and stole their land, and then we came again to steal their oil. I killed them, but I never hated them. They were just doing what even then I wished American white people would have the balls to do someday. I sure would like to take this kike down. My way of apologizing to all the people I hurt over there."

"When they get to where they're going, will you take a shot?" asked Gardner eagerly.

"Yeah, one way or the other, unless it's just plain suicide for all of us."

"Looks like they're turning off," came Mohr's voice from the cab. "Cornell Road exit."

"Now what?" wondered Cat. "Where the hell are they going?"

Joe Mohr spoke on the radio. "Cat, good news and bad news. Bad news, there's a Fattie roadblock at the top of the off ramp, and they're going right through it. Good news, we have a couple of Apex pick-ups on Cornell and down on Thompson, and they're on my trip sheet, so we ought to be able to talk our way through."

"Go for it," said Cat-Eyes, deciding quickly. Mohr pulled off at the exit and the blue truck pulled into the line of cars at the top of the ramp, waiting to pass through the standard mobile checkpoint, which consisted of a portable, manually operated boom and about twenty FATPO officers in their dark blue, almost-black serge outfits and body armor, on both sides of the road. He reached back and pulled the row of suits and shirts on the rear rack closed; anyone looking in the back of the vehicle would see only garments in plastic on hangers and plastic bags on the floor. "Okay, Scott, get your weapon ready just in case anybody sticks his nose a bit too far back in here who should have kept his nose the hell out." Lockhart took his M24 out of the clamps and chambered a round. Gardner took his own rifle out, a Steyr .30-06 hunting rifle with a scope, and did the same. This could be tricky, but Apex trucks were a familiar sight on the streets, and on any given day they would go through at least one FATPO or police checkpoint. They were almost never searched anymore, and on the rare occasions when they were, so far they had been carrying nothing but laundry. Mohr's papers were all in order and he had made it past such checkpoints often before in the past week; he even knew some of the Fatties on his route by name now.

Mohr didn't know the captain who stepped up to his cab with his M-16 at the ready, a white man with a blank face and the deceptively polite tone

of a policeman who was about to do something very bad. Nor did he know the three FATPOs who stood behind him in the cold drizzle, their weapons also at the ready. In both his side mirrors, Mohr could see more armed gun thugs moving around to the back of the truck. The captain said, "Sir, please turn off your engine and step out of the truck."

"Sure," said Mohr with a shrug, "Let me get my trip sheet." Mohr leaned over a little to his right to reach for his Browning Hi-Power automatic, and some instinct made him duck down just as one of the federals fired a rifle bullet into the cab, creasing his left shoulder and the left side of his face. Mohr floored the accelerator without even seeing where he was going, smashed through the portable roadblock boom, came up with the Browning in his right hand and managed to fire several shots at the scattered FATPOs as he roared down Cornell Road, swerving to avoid oncoming traffic and picking up speed, the truck wheels spinning on the slick asphalt. He could barely keep his wounded left arm steady on the steering wheel, and he had to set the gun down on the seat to pick up the radio to talk to the men in the back. "Cat, they're onto us!" he yelled. "I don't know how, but when I pulled up they all moved in on us locked and loaded!"

"Yeah, I saw," said Cat. "Are you okay, Joe?"

"I'm hit in the left side somewhere, and my arm's starting to hurt like hell, but I can still drive," reported Mohr. "Do we bail?"

"Those damned choppers!" said Cat with a curse. "No point in bailing with two copters to bird-dog us, plus they're gunships and they're probably about to blow us off the road! Joe, you've got to floor it and catch up with that convoy, get in among them so close the choppers won't dare fire their rockets or chain guns for fear of hitting down into their own men! Then if you can get past them, head for that bird sanctuary up on Cornell here. That's about four square miles of woods and we can at least find cover in the trees there and try and work our way out."

"That just gives us the Strykers to worry about," said Mohr, who knew that their chances were now slim to none. "What that fuck? Hang on!" Mohr floored the accelerator and sent the truck hurtling down Cornell Road NW, passing slower-moving traffic like a madman, and within seconds he had the rear armored vehicle of the convoy in sight. He picked up the radio. "They may think we're a truck bomb and run!" he yelled hopefully to Cat in the back.

"Just don't roll us over!" replied Lockhart grimly. "We got no seat belts back here."

The crew on the rear Stryker seemed to be napping, or else they were afraid to fire on a truck that might be full of explosives, because the blue truck

caught up with the motorcade right in the intersection of Cornell and Skyline Boulevard, and the staff cars scattered like quail in a covey. There was no telling which one of them contained the Israeli ambassador. The lead Stryker raked the truck with a machine gun burst as it roared by, perforating the entire length of the vehicle and shredding some Portland citizens' laundry, but by some miracle not hitting any of the Volunteers. Lockhart was watching the outside through the laptop. He picked up the radio. "Joe, we got an Apache closing in on us upstairs. We're about ten seconds from getting a Hydra missile up our ass. We have to bail."

"I'm coming up on Thompson Road, that bird sanctuary is up on the hill to the right," yelled Mohr. "I'm going to pull into that gas station up there and then we bail and run for it on foot. Maybe those FATPO assholes won't fire rockets into anyplace crowded with civilians."

"Yeah, and maybe when they catch us they'll give us cookies and milk. As soon as he stops we get those doors open and move out," said Lockhart to Gardner. "We need to make it into the woods where they can't watch us like bugs under a microscope from those choppers. Let's just hope they don't have infra-red tracking gear! We want to make the motherfuckers come in after us, up close and personal."

Mohr was wrong about the FATPOs exhibiting compassion and concern for civilian life. The Apache gunship rocketed the truck without compunction within seconds after it came to a halt. Lockhart and Gardner made it out of the vehicle; Mohr, who had to open the left hand driver's door by reaching across with his right hand and climb down out of the cab without the use of his blood-soaked left arm, was a few seconds too slow. He was killed when the truck exploded into a million shards of metal and tatters of cloth. A second rack of Hydras, which the Apache seemed to fire just for the hell of it, detonated the gas tanks beneath the concrete. The ground thundered and a huge fireball billowed upward into the sky, a conflagration that killed twelve more people who had stopped for gas at the wrong place at the wrong time, or who worked at the station. But the explosion and the curtain of black smoke that rose into the air was able to keep the whirlybird off Lockhart and Gardner for almost a minute. When the copter spotted them again, both Volunteers were running up a low hill toward the tree line of the Portland Audubon Society's bird sanctuary, rifles in hand.

The Apache's California-Asian pilot, Warrant Officer James Yee, had always wanted to be black. Even in his cockpit he wore a red Los Angeles Lakers baseball cap on his head, backwards. "Yeah!" he screamed. "Dass what I'm talking about!"

Yee's co-pilot, Warrant Officer Eddie Williams, really was a negro. The two of them had a running gag going. They liked to play "Rush Hour," after a particularly moronic series of movies from a few decades before. "Man, when you get back to base will you *look in a mirror?*" Council demanded of his partner. "Read my lips, homes. *You are not black!*"

"Shut up and let me fly this thing while you waste those crackers!" responded Yee.

"My pleasure," said Williams, opening up with the 30-millimeter chain gun and mangling one of the fleeing men, knocking Scott Gardner down and plowing dozens of rounds into him on the ground. "Yeah, yeah, how you like dat, racist muthafukka? How you like some o' dat?" The Apache roared over the dead man. There was a loud clang inside the cockpit of the Apache, and Williams began to scream and scream like an animal. "Dey shot my dick off! Dey shot my dick off!" he shrieked, thrashing about in his seat like a spastic. Yee looked down and saw that his partner's crotch was a sodden mess, spurting blood onto Williams' flight suit and the seat. A bullet from Cat Lockhart's rifle had been fired from the ground right into the underbelly of the helicopter, and it had indeed detached Warrant Officer Williams' genitals. "Wheah my dick! Wheah my dick?" moaned Williams, fumbling on the ceiling and around the seat searching for his missing manhood. "Dey can put it back on, right, man, dey can re-attach my dick, huh?"

Yee heard another clang as a second rifle bullet popped into the cabin, and he decided that the point had been reached when discretion was the better part of valor. He turned around and radioed, "Pilgrim, this is Cormorant One. Target destroyed, one terrorist down and one still in the wind. We have been hit and my co-pilot has been severely wounded. Returning to base." They never did find Eddie Williams' penis, but it didn't matter. By the time Yee landed back at the FATPO air base at PDX, Williams had bled to death.

The flight of Cormorant One gave Cat-Eyes Lockhart time to make it into the tree line of the bird sanctuary. Down below him he could see the FATPO convoy pulling up within a safe distance of the burning gas station, and he sighted in his rifle on them. Down below Ambassador Chaim Lieberman got out of the staff limousine. Lieberman was an Israeli of the old arrogant type, tall and lean and muscular, tanned, coiffed hair and movie-star good looks. Today he wore a neatly tailored Armani suit, but he looked even better in uniform with his shirt open, and he always took every opportunity to show off his hairy chest and make the *shiksas* at the U.N. and White House functions swoon.

Lieberman was followed out of the car by Major Wallace Reid. "Sir, I don't think this is a good idea," said Reid. "It's not safe out here. Cormorant One reports one of the bad guys is still in the wind around here somewhere."

"Nonsense, Major," said Lieberman, slapping Reid on the back with a hearty and condescending laugh. "I'm an old soldier myself, remember? I just want to observe how your boys handle themselves. I'm not worried."

Chaim Lieberman should have been worried, because at that moment a 7.62-millimeter bullet came flying out of the sky and drilled him through the throat, snapping his neck and severing his jugular vein. Lieberman goobled, splooged blood from his mouth and fell dead on the asphalt, his handsome face now looking like the wooden mug of a constipated marionette. Reid was staring at the loss of the man he was supposed to be guarding and the utter ruin of his career, when a second slug slammed into his body armor, knocked him down and cracked two of his ribs. Later on an FBI forensics team figured out where Cat Lockhart had been hiding, and they made the shot at just over seven hundred yards.

Lockhart moved back into the woods. "Now come and get me, assholes!" he snarled. They did. Hundreds of them came. Every exit from the sanctuary was sealed off within minutes by FATPO stop-groups dropped in by helicopter. He moved and fired and some more of them died. But in the end there were just too many of them.

He fell on a cold and rainy afternoon, his weapon in his hand, and his blood drained into the earth of the land he gave his life to make free. Some of his enemies said afterwards that they thought they had heard the beating of wings as they closed in on his body. But after all, it was a bird sanctuary.

* * *

At about three o'clock, Second Brigade Commandant Tommy Coyle ordered an emergency meeting with First Brigade Commandant Billy Jackson and Captain Wayne Hill in a deserted coffee shop in McMinnville, ostensibly closed for renovations. Although Coyle and Jackson were technically equal in rank, Coyle was senior and effectively commanding officer in charge of the entire Portland area NVA. Jackson brought Lt. Jimmy Wingo and Kicky McGee with him. Hill arrived a few minutes later, and he was admitted at the rear door of the coffee bar. He knew from the sight of Kicky's white face that something was badly wrong. Her eyes were red; she had been crying. "What's happened?" he demanded of her.

"They got Cat," she told him, her voice shaking with grief. "Those goddamned animals are dragging his body through the streets downtown, laughing like hyenas on TV. I couldn't watch anymore."

Hill ran into the bar. Coyle, Jackson, Wingo, Gary Bresler and several other Volunteers from both NVA brigades were staring at the wide-screen plasma TV in one wall, their faces twisted with shock and anger. "Kicky told you about Cat?" asked Wingo.

"What happened?" demanded Hill.

"Now that you're both here, maybe you can explain that to me," rumbled Coyle. His voice was grim. "Oscar, I'm told you and Billy pulled Cat off a routine training run for a tickle?"

Jackson explained. "Cat and two other men, Volunteer Joe Mohr and that new kid Scott Gardner from C Company, Second Batt were doing a standard patrol in an Apex truck. Cat was teaching Gardner the ropes on scouting and spotting. Then Oscar called and said he needed some bodies. He asked me to give him anybody who was out near Highway 26 for a recon."

"I wanted them to shadow an enemy VIP convoy, which we just found out contained the Israeli ambassador, doing a drop-in up at that old Jewish cemetery on St. Helens Road," said Hill. "I know now that he was going to make a speech at the grave of some so-called Holocaust survivor who was some relative of his, America and Israel fighting shoulder to shoulder against terrorist evil, all that crap. But at first we didn't know where he was going. Our information from the JC comes in by dribs and drabs."

"They picked up the convoy on 26 all right, but somehow they got made at a checkpoint at the Cornell exit," said Jackson. "They bopped their way through and almost made it up into Forest Park, so they could E & E on foot and hopefully they could un-ass the area, or else we could arrange an extraction, but then we lost contact. Last thing Mohr was able to tell us was that they were being stalked by helicopter gunships, and then there was all kinds of chatter on the police and Fattie frequencies, but we couldn't make out what was going on. I sent in a couple of two-man teams to try and get a visual and report, and maybe extract if they could, but the Fatties had the whole northwest section of the city locked down. Our guys couldn't get within a mile of the scene. All three men in the truck were killed, I'm not sure under what circumstances, although from the sound of things, it took them a while and they took a bunch of Fatties with them. The reports we're getting indicate the Fats blasted the hell out of the truck and a gas station. Our guys cleared the vehicle but at some point they were all hit."

"Could the convoy have been some kind of set-up?" demanded Coyle.

Hill shrugged helplessly. "We only heard about it at all late last night," he said. "We have some people in the Justice Center, of course, but they don't have access to the top secret clearance levels and mostly they have to rely on what they can fish out of wastebaskets and overhear in the break room and the john."

"Sir, if it was a set-up, they lost the bait," pointed out Jackson. "I don't know if you caught it in the middle of all this hullabaloo on the tube, but twice some of the media have mentioned in quick passing that the Israeli ambassador is dead. Looks like Lockhart made one last major kill, at least."

"My God, look at those . . . those . . ." Coyle gestured at the television as words simply failed him. Hill turned his eye on the screen as one of the Volunteers turned up the sound.

The shot was from a news helicopter somewhere over downtown; Hill saw a blue-black FATPO Humvee rolling slowly down the street, followed by several open truckloads of FATPO men, with some more of them running alongside the Humvee and dancing and capering behind it like drunken black bats. The Fatties in the truck and in the street were firing their weapons into the air in celebration; Hill wondered why they didn't hit the news copter. There was a white nylon rope attached to the back of the Hummer, and about fifteen feet behind it was dragging a reddish lump of something that appeared to be a human body. The clothing seemed to have been stripped or torn off by the friction with the asphalt; the body was Caucasian but any other features were unrecognizable by now. Hill thought he could see a faint reddish smear left on the street in the corpse's wake. The street was lined with cheering people, and even from the air, as the camera swept over the crowd, Hill could tell that most of them were black or brown or Asian with a smattering of young white faces, possibly homosexuals or left-wing university students, or else just gawkers. But the bulk of the mob was definitely non-white. It seemed that somehow the word had gone out on the jungle drums and every minority in the city had rushed on to the street to celebrate the demise of one of their greatest enemies.

The camera shot changed to street level. A woman in a raincoat with distinctly Semitic features was holding a microphone. She was talking excitedly to her audience. "This is Pamela Levinson reporting for Fox News. It's a red-letter day for all Americans here in Portland, after a spokesperson for the Federal Anti-Terrorist Police Organization has confirmed that about ninety minutes ago, one of the NVA's most notorious racist murderers, the Jack of Diamonds sniper Jesse 'Cat-Eyes' Lockhart, and two other fascist terrorists as well were run to earth and killed by the FATPO in a highly coordinated and

fast moving action in Portland's Forest Park district. My understanding is that both President Chelsea Clinton and Oregon governor Mike Tsafendas have officially congratulated the men and women of the FATPO for this major blow against domestic terrorism."

The screen cut and a white man's face appeared above a suit and tie in the upper right hand corner. "That's correct Pam. The governor's office issued a statement just a few minutes ago expressing the gratitude of Governor Tsafendas, who says that the people of Oregon can sleep more securely tonight in the knowledge that there are three less racist scum, his words Pam, in their state than there were this morning. We are expecting an official statement from the White House press secretary, and CNN will take you to that conference when it begins, but we can confirm that President Clinton has telephoned the FATPO command here in Portland to express her pleasure and congratulations at the news."

Pam interrupted him. The Humvee with its gruesome burden was just approaching her position on the street. "Let's talk with some of the brave federal officers who carried out this heroic mission!" she said. She and the cameramen managed to force their way through the crowd and into the street, and Pam collared one of the dancing, yapping FATPO men who boogied and leaped and writhed around Lockhart's defiled corpse. The FATPO in question was a negro with a small pencil moustache and a gold tooth. "Can you tell us what happened, officer?" yelled Pam. "How did you do it?"

"Shot dat white muthafukka in de *ass!*" shrieked the maddened black. "Put his racist muthafukkin ass all de way *down!* Dass what I'm talkin' about!" Then the camera zoomed on the crushed and bloody mass of flesh and bone that had been Jesse Lockhart. All of the NVA men in the bar turned away and one of them snapped off the sound. There was a long moment of silence.

"May I suggest this might be an appropriate occasion for Operation Festival, sir?" asked Jackson quietly.

"Technically I'm supposed to get the Army Council's permission before I initiate Festival and possibly cost us more casualties than we can afford to lose," said Coyle with a sigh.

"I can get hold of Mr. Chips, but we need to start moving now, and I don't think anyone up there will object," said Hill. "Cat was a hero. Or perhaps I can experience difficulty getting through, if you think it's better."

"No, don't do that. He'll probably be calling you anyway," said Coyle. "I am not going to lie to myself or anyone else. Losing Cat-Eyes Lockhart is a major blow, and we need a major response. That's always been our policy. We never let the Americans claim a victory without getting one up on them. We

cannot be perceived to have lost the momentum. Festival it is. Wait for the AC's call, and if somebody up there starts getting skittish and wants to hold back, give it to me and I'll handle it. After a couple of hours you may not be able to find me anyway, because I'm going out with the rest of you. I know that may not be command professional and all that, but I will be damned if I don't get some of their blood for me too."

"What's Operation Festival?" asked Kicky, who had come back into the room.

"That's when we let the badger loose and go after these sons of bitches with everything we've got, comrade," said Coyle. "It was originally intended to be used if anything came up in Seattle or Spokane or some other situation where a major diversion was called for in order to take military pressure off some other point where the enemy was concentrating, but I agree with Oscar, in this case it's called for. Lieutenant, you know your company's Festival assignments?"

"Yes, sir," said Wingo.

"All the company commanders in First Brigade do, sir," said Jackson.

"Ditto the Second. All right, Festival it is," said Coyle.

"Oh, God!" said Kicky in despair. "I just thought. Who's going to tell Christina Ekstrom about Cat?"

Coyle looked at her in surprise. "Why? Were they . . . ?"

"Yes, sir, ever since California," confirmed Kicky. "Chris went back to Astoria and Third Battalion, but I know they were still seeing each other whenever they could." Coyle's phone beeped. He opened it and listened.

"Speak of the devil. Yeah, it's Festival time. Your guys coming down to join the fun, Zack?" asked Coyle.

"I couldn't stop them even if I wanted to," replied Hatfield on the other end. "Cat was a local boy, remember?"

"Okay, before you just go roaring into town blasting, I want you to meet me at the Sugar Shack at," he looked at his watch, "1800 hours and we'll get coordinated. Also, I've just been informed about Cat and Lieutenant Ekstrom. Does she know?"

"She knows," said Hatfield.

"Please convey my deepest personal sympathies," said Coyle. "To her, and her father, and to all the Volunteers of Third Battalion."

"Already done, sir. Sugar Shack at 1800 it is." Zack hung up.

Coyle dialed the phone. "This is Garfield," he said. "I want a big dish of lasagna, ASAP. Call me back." He closed the phone. "In a minute I will be making an address to all NVA personnel in both brigades," he explained to the

others. "This will be digitally recorded and sent out to every officer's phone we've got as a voice mail message, and either transmitted onward or played for every Volunteer in the command. I know it's risky sending something like this in the clear with the way they monitor the cell towers, which is why we've never used this system before, but there are times when I have to speak to my people straight up, and this is one of them." They continued to stare at the television with loathing. "Shit!" yelled Coyle after a bit. "They're taking him to Flanders Street!" Sure enough, the Humvee and the motorcade and mob behind it had halted at the corner where the Battle of Flanders Street had been caught on video and sent around the world. Coyle switched on the sound again. Pam the CNN newshen had followed the vehicles and was talking again. She was not only smirking, the smirk was in her voice as well.

"If I didn't already know that was a Jew, I'd know that was a Jew!" snarled Wingo in anger and loathing.

Pam gabbled on. "It looks like FATPO has decided on a little symbolic payback for the heroic death of Portland police chief Linda Hirsch and a number of other fine and brave Portland police officers, here at this now infamous intersection of Flanders Street and 13th Avenue where Lockhart and two accomplices murdered Chief Hirsch several years ago."

Flanders Street, thought Kicky, her heart sinking, the terrible guilt she had fought so long to suppress suddenly surging back full strength. *Where I led him that day to betray him. Now they bring him back there to desecrate his body and spit on his memory. God is speaking to me. I can run, but I can't hide. I must pay my debt.*

The camera showed a number of FATPO men moving toward the tattered corpse on the ground. They had bayonets, knives and entrenching tools in their hands. The TV flicked off. They all looked up and saw Oscar lay down the remote onto the bar. "We don't need to see that," he said quietly. "We have to keep our heads clear and our hearts calm for this thing tonight. Our anger is righteous, but if we let it override our judgment, then we'll make mistakes and there will be more dead to add to the three comrades who died today. We can read about it in the papers tomorrow, in a couple of paragraphs tacked on to the end of the long stories about what we do to them tonight."

"I agree," said Coyle with a heavy nod. "Thank you, Oscar." Coyle's phone rang. He picked it up. "Ready?" he asked. There was a pause, and then he spoke.

"Comrades, this is Commandant Thomas Aquinas Coyle of the Second Portland Brigade, Northwest Volunteer Army. You will have heard by now that this afternoon we lost a brave Volunteer, a true hero of our Folk, and a

good friend, as well as two other good men. Even as I speak, the enemy is rejoicing in the streets of Portland, howling and roaring in triumph like the beast he is. That will cease. It will cease tonight, because we are going to wipe the smirk from his bubble lips and strangle the laughter in his vile throat. With their unclean blood we will wash away the stain of the dishonor that has been offered to Jesse Lockhart's mortal remains. The action upon which you are about to embark is called Operation Festival. For the next 24 hours, we are going after these sons of bitches. We will hunt them down like the vermin they are, and we will turn their cackling laughter into screams of agony and terror. They rejoice now. This time tomorrow, they will be hiding their faces and trembling in terror at the reckoning we will exact from them.

"You will all be informed by your respective company commanders as to your specific targets and modes of attack. Keep as much to the plan as you can, but don't be reluctant to improvise and take on targets of opportunity. Just don't get yourselves killed in the process. We have three comrades to mourn, and I am sorry to acknowledge the likelihood that this time tomorrow, we may have a few more. I want our own butcher's bill to be as small as possible, while the butcher's bill of the enemy must be immense. Blood vengeance for a fallen brother is a just and righteous act, and a moral duty to all men of honor and pride. Suicide fails our cause and our future, and it fails Cat-Eyes Lockhart and Joe Mohr and Scott Gardner. They would want us to live for the Republic, not die for it. Spill the enemy's blood tonight, but spare your own as much as possible. Our day of victory is coming, comrades. We all know it. If ZOG was capable of defeating us, they would have done so by now. We're going to win. I want all of you to be there with me when General Order Number Ten is rescinded and we can all raise a glass to the memory of Jesse Lockhart and all of the men and women who have given up their lives that our land and our Folk might be free. Be careful out there tonight. Shoot straight and make these evil people pay in blood the price of their insult and cowardice. Good luck, comrades, and good hunting. Coyle out."

* * *

That night all hell broke loose in Portland.

To the media and the people of the city, it looked spontaneous, like an eruption of NVA vengeance for Cat Lockhart's death. It wasn't. The Army command had been making plans for Operation Festival for a long time, diddling with ideas and target selection, extrapolating tactics and enemy responses, updating the plan periodically in case it ever had to be

implemented on short notice. The main problem was the large numbers of FATPO gun thugs and Portland police on the streets, especially those surrounding the main targeted areas in the hostile neighborhoods and around key facilities such as the airport, the Justice Center, police stations and power plants, *etcetera.* Whenever possible the enemy forces themselves were to be engaged and destroyed, but the main objective was to get past them and gouge into the large remaining number of "soft" but important targets in Portland.

About dusk, the two urban brigades of the NVA coalesced into a little over a hundred assault teams, four to six people per team, with at least two vehicles per team. Some of these were combined into larger special task forces with specific objectives. It was dark and overcast with no moon, but not raining, cold but not unbearably so. Everybody was out for this one, even covert operatives like Ray Ridgeway, who operated as a spotter and was able to zero some of Oscar's assassin squad in on several wealthy Zionist targets he surreptitiously located for them wherever they were hiding from the ruckus, in their homes, their clubs and offices, and in swank hotel rooms. In addition, Coyle had at his disposal around 250 well-armed Volunteers from Third Battalion down on the coast, who arrived by assorted back roads and assembled at the safe house known as the Sugar Shack. Zack Hatfield and Coyle tried to move them out almost as fast as they came in to make sure too many Volunteers weren't assembled in the same place and vulnerable to a surprise attack. After conferring with Hatfield, Coyle had the Third Battalion people lay a series of ambushes at over a dozen on and off ramps along U.S. Highways 26 and 30 as well as Interstate Five coming into Portland, the object being to control access to the western part of the greater metropolitan area and interdict any attempt by FATPO or the police to move large bodies of men and weapons from point to point on the ground.

Commandant Billy Jackson and First Brigade were assigned the mission of attacking and doing as much damage as possible in downtown and North Portland, the last remaining African ghetto of any significance remaining in the Homeland. "If it looks at all feasible, I want to see if we can clean out that whole damned black spot tonight," Coyle told him. "We need to beautify the City of Roses by making sure there's not a single black face on the streets. Oh, and while you're at it, see if you can clean up Portland University. According to Tom and Becky the few decent white students live off campus, so it's pretty much a free fire zone."

"Can you let me have the smokers, Tom?" asked Jackson. "I think they're just what the doctor ordered for those putrid groves of academe up there."

"That's affirmative," said Coyle with a nod. "Tonight we unveil all three of our secret weapons and introduce 'em to Mister Joo."

Second Brigade's task was to hunt down, engage, and destroy any FATPOs and police whom they could ambush and outgun, pin them down at their checkpoints with small arms fire and RPGs, and eventually force them to pull back into static positions like their barracks, or police stations, or the Justice Center, to occupy their attention, interfere with their movement, and give the other Volunteers free rein to do their thing in the city. Once the melee got started there was a good deal of overlap between all three of these missions and forces, and by morning the situation was so confused that no one could ever really tell who did what and to whom.

By seven o'clock that night the television news had figured out that something was going on, and interrupted regular programming with a series of increasingly confused and hysterical reports and rumors. FATPO and police patrols moving through the winter darkness were being fired on from every corner and rooftop by snipers and RPGs, by small parties of Volunteers who then vanished into the night. What little liberal-lefty night life still existed in Portland was down in the Pearl District; now small groups of men and women were running through the streets throwing hand grenades and Molotov cocktails through the doors and windows of trendy yuppie fern bars and night clubs, shooting anyone with a black or brown face, dodging into alleyways and in and out of buildings when the police pursued, then turning and firing on their pursuers. By seven thirty the downtown area was rattling and crackling with gunshots, bursts of automatic weapons fire and the intermittent hollow boom of explosions, mixed with screaming and shouting as patrons of various establishments fled for cover.

Media news trucks and reporters who attempted to get out onto the streets and report what was going on were also fired on, and several journalists and techs were killed, including a well-known correspondent from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. All television stations in Portland had long since been surrounded by Bremer walls, razor wire, and details of heavily armed private "security contractors," but the NVA had scoped them out previously and developed contingency plans, which they implemented for Op Festival. A long-standing target on the NVA's wish list were the combined studios of both Fox News channels, KPTV and KPDX, on Greenbriar Parkway in Beaverton. Elements of B Company, First Brigade, and a special EOD team had been planning a major tickle there for a while, and they moved it forward for Op Festival. At approximately 8 p.m. there was a rattle of gunfire and a large explosion outside, and one of the station's

cameramen was able to film a stolen bulldozer crashing through the heavy security doors and into the lobby, followed by two men in ski masks who lugged a footlocker into the building, placed it in front of the locked door to the studio area, and ran out into the darkness along with the bulldozer's driver. The cameraman saw a cute little cartoon sticker of a Red Baron in a German biplane from World War One on the footlocker, and he had sense enough to run like hell. He made it out of the building alive before it came down, with his camera and his footage, which earned him several journalistic awards. No one else survived.

A few minutes later across town, the studio of KATU-TV shivered and shook in mid-broadcast live on the air, as a series of home-made rockets with high explosive warheads screamed over the Bremer walls into the fortified compound and slammed into the building. News anchors Roger Coleman and Edie Berry calmly stayed on the air talking to their audience for almost a minute with lights and plaster falling from the ceiling all around them, before the power went out and the station was off the air. Both survived and were awarded Medals of Freedom by President Chelsea Clinton, as well as jobs on the east coast since both refused to go back to Portland.

A team attached to First Brigade EOD loaded up trucks and vans with their latest creation, over a thousand home-made potato-masher style stick grenades made from broom and rake handles and lengths of five-inch diameter black iron pipe, loaded with a variety of explosives and ignited by short lengths of fuse. Using coded communication on cell phones, CB radios, and wireless laptops they were able to locate and rendezvous with other crews from around the city and pass out dozens of these per assault team. The devices worked well, and the peculiar clunking *thump!* in the distance of the potato mashers became a well-remembered feature of that night. "Make sure that before you light one of these, you look at the paint around the nipple here where the fuse goes in, comrades," cautioned Volunteer Bob LaFollette at every distribution. "You got plain black metal, white band, blue band, and red band, and the blue and red are kind of hard to see in the dark. Use a flashlight if you have to, because these colors are important. They tell you what kind of charge you're throwing. No paint at all is simple black powder, packed with roofing nails or sheet metal screws, for anti-personnel use. White is nitrocellulose mixed with white phosphorus. That's an incendiary; if there is anything burnable around, these babies will ignite it. Red is three sticks of TNT crammed inside the case. That's for a big blast when you really want to blow a hole in something. There aren't many blues, but they're military C-4 and also some bathtub gelignite the Red Baron cooked up on his day

off. Those are for enemy vehicles. Toss one of those under a Stryker and the blast will flip the damned thing over on its back like a crab."

By eight o'clock serious casualty reports were coming in and the hospital emergency rooms were filling up. Lights were going out all over town as the NVA knocked out power transformers on poles and brought down carefully selected lines, plunging the Pearl and the most heavily American-occupied areas into darkness. "Try to keep the power on in the white areas of town," Coyle had ordered. "The power plants are too heavily guarded to be attacked without unacceptable casualties anyway. I want the word to get around that we do differentiate, and that we're not just a bunch of loonies out to cause mass destruction for the hell of it. The white public has to understand that this isn't just random violence, that there is a reason for it and it's directed only against the people who don't belong here, not against them."

Teams of gunmen drove through the darkened streets to specific addresses, working off lists provided by the Third Section of suspected government sympathizers whom the NVA hadn't yet gotten around to dealing with. Rather than take the time to break in and go searching for specific people, they would stop outside a Zionist house, and even if it was dark inside they would fire a magazine or two into the windows and toss a grenade, a pipe bomb, or a burning cocktail onto the porch or at the front door. This conveyed the message quite effectively to the persons of suspect loyalty inside: *we know who you are and where you live, and relocation to more hospitable climes is advisable.* Then the Volunteers would roll on to their next target. Other teams roamed the city targeting certain buildings owned by the government, by Jews, by multi-national corporations or by other assorted anti-NVA elements. These were businesses, warehouses, offices, community centers, multi-racial and multi-cultural churches, so forth and so on. They calmly pulled over, went inside or broke in, ran off any onlookers with a few warning shots, doused the floor and fixtures with gasoline, and torched the place. By nine o'clock there were dozens of fires reported all across the city, and the firefighting services were stretched to the limit and beyond.

FATPO and police trying to respond to various emergencies around town ran into the Third Battalion's ambushes on the exit ramps, including a large supply of RPGs, which the NVA had recently acquired from certain Russian international arms dealers with the tacit approval of the government in Moscow. "Damn, we never had enough of these babies before!" cackled Volunteer Hiram Johnson of Third Battalion's C Company to his comrade Mike Buda, as he watched a Portland PB van burn with several dead cops inside it. "Especially at Sunset Beach!"

"Yeah, now we can use 'em up like popcorn," agreed Buda. "Okay, Hi, you're loaded. Now if we can just get Fattie to send us some more targets!"

"If they won't come to us, we'll go to them," said Lieutenant Ricky Parmenter, coming up behind them in the darkness. He was wearing what he now considered to be his lucky cowboy hat from Sunset Beach. "Cap just called, says we need to change position after each contact so they don't try to zero in on us with choppers. We're bugging out to the Canyon Road exit."

The elements from First Brigade's D and E Companies sent to assault the University of Portland found the campus in chaos, devoid of police or FATPOs, all of whom had been ordered into North Portland or elsewhere through some act of carelessness or incompetence. About 50 Volunteers split into two groups and moved into Eric and Annette's alma mater from Park Avenue on the south side of campus and 12th Avenue on the north side. The electricity was out, but the university's emergency generators had kicked in, so there was some light outside and in the larger buildings. Groups of students, mostly non-whites, were milling around on the quads, in the student union and in the dorms, some with candles, many with beers. A number of persons of color and wildly bearded Jewish-looking types were up on benches or planter walls haranguing small clumps of listeners with long screeching tirades of the left-wing "Fight the Fascists!" variety; one oddball Mexican was actually shouting the famous Communist battle cry from the Spanish Civil War, *"No pasaran!"* Some of the students had gotten hold of a motley variety of pistols and long arms from somewhere, probably gang-banger hardware, and they were flourishing them and firing them in the air, jumping around like demented monkeys and screaming about fighting the Fascists.

Then all of the sudden there was the NVA in the flesh, coming at them from out of the darkness, gun muzzles flashing, cutting them down with aimed shots like shooting fish in a barrel, and the student scum turned and stampeded in terror. The Fascists passed all right, as they had done in 1938. Finally the Volunteers turned loose the first NVA secret weapon of the night, a pair of two-man crews each armed with a home-made flamethrower built from scuba diving tanks that contained a pressurized load of home-made napalm, one of the Red Baron's creations, shot in a thin but volatile stream through a nozzle adapted from a welding torch. The "smokers" worked perfectly as they went from building to building and dorm to dorm. Inside twenty minutes the entire campus was in flames.

In North Portland FATPO dug in, determined to protect the last major black enclave in the Pacific Northwest as if they were an endangered species, which of course they were. The federals threw up a perimeter of checkpoints,

sandbagged positions and hastily-strung razor wire on every corner and intersection. They issued M-16 rifles and loaded magazines to every able-bodied black male and female who asked for one, thus augmenting the already formidable arsenals of the Portland Crips, Bloods, and other street gangs. Jackson was cagey; his scouts reported what the enemy was doing, and he avoided sending his squads attacking directly into the fetid slum streets where they might get cornered or caught in a crossfire. Instead, he staged hit and run raids on the outposts around the perimeter of the ghetto with sporadic small arms fire and Molotov cocktails to keep the Fatties pinned down, while at the same time he sent teams of arsonists infiltrating the area via alleys and side streets and over fences. These set fire to every wooden building they could break into or otherwise breach with cocktails, many of them containing the Red Baron's special flamethrower mix, although the white phosphorus grenades came in quite handy as well. There were a lot of wooden buildings in Portland. The NVA ringed the black district with fires, and then they made sure the fires burned inward and not outward into the white neighborhoods by simply refusing to let the fire trucks into the area, while allowing them to put out any blazes that transgressed onto white streets.

Then Jackson broke out the NVA's second secret weapon of the evening's gala event, two carefully hoarded factory-made 81-mm mortars bought from corrupt Army ordnance personnel at Fort Lewis. Both weapons had skilled military-trained crews to serve them, recruited from among the NVA's many Iraq and Iran veterans. He placed one mortar on Greeley Avenue and the other on Columbia Boulevard, assigned teams of riflemen to guard them from interference, and without hesitation he gave the order, "Fire up every round we've got, boys. We'll be able to get more, and we need to give Cat Lockhart a hell of a final salute."

For several hours the two mortars proceeded to rain over 500 shells down on North Portland in long, slow sweeps, working a grid pattern rather than trying to hit specific Federal targets. The shells landed indiscriminately on houses, stores, in the streets, on FATPO positions, while the dozens of fires crept closer and closer, spreading through the slum house to house in the absence of the fire engines. This sent mobs of blacks into the streets where they ran around like chickens with their heads cut off, screaming and bellowing in their fear and hatred of the white man, some wounded, many of them raving drunk or stoned on crack, many of them waving weapons in the air they'd gotten from the FATPO or pulled from their own hidden stashes. Rival gangs shot at each other, some shot at the FATPOs, and the FATPOs, almost as ill-disciplined as the mob, fired back. Store windows were smashed and

the negroes began to loot, staggering down the street loaded with everything from plasma television sets to cases of potato chips, only to be shot down by bullets or blown to pieces by a falling mortar shell. When the black populace tried to escape from the area they were met by muzzle flashes and rattling machine guns twinkling in the darkness as the NVA cut them down. By ten o'clock at night North Portland was a burning madhouse. The FATPO commander realized that his men were starting to desert or join the looters, and in order to retain any semblance of control he had to give the order to evacuate and return to barracks. The Portland mayor and Oregon Governor Mike Tsafendas were on the phone with Washington, D.C. screaming for the military to come and bail out the Fatties and what was left of the hapless Portland Police Bureau.

There were three main FATPO barracks in Portland, one on the east side on Foster Road, one in North Portland at the Portland International Airport, and a third on the south side on Ross Island in the Willamette River. The FATPOs abandoned their posts, retreated to what transport they had left, and by midnight they were moving in three columns of heavily armored vehicles through the streets toward their fortified sanctuaries. It was then that the NVA unleashed the third secret weapon Coyle had spoken of earlier, a fleet of six Somali and Taliban-style "war wagons" similar to Zack Hatfield's command vehicle, pickup trucks and converted SUVs on which had been mounted the deadly Browning .50-caliber machine gun.

The NVA had already used several similar vehicles mounting lighter twin 7.62-mm guns to launch attacks in various places around the Northwest, and Portland had four of these as well, which were now sent zipping through the still chaotic and burning streets of North Portland blasting away at anything that moved, with deadly results. But the .50s were hard to obtain, and ammunition for them in sufficient quantities even harder, so Coyle had been holding them in reserve until some special occasion called for their unveiling. The war wagons made zig-zag attacks against the FATPO convoys from the side streets and from the rear of the convoys, the heavy armor-piercing rounds smashing through whole engine blocks and raking the unarmored vehicles with death, tracer bullets sometimes igniting the vehicles and detonating their fuel tanks. The columns had to move slowly, because the lead vehicles were targeted by RPGS, fired from behind walls, from rooftops, around corners, from any cover that offered. The rocket grenades and the .50s weren't much good against the FATPO Strykers or armored personnel carriers, but the trucks were vulnerable. Few of them made it back inside the Federal Bremer walls. Those FATPOs who were not killed outright when their trucks were demolished kept on retreating

on foot, and were picked off one by one or trapped in cul-de-sacs when they became lost in the pitch-black streets and wiped out.

Dawn was obscured by thick clouds of smoke hanging over the city from the hundreds of burning buildings. Portland was a wreck. The streets were littered with dead bodies and burning hulks of FATPO trucks and police cars; the Portland PB had either thrown down their weapons and fled or else was holed up in the Justice Center and their fortified substations. Overhead came the whuppa whuppa of helicopters, both military and media. At 6 a.m. Coyle received word that a battalion of the Third Marine Division had been flown in from San Diego and was landing at Portland Airport, accompanied by several C-130 cargo planes containing tanks and artillery. He sounded the recall. He picked up his cell phone, asked for a second dish of lasagna and told his Volunteers, "Comrades, you have my admiration and my congratulations on a job well done. We have avenged our fallen brothers, and we have given these ZOG bastards a preview of coming attractions. Now fade, comrades. Let it be as if we were never here."

The United States government never released any exact casualty figures on what became known as the First Battle of Portland. Hundreds of FATPOs and police and at least a thousand civilians surely died, but no one knows for sure. Property damage was estimated at several billion dollars; the University of Portland alone was burned to the ground and was a complete write-off, and almost all of the city's surviving black and Hispanic population finally fled, never to return. The NVA's official losses for the engagement were 12 dead and 28 wounded. Within an hour there were no NVA left on the smoke-filled and corpse-littered streets, except for the participants in one last daring tickle.

* * *

Around three o'clock that morning, with the city still rattling and shaking to machine gun fire and explosions and glowing from the many fires that had been set, Captain Wayne Hill returned to the Sugar Shack after having asked for Jackson to meet him there. Jackson arrived along with Jimmy Wingo and Kicky McGee about forty-five minutes later. "How's it going out there?" Hill asked.

"A night to remember," said Jackson. "We're turning them every which way but loose, although we won't be able to keep it up. What have you got?"

"Maybe a way to wind up Operation Festival with a big bang, physically and psychologically," said Hill. "Question: what is the one thing we've been trying to do for the past four years, but we haven't been able to swing yet?"

"Get a package inside the Justice Center," replied Jackson immediately.

"Right," said Hill. "The closest we've ever been able to get is a few RPGs tossed at the main gate, and one truck bomb that didn't do much more than scar the concrete on the Bremer walls. The problem is that we've never been able to get anybody *inside* the damned place, past all the security and checkpoints, at least not with a 50-50 chance of getting out again. Some of our spies in there have told me they're willing to break bad if I ask it of them, but getting weapons or explosives in would still be a major problem, and it would be suicidal for whoever carried out an attack. There's just no way out. Cameras clocking your every move, even in the johns. Razor wire, security posts on every floor, mines on the perimeter, concrete as high as an elephant's eye. They've even got anti-aircraft guns on the roof in case anyone tries to do a 9/11 and crash an airplane into the place. With all those people packed into downtown like sardines on those short Portland blocks, it's always been too risky to use mortars and rockets, because a miss might blow up some adolescent working in a Starbucks or somebody's granny shopping for nick-nacks in a boutique, and the media would never let us hear the end of it. We've been able to hit a few of those armored vans and buses that take the bureaucrats and droids and contract workers in and out, and some airport convoys, which is one reason why they always use copters now, but we've never been able to get inside the Green Zone, for the simple reason that there's only one way in and out."

"Well, yeah, besides the Snitch Gate, which we can't get into either," said Jackson with a shrug. "So?" Hill smiled and drew a plain white plastic square from his shirt pocket, which he held up. "What's that?"

"Swipe card for the Snitch Gate," he said.

"You're shitting me!" said Wingo, startled. "Sorry, you're shitting me, sir."

"How do you know that's what it is?" asked Jackson, intrigued.

"I'm reasonably sure," said Hill.

"Reasonably?"

"You're familiar with Baby Huey?" asked Hill. Baby Huey was Ray Ridgeway's code name. "He put us onto a good tickle this evening. Some top legal beagles have been visiting the Justice Center, an Assistant U.S. Attorney General and his entourage. Apparently the military tribunals are becoming an embarrassment to Chelsea, or rather to her mom who still hides in the Oval Office closet while Chelsea does business. They're bringing in what the British in Northern Ireland used to call Diplock Courts, which is basically just one single politically reliable hanging judge instead of a jury, but he's a

civilian. They figure it will look better in the media when some senile old ward heeler in a black robe orders an entire town deported to Nevada than when some nigger bird colonel does it. Just their usual re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic kind of thing. I think they know they're whipped, they're just refusing to admit it. Anyway, due to us restless natives, all the copters were tied up tonight. The AAG and his flunkies decided not to risk trying to make it to the airport for their flight back to La Cesspool Grande, and so they had to rough it for the evening in some luxury suites at the Vintage Plaza Hotel."

"That place is almost as heavily fortified as the JC itself," commented Jackson. "Blackwater goons coming out the wazoo. But let me guess. You got in?"

"Myself and one of my colleagues, yes, and we were able to finagle the cameras," agreed Hill. "You'll have to wait for my memoirs to find out how, since if we want to strike while the iron is hot here, we don't have all night, or what's left of the night. Long story short, a couple of hours ago me and my guy get into the Assistant AG's hotel room with a couple of silenced pieces, we find him in bed with a woman lawyer and we shoot 'em both in the *res ipsa loquitur.*"

"How do you know she was a lawyer?" asked Wingo.

"We copped both their briefcases and her purse before we beat feet, then went through the stuff when we were safely away." Hill pulled out several more cards, one on a clip, and a leather woman's wallet from his jacket pocket. "Full set of ID. The woman was one Louise Richardson, Assistant United States Attorney for Portland. Don't ask me what all these damned lawyers are doing to earn their salaries now that the military and the Fatties have taken over the judicial process, but the Justice Center is crawling with 'em, and that's where she works. Driver's license, Bar Association ID, Federal ID, interior key card, Justice Center ID badge, it's all here. And this." Hill held up the white plastic card. "I am convinced it's the key card for the Snitch Gate. We've never been able to capture one, but I've heard them described to me, plain white, nothing on them except a name, which is here, as you see. Louise Richardson."

"Uh, can I ask what's the Snitch Gate, sir?" asked Kicky, uncomfortable memories stirring in her mind.

"Several years ago the Portland PB and FBI were making a full court press to try and recruit informers," explained Jackson. "They wanted to get rats inside the NVA, of course, and some other places in the Homeland they've done so, although never here yet, thank God."

"Mmmm, you know we kind of differ on that, sir," said Hill in a sour voice.

"Yeah, I know," said Jackson. "Oscar here is still convinced we had a mouse in the house about two years ago, in fact he thinks you guys were set up on Flanders Street that time you and Cat bopped your way out of that trap, but we never were able to prove anything one way or the other. Not for lack of his trying."

"Oh, I'm still trying, sir," Hill assured Jackson. He turned to Kicky. "ZOG decided that they needed secure premises wherein to meet this army of informants they were planning on recruiting. They figured the rats wouldn't want to be seen coming in the main gate of the Justice Center or the door of a police station, and meeting them in public places was too risky since they had sense enough to realize we have our own informers, and we've got *them* under surveillance. So what they did was they built a tunnel from the first floor of the Justice Center, under the street, and through a door in the concrete on the Second Avenue side. The actual door on Second Avenue is all rusty, flaky paint, and it has a big red sign on it saying no entrance, report to main gate. It's half hidden by some concrete abutments. Anyone who sees it from the outside figures it's sealed off. But it isn't. There's a discreet little swipe lock and key pad recessed into the wall to the right of the door. To cut to the chase, the great army of snitches that the Feds envisioned never materialized, although I am sure informants do use it from time to time. But over the past few years, the Snitch Gate has become a kind of convenience for high and medium-placed Justice Center employees who want to sneak in and out of work, or else they're just lazy and they don't want to have to go through the long lines getting in and out. If they have one of these swipe keys they can park their cars in the garage on the corner of Second and Main, which is fully secured and covered by the JC's camera system and so reasonably safe, and they can just slip in the side door without having to wait in the line at the main gate. Possession of one of these swipe cards has become kind of a status symbol in the JC, a perk, an indication of privilege. Apparently the Richardson woman was privileged. Since she was screwing an Assistant Attorney General who presumably did not place the wedding ring we saw on her dead finger, I think we know how she got that way."

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Wingo. "You mean to tell me that the mighty FBI made a secret entrance into their main fortress, and it's guarded only by a magnetic lock and a key pad?"

"Oh, no," said Hill. "The enemy is evil, Lieutenant, but they're not stupid. Inside the door there is a fully manned guard station, metal detector, X-ray

machine, sniffer dog team, search personnel, you name it. Once you get past that you go down a corridor and you go through the same procedure at the end on the first floor exit. Plus the usual cameras and alarms, and of course you have to swipe your card and key in your access code at the other end again to get into the Justice Center building itself. It's just as tightly sealed up as the main gate."

"So what good is all this stuff, then?" asked Wingo, gesturing at the dead attorney's ID.

"Until now, we haven't even been able to get that first door open," said Hill.

"We can't get it open now unless we know this white card is the Richardson woman's Snitch Gate swipe key," said Jackson irritably. "And if it is, we still don't know her pass code."

Hill pulled out a black address book from his pocket and opened it. "I think we might," he said. "Apparently Ms. Richardson didn't trust her memory. On one page here she neatly wrote out all her PIN numbers and computer passwords. Including this one, #1111. Simple enough."

"And we know that's her Snitch Gate access code, how?" asked Jackson.

"Because it's marked *Secret Entrance*," replied Hill, showing him the page in the book.

"No way. That's too easy," said Jackson with a scowl. "Surely a lawyer wouldn't be stupid enough to write all her personal information in a book that could be stolen. This broad couldn't have been that dumb! You sure this isn't a set-up?"

"I suppose it's possible she carried this dummied-up address book around with her in her purse in case one of us did get hold of it somehow, but that seems rather Byzantine to me," said Hill. "I rather doubt she planned on our bursting into her hotel room and shooting her in the ass on the downstroke, just to lend realism to our finding this book. I think she was just methodical and full of American arrogance, never thinking when she wrote those numbers that it could ever come back to bite her. After all, she was a high-powered attorney, and we're just redneck pump jockeys and dishwashers and janitors, right? How could us peasants ever dare to harm Her Ladyship? We're supposed to be shuffling and tugging the forelock. Plain old American hubris. Gets 'em every time."

"So we can get the door open, maybe," said Jackson dubiously. "And there's how many Fatties or Blackwater goons or whoever waiting there for us?"

"Blackwater. At least six or eight, plus a dog," said Hill.

"The dog we can throw a stick and tell him go fetch. What about the gun thugs?" asked Jackson. "And once we get past them, we have to get past

the second security post at the end of the corridor—what, exactly is it that you want to do, Oscar?"

"Nothing elaborate," said Hill. "Get the door open, toss in a really big package to take out the whole post and maybe even get a pressure burst that will blow out the other door at the end of the hall, and then beat feet. The thing is we will actually have gotten *inside* and killed inside the JC, for the first time. We can also make them seal up that entrance, and you know there are conceivably conditions where it might be convenient for us for there to be only one way in and out of that place. The charge will have a timer that can be set. If the pass code works, I open the door and throw the bomb inside, then slam the door and run. If the pass code doesn't work, I'll hit the timer, set it down against the door and run. Piece of cake."

"You'll deliver the package yourself?" asked Jackson.

"My private tribute to Comrade Jesse Lockhart," said Hill soberly. "It still bothers me that he and the others were killed after I pulled them off a routine run. I know that's not reasonable, but there it is. I figure I need to put my own ass on the line by way of atonement, if you want to put it that way."

"Which you've already done once tonight," pointed out Jackson. "Never mind. What exactly have you got in mind?"

"I've already taken the liberty of borrowing the Red Baron's services," said Hill. "He's downstairs rigging something up."

"Since we're not all sitting on the moon right now, I presume he's doing so successfully," said Jackson.

Kicky McGee spoke up. "Sir, there are cameras all up and down Second Avenue and in the JC itself. Do you know if there is a camera on the outside of the Snitch Gate itself?"

"I'd be surprised if there weren't," said Hill. "I don't plan on staying around long enough to be identified."

"Yeah, but will you be able to get close enough to get to the door and open it?" asked Kicky. "Let me do this, sir. Remember what we've been doing tonight, really shaking ZOG up. They're going to be doubly on edge down there at the Justice Center, and my guess is you won't be able to get close without getting stopped and searched. All this ID is for Louise Richardson. You don't look much like a Louise to me, sir, unless you want to go in drag." She picked up the Justice Center pass and squinted at it. "Okay, she's about ten years older than me, but if I lay on the lipstick and eye shadow and brush my hair back straight like she's got it in this picture, I can pass unless someone leans down and looks close. When she had to do the Resurrection Shuffle, Comrade Becky gave us female comrades some of her clothes, and I have a

kind of lawyer-looking suit in my kit out in the truck I've been carrying in case I ever need to dress up, and it will cover all my tats. Let me put on that suit and paint up my face, put on that badge, and have the Baron put the bomb in a briefcase. Her briefcase, if you've still got it. When I go up to that door and swipe it, I'll find the camera and I'll fumble with my purse or something, look down, so they don't see my face. They'll think they see a woman who's been coming in and out of their little rabbit hole for a long time, and if the access code doesn't work, maybe they'll even buzz me in."

"That works," said Jackson with a nod. "Better than Oscar trying to sneak up and pry the door open with a woman's swipe card and a sack or a gym bag in his hand." Wingo wasn't happy, and his face showed it. He never was when Kicky was in danger, but it was understood that female Volunteers had to carry their weight and their share of the risk, and personal relationships took a back seat to the cause of racial victory, so he stood by the code and said nothing. "Oscar, I hope driving is enough risk to salve your conscience. Jim, you go with them."

An hour later they assembled in the basement in front of a work table behind which stood a slender young man with long auburn hair, wire-rimmed spectacles and the sensitive face of a concert pianist. This was Lieutenant Paul Kurtz, the famous Red Baron, possibly the foremost bomb-maker in the NVA. Top five, for sure. Kicky was wearing her dress-for-success lawyer suit; it was a pleasant beige, but she hated the high heels that naturally went with it. "Oscar says you want a big blast," Kurtz said to them. "Six pounds of Semtex should completely decimate an enclosed space of the kind that has been described to me. Make sure you close the door firmly after you throw the ordnance, comrade," he said, nodding to Kicky. "If the door is open a lot of the blast force will be dispersed. Then leave the area as rapidly as possible. With any luck we might be able to bring down a retaining wall and do some serious structural damage to the Justice Center. There is the charge, which I will load into the case just now."

Kurtz nodded to a block of material wrapped in black duct tape and with a circuit board and a battery taped to the top, from which protruded several wires. Inserted into a hole bored in the center of the block was a silver tube, the mercury fulminate detonator. "We weren't able to use the lawyer's original briefcase, so I am giving you this one, which has one of my tamper-proof detonation mechanisms. I have installed a double switch and separate AAA battery just behind the two locking devices." A small wire with a U-fork on the end protruded from just behind the handle and lay on the lining inside the empty case. Two match heads rested on each tine of the fork. "Once the

charge is inside and the case is closed, there is no reason I can think of why you would wish to open it, but one never knows," Kurtz said to Kicky. He closed the case. "If for any reason you do have to open the case, push the locking tabs *up,* like this." He demonstrated, and the briefcase opened smoothly. He closed it again. "When you push the tabs sideways, as 99 out of 100 people instinctively do . . ." Kurtz did so, and as he opened the case there was a pop and an electric spark from the forked end of the wire, with a small puff of smoke as the match heads flared up. "The charge will detonate, blowing whoever opens the case to kingdom come, along with anyone else nearby. I suggest that before you allow anyone to take the case away from you and mess with it, comrade, you arrange to be either dead or elsewhere."

"I'll make a point of it," said Kicky dryly. "How do I start the timer?"

"Push the locking tabs *down*," instructed Kurtz. "You will then have twenty seconds to get the hell out of Dodge."

"Why not thirty?" asked Wingo.

"Because in that extra ten seconds one of the Blackwater apes might twig to what's going on when he sees a briefcase sliding toward them, grab it up, and toss it back out the door," said Kicky. "Don't worry, Jim, twenty seconds is enough. It's a lifetime. As soon as I hit the timer and throw it, I'm losing these damned high heels and I'll be back in the car before you know it. Just make sure you have my Reeboks in there ready for me."

"We better get going," said Oscar. "Brigade just called. The Marines are landing and we want to get in and out before they arrive at the Justice Center."

The mission consisted of three vehicles, two scout cars and a stolen government Lexus with illegal (for civilians) tinted windows. "No one will be surprised at seeing a lawyer get out of this car," chuckled Kicky. "They'll see me coming in my fancy threads and my briefcase with my badge dangling from my lapel and they'll think that Louise chick is a real workaholic, coming in the day after Jerry Reb blew up the town."

Dawn was coming up in the eastern sky; the day was going to be clear and cold. On their way downtown the interstate was deserted except for the odd burning car or burned-out FATPO truck, smoking on the shoulder or sometimes in middle of the center lane. Hill had to be careful not to hit any disabled vehicles. "God, I hope nobody blew any potholes in the road last night," said Wingo. "I'd hate to jar that briefcase on your lap back there, Kick."

"Now which way did he say I *wasn't* supposed to open this thing . . . ?" she mused. Oscar got on the cell phone and spoke with the other two vehicles that had driven on ahead of him.

"Okay, Lavonne says downtown is deserted except for the wreckage of last night's wild party," he told them. "Brigade confirms the Fatties and cops have been ordered to stay in their holes. They're waiting for the Marines. That's good and bad at the same time. We won't have to worry about traffic, but we'll stand out more for being on the street. Kick, once you deliver the package, we pick you up on the wing, and we rendezvous at Ankeny Park. We dump this car, which will be on their security tapes and switch to the truck and the Buick. One vehicle departs across Burnside Bridge and the other up Front Avenue. Should be no problem unless they simply machine-gun us from the gatehouses the moment we stop to let you out."

"Thanks for the visual, sir," said Kicky.

"You are sure you know where the Snitch Gate is, Kick?" asked Wingo.

"I've seen it before, just didn't know what it was," said Kicky.

"I am convinced the door will open for you with #1111," said Hill. "The only thing I'm worried about is that housekeeping or someone at the Plaza will have found the two bodies in that hotel room, someone put two and two together real quick, and Louise Richardson's access code got canceled."

"Don't fuck around trying to get the door open if it won't open when you swipe your card and enter the code," warned Wingo. "Just put the charge down by the door and run. I'll cover you if there's any activity from the gatehouses." In his lap Wingo carried a Kalashnikov with a drum magazine, the stock folded up. Oscar had a sawed-off pump shotgun in the door compartment of the Lexus.

"Okay, we're coming in," said Hill. "You know we don't dare risk a turn around the Justice Center. They've got their cameras on over the whole exterior and going around the block will stand out like a cow in church. We drop you at the corner of Second and Main, wait like we're watching to make sure you get inside all right, and then you deliver the package and we haul ass out of here."

"Got it." The Lexus slowed. She adjusted her sunglasses, leaned over into the front seat and gave Jimmy a quick kiss on the cheek, and said "Back in a jiff." Then she got out of the car and walked calmly across the street toward the apparently solid concrete berm wall, aiming for a small alcove between abutments where a rusted, paint-peeling door stood.

The street was empty, but then a second car came around the corner, a long black Oldsmobile, also with tinted windows, indicating a police vehicle of some kind. The occupants of the Olds didn't notice the Lexus, but one of them noticed Kicky. *"Mutha FUCK!"* bellowed Detective Lieutenant Jamal Jarvis.

"What?" yelled his partner Lieutenant Elena Martinez. Between the two of them they were the last survivors of Portland PB's Hatecrimes Squad, and by now they were so well known to the NVA that they weren't even allowed on the street. They had spent the past year going stir-crazy in the Justice Center, their boredom relieved only by interrogation duties, which had become more and more simply excuses for bloody torture and humiliation of any white suspects who were brought in. They got no valuable information, but no one seemed to care anymore. Their careers were on the skids.

Lainie had failed in her continual efforts to screw her way into the FBI and be assigned somewhere out of the Northwest; Jarvis had in fact just picked her up from the Vintage Plaza hotel where she had found the latest in her long string of highly placed federal lovers, an Assistant Attorney General, in bed with his Portland colleague Louise Richardson. This hadn't surprised Lainie since she was joining them for a threesome. The fact that they'd both been shot dead *had* surprised her, and the fact that she had just spent several hours trying to explain by phone to the investigating officer (who was afraid to come into the streets and examine at the scene) why she had been entering a hotel room in the wee hours of the morning had irked her. Now the NVA had trashed the city she was supposed to be responsible for, and her increasingly deranged partner Jarvis was cursing before breakfast. "What?" she demanded of him.

"Dat's de bitch!" hissed Jarvis, his eyes popping. "Dat's de fucking muthafuckin goddamn Kicky McGee bitch, right dere! Right dere, goddammit! See?" He pointed. "I know it's her! I always know a white ho' from behind when she swing her ass! Dat's de bitch!"

Lainie's eyes narrowed. *"Madre de dios*, I think you're right, Jamal! Why the hell is she dressed like that?"

"She goin' in de Snitch Hole," said Jarvis.

Lainie was tired and sufficiently off her game so her first reaction was to assume that Kicky was now snitching for some FBI agent. "Goddamit, she's *ours!*" she shouted. "Grab her!" Jarvis whirled the Oldsmobile around, flew up beside Kicky just as she stepped up onto the sidewalk beside the Justice Center, and brought the car to a screeching halt. Both Jarvis and Martinez leaped out of the car; Kicky turned and screamed as Jarvis grabbed her by her hair and Martinez by her arms, opening the back door of the Oldsmobile and hurling her bodily inside. Then Lainie slammed the door on her.

"Shit!" cursed Jimmy in the Lexus. "I know them! That's the Mami and the Monkey! I've got to get her out of there!" He jumped out of the Lexus, unfolded the Kalashnikov's stock and jacked a round into the chamber.

Oscar didn't bother to point out that Wingo was now in full view of the security cameras and the manned machine-gun nests in the two main gatehouses, standing openly in the street with a weapon in his hand. He simply assumed that this was it, that his race was run due to plain and simple bad luck. *Damn*, he said to himself softly as he got out, chambering a shell into the shotgun. *Well, nothing like a short life and a merry one.* Wingo began advancing across the street on the Oldsmobile.

"Where de fuck you been, bitch?" bellowed Jarvis, turning around from the driver's seat, reaching out and slapping Kicky with his open hand, her face, her head, punching at her with his fist. Lainie grabbed Kicky's hair and shook her head back and forth as if she were trying to snap Kicky's neck.

"Who the fuck do you think you are, you gringo whore?" she screamed. "Didn't I tell you once that you control nothing, you decide nothing, that you *are* nothing? This isn't your country anymore, gringo bitch! It belongs to us, to *La Raza*, you got that, *puta blanca?"* Kicky twisted her head, and through the window she saw Jimmy and Oscar moving toward the car, weapons at the ready.

He is coming for me, she thought hysterically. The Sword of Damocles over her head had fallen, and her life was now at an end. *He loves me, and now he's going to die for my worthless sake. If he lives it will be worse, because they will tell him. He will finally know me for what I am. He will look at me. I can't bear that.* Kicky pulled the briefcase onto her knees and placed her thumbs on the lock releases. Jarvis saw, and he had one final flash of realization, and time to utter one final terror-screamed obscenity.

There was a blinding flash of light.

Through some odd quirk of kinetic energy the blast blew out the bottom of the Oldsmobile and hurled most of its force *upward*, as well as the car. It flew almost thirty feet high in the air, crashed down, and broke up into separate heaps of flaming, melting metal. Even as close as they had been to the car, miraculously Wingo and Hill were only knocked off their feet, bruised where they hit the asphalt, and creased by several white-hot fragments, but otherwise unhurt. Wingo staggered upright, snatched up the Kalashnikov in a daze and looked around wildly for something to shoot. Then his eyes focused on the burning wreck before him. "SWEET JESUS GOD NO!" he screamed at the top of his lungs.

There was a popping sound; the FATPOs in the gate houses were firing at them now, although the smoke from the burning Oldsmobile obscured their aim. Wingo bellowed mindlessly, raised the AK to his shoulder and emptied his drum on full auto, right at the gatehouse. Hill ran up to him and shook him, shouting into his face.

"Jimmy, she's gone!" he yelled. "She's gone, Jim! We've got to get out of here! She wouldn't want you to die! She would want you to live and help us beat the bastards! Come on, Jim! We've got to go!" Wingo finally seemed to notice that people were shooting at him, and he let Hill stuff him back into the passenger side of the Lexus. As Hill floored the accelerator and the car fled the area, the sun tipped over the concrete skyline to the east and flooded Second Avenue with the golden light of a new day.

XXIX

"We Won!"

King Henry: I tell thee truly, herald,
I know not if the day be ours or no;
For yet a many of your horsemen peer
And gallop o'er the field.
Montjoy: The day is yours.

King Henry V.—Act IV, Scene 7

On a warm summer evening, a special meeting was convened in a private home in Clatskanie, Oregon. The house had belonged to a prominent local businessman, a Unionist sympathizer who left the area abruptly some years before after a heart to heart talk with some of the Boys. Since he hadn't returned to reclaim or inspect his property, Zack Hatfield assumed he had no further use for it. He installed as caretakers a middle-aged white couple from Eugene who had in turn been accused of Nationalist sympathies and accordingly been made homeless by FATPO bulldozers, and afterward he used the house as a way station and supply point, as well as for occasional conferences. Tonight Zack was playing host to a number of NVA officers who had gathered there on orders to watch a special nationwide television broadcast by President Chelsea Clinton.

"I have no idea what the hell is going on," Hatfield told anyone who asked. "Orders from up top, everybody who can get to a TV set needs to watch Chelsea's speech tonight. I just hope the feds don't decide to drop a Cruise missile or an assassination drone on this house tonight."

"You know the rumors are flying like bats out of a cave," said Lennart Ekstrom. "Operations Applesmash and Pigkill have been tearing ZOG a new one." Ekstrom referred to two long-range, long-term operations that the NVA had begun with the objective of disabling the two primary East Coast centers of Zionist rule, New York City and Washington, D.C.

"Yeah, and they need to stop flying," said Zack sourly. "I've heard the buzz. I know what everybody's thinking, and I'm worried that we're getting our hopes up prematurely. There seems to be something going on, true, but my guess is it's going to turn out to be something nasty for us. I know our guys on the road tour have been turning a performance as good as Cat and the Boys from Portland did down in Hollywood. I especially like what they've done with the New York Stock Exchange."

"What Stock Exchange?" asked Ekstrom with a hearty chuckle.

"Exactly," agreed Zack with a nod. "Kind of hard to trade stocks in a hole in the ground. But if anything, the offensive we're carrying out right in the belly of the Beast may bring on some kind of especially horrible retaliation here in the Homeland, although I've no idea what they can feasibly do that they're not already doing here. But there's no way ZOG is going to just throw in the towel and finally give us our freedom, Len. We're going to have to physically drive them out, every last soldier and bureaucrat and Jew, and then drive stakes through their hearts before they'll let us go. They can't afford to give in. Once they concede that the actual territory of the United States is divisible by race, then everybody's going to want a piece of the pie. The Mexicans are going to demand the Southwest for this Aztlan they've been hablamosing about for years, the niggers will want the South for New Africa, the Cubans and Haitians will demand Florida, the bugger boys may ask for some kind of Faggotstan somewhere, the French might start getting stroppy up in Quebec again, who knows where it will end? Every other continent is composed of multiple small nations, so why not this one? If we go then the whole empire goes, eventually. The power structure doesn't dare give in to us, or they're done and their power is finished, and they know it."

"Even Axis Erica isn't giving us any clues," said Lieutenant Rick Parmenter with a chuckle, nodding over to a computer in the corner that was tuned to the nightly Radio Free Northwest internet broadcast.

"I'm not sure it's polite for us to use the enemy's propaganda name for a comrade," said Lieutenant Sherry Tomczak primly.

"She has a notable sense of humor. I don't think she'd mind," said Hatfield.

On the computer screen a sultry Erica Collingwood was sitting at a table with a microphone in front of her and a large Tricolor flag behind her. "And that's the RFN news, the real news the Jews won't allow you to hear," she said in her mellifluous voice. "Now here's a few quick messages for some of the Boys out there, before we all tune in to hear what the Brat has to say. Here's one for all you Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers: Fat Freddie's cat had a flea bath and he's ready to go home, so Phineas needs to get that organized. A message for Kenneth: the frequency is ninety-nine balloons. I've also been asked to say that armadillos are the only animals besides man who get leprosy; somebody out there knows why, and you know who you are. Oh, and Mom: Timmy needs some more of your apple pie."

"How come we never get any coded messages like that from Axis Erica?" asked Ekstrom. "Uh, we don't, do we?"

"No," chuckled Zack. "I once suggested to Red that we use a code like that from her for something we were doing, and he clued me in on a little secret. Those messages of Erica's don't mean a damned thing. It's all gibberish, but it drives the enemy code-breakers and intelligence analysts batshit trying to figure out what the hell she's talking about. They waste their time trying to make sense out of that crap, time they might otherwise use in doing us harm."

"So no idea at all what's coming tonight, Zack?" asked Lieutenant Christina Ekstrom, who was sitting on the sofa in front of the TV.

Hatfield shook his head. "No, but Oscar and both our Portland brigade commandants are in the next room chewing something over. Oscar and Tommy Coyle just got back from some big pow-wow the Army Council threw up in Seattle. Something big is stirring, all right. Hell, maybe Chelsea's going to announce the federal government's decision to deport the entire White population of the Northwest and give it all back to the buffalo as a nature preserve."

"You know, there are loony environmentalists who have suggested that very thing?" commented Wayne Hill as he and Jackson and Coyle came out of the next room. "It's time, guys. Turn the computer off and let's go from the beauty to the Beast."

"Can you give us any idea at all, Oscar?" asked Hatfield.

"Frankly, Captain, before I say anything I want to make absolutely sure that what we have been told is going to happen does, in fact, happen," said Hill soberly. "A lot of people, myself included, don't trust these bastards in Washington, D.C. any farther than we can throw them. This may turn out to be some kind of trick or double cross. If it's not, then I have a series of

orders from the Army Council for the Portland and coastal Volunteer forces, but let's wait and see if the Brat says what she's supposed to."

The TV was turned on to CNN, and Hatfield clicked the sound on. The first thing they saw was the ebony face of Paulus Ingram, a well-known network talking head who had the distinction of being one of the ugliest men of any race on television. His hair was artificially straightened, adding to the grotesque appearance of his round head and bubble-lipped face. Ingram had successfully defended his job as the lone African-American male commentator of any stature at CNN against a white woman, a male Hispanic, and the network itself; his last federal lawsuit had resulted in the famous "Ingram Injunction" from the United States Supreme Court, forbidding CNN to dismiss him, demote him, or discipline him in any way, and had been hailed as a model for 21st century civil rights law. "We're still waiting for the hookup from the Oval Office to begin," said Ingram, addressing a white female talking head, a Barbie doll blonde whose face appeared in the lower right hand of the television screen. The White House was behind her, illuminated in the muggy darkness of a summer night.

"I notice they don't show the Bremer walls and the sandbags," chuckled Coyle.

"I gather the Brat is a bit jumpy since the bit with the exploding cigar at her dinner table," said Rick Parmenter. "They've supposedly sandbagged her bedroom now."

"Pity nobody sandbagged her mother years ago," growled Hatfield.

Ingram gibbered on. "Apropos of what you were saying just a minute ago, Jenny, the President's announcement is definitely unexpected. We didn't get word ourselves until this morning. CNN has been informed that she and the Vice President, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Director of Homeland Security met with a delegation of senior legislators from both Houses of Congress this afternoon and apparently what they had to say took these Congressional VIPs by complete surprise. I have heard described to me that their faces leaving the White House were in some cases angry and in some cases simply baffled. It's also unexpected in that this is Chelsea Clinton's first nationwide address devoted entirely to the subject of domestic terrorism, outside of what might be considered the standard and obligatory references and expressions of our national determination to win the war on domestic terror during her State of the Union addresses. Ms. Clinton has in fact devoted most of her term so far to the social agenda that has always been her family's strongest point whenever the Clintons have been in office, as opposed to the Bushes, who are generally regarded as more prominent in

foreign affairs and security issues, although it has to be said Clinton Three has continued Bush Two's strong line in the War on Terror to the satisfaction of both parties. She's taken a firm stand on both Islamic terrorism in the Middle East and throughout the world, and she's been just as firm on racist terror in the Pacific Northwest. But this President has so far been content to leave security issues to the professionals, and in order to further professionalize the struggle against domestic terrorism, at the beginning of her term she signed off on the strengthening of the Federal Anti-Terrorist Police Organization both manpower and budget-wise without hesitation, as well as the section allowing the relocation of local populations in the Northwest who are deemed by the Attorney General to be insufficiently cooperative with federal authority. A notable bipartisan effort that won her a lot of points on both sides of the aisle."

"Yes indeed, Paulus," said Jenny brightly, "That was to be expected in view of the fact that the FATPO bill received bipartisan backing at the time of passage, notably from her mother, former President Hillary Clinton, in return for the Republicans' concession regarding the suspension of the Twenty-Fourth Amendment, allowed Hillary herself one more shot at the gold ring and which will actually enable her to succeed her own daughter for an unprecedented fourth term. That would be one for the books, eh Paulus? But Washington is a goldfish bowl. Surely we must by now have at least some inkling of what the President intends to say?"

Ingram replied, "Well, Jenny, there is some speculation that she finally intends to declare at least three Pacific Northwest states and parts of several others to be in a state of insurrection against the United States, which is a step that Congressional conservatives and liberals alike have been calling on the executive branch to perform for many years, and if I may say so, if this is the reason for the President's address tonight, then it's not before time, Jenny. I simply don't know what else the level of terrorism and racist intimidation that exists in Washington and Oregon and Idaho could possibly be called, if not an armed insurrection. The official reason that this hasn't been done is that to do so would concede that the United States has in effect lost control over the Pacific Northwest and thus hand the terrorists a moral victory, but a lot of people have never really bought into that. I asked about that very issue earlier tonight when I had NAACP president Jamal Watkins on my show. Kenneth, we seem to have a little time, can we roll that one clip while we wait for the President to make her appearance?"

The screen flashed to another negroid countenance. He was seated in a plush studio swivel chair. "I would verra much hope dat tonight President

Clinton shall indeed finally take de necessar-ray steps to address de problem ob racist terror in ah so-ci-eh-tay. De peeple ob dis cuntry hab long awaited some sign dat dose in powuh ah red-day to make a commitment to human decency and crush, extoimenate, and cut off from de oith dese white racist moiderers who hab defiled . . ."

Ingram broke in. "Wait, I have been informed that President Clinton has entered the Oval Office." The scene suddenly cut to the sad and rather confused-looking, camel-like face of Chelsea Clinton. She was wearing a prim, almost dowdy tweed suit, and she was seated behind a large mahogany desk in the Oval Office, American and Israeli flags prominently displayed behind her.

"God, every time I see her I wait for her to flap her flippers together and bark so some tourist will throw her a fish," said Christina Ekstrom.

Chelsea was still staring silently at the camera, almost in a trance. "Come on, start the damned teleprompter!" jeered Rick Parmenter.

Someone must have done so, because the President began to speak. "Good evening," she said. "Tonight I wish to speak to the United States of America, and to the world, about something I understand and accept will be very much misunderstood, and which will cause deep feeling throughout the country. But what I must discuss with you tonight is an idea whose time has come, and it may well prove to be the beginning of a new era in this nation's long war on terrorism. For many years during the last century, terrorism was something that was restricted to foreign countries, mostly in the Middle East as the result of Muslim refusal to accept the sudden existence of a Jewish state in their midst where none had been before, and the Muslim world's subsequent abandonment of all civilized and humane standards of behavior in their effort to drive that Jewish state out of existence. As both the foremost ally of Israel, and the standard bearer of democracy and enlightenment, it was perhaps inevitable that the United States would be eventually dragged into that terrorist conflict.

"Then came the cataclysmic events of September 11th, 2001. Ever since then, the United States has followed a policy of bringing democracy and freedom directly to the Muslim world, by persuasion and diplomacy where possible, by compulsory régime change where necessary. It is in the interest of all of humanity that Islam be required to embrace values and systems of government that will enable the state of Israel to survive and prosper, and thereby bring about the ultimate goal of all world history, a Brotherhood of Man. This administration, like previous ones, has continued this benevolent policy of imposing civilized thoughts and behaviors on those within the Islamic

world who are unwilling to recognize the need to modernize their faith and bring it into conformity with twenty-first century human values, specifically rendering Islam inclusive of women, religious and racial minorities, and those of different sexual orientations. We will not falter in this sacred trust. Israel is intended by God to be a Light Unto The Nations, and America was created to be the torchbearer of that light."

"That doesn't sound like they're throwing in the towel to me," growled Hatfield in disgust. "Christ, what are Grendel and her mother planning on doing now?"

"Wait for it," said Oscar.

"But closer to home, tragic events have taken shape," Chelsea went on. "Our own country throughout its long history has never been free of the curse of racism, of intolerance, of hatred and bigotry, of contempt for minorities and women and gays on the part of the heterosexual and patriarchal white males who controlled America and its resources for so long a part of our national existence. Within the past three generations, to our eternal credit, America has begun to step forward, out of the fever swamp of racial hatred, and into the green and pleasant meadows of brotherhood and tolerance. Beginning with the civil rights movement, led by the immortal and beloved Doctor Martin Luther King, and continuing on with the anti-Vietnam War movement of the 1960s in which my own beloved parents grew to political and personal maturity . . ."

"Your father never did grow to maturity, and your mother is an ageless being, neither young nor old, an immortal spirit of evil," muttered Billy Jackson.

"It was inevitable that there would be bitter and stubborn resistance to the march of the New World Order," said Chelsea, changing tone. "Sometimes even violent and criminal resistance by men with closed minds and closed hearts. For many years hatecrime was dealt with swiftly and efficiently by law enforcement and the courts, and many white males paid the price for their refusal to turn their back on the past and accept the coming of a bright new day of tolerance and diversity where the black man, the brown man, women and gays of all colors walked proudly at his side as his equals and, more often than not, his betters. Up until a certain day in October, four years and nine months ago, we thought that ordinary criminal procedures were enough to deal with this cancer of racism and hatred in our society. Unfortunately, we were wrong. On that October 22nd, evil men who had spent years creating and perfecting a diabolical criminal conspiracy, elected to use a child custody case involving the Singer family of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, as an excuse to launch what can only be termed an insurrection against the United States."

"It's martial law!" said Hatfield.

"Or maybe she's just trying to sugar-coat a really bitter pill," suggested Oscar.

Chelsea continued to drone in a monotone. "That insurrection has gone on for almost five years now. It has claimed thousands of lives. This very hallowed and historic home of the nation's chief executive, from which I address you tonight, has been attacked and damaged, and my own life and the lives of my family have been threatened. Some of my closest personal friends and political allies have been murdered. The terrorist campaign has destroyed billions of dollars worth of both government and private property, and not only in the Northwest. That destruction, combined with the lost revenue and the expense required to enforce the law and maintain security in the Pacific Northwest, and now in other parts of the country, is now literally beyond calculation, as I have been informed by the General Accounting Office."

"It's never the generals who surrender, comrades," said Hill with grim satisfaction. "It's the accountants!"

Chelsea went on. "Worst of all, the ongoing racial violence in the Pacific Northwest has distracted this great nation of ours both from America's civilizing mission in the Muslim world, and from our domestic agenda of creating a true and inclusive paradise on earth, insofar as that is humanly possible, based on the ancient Jewish and yet also universal idea of a Brotherhood of Man. Assessing the developments in the Pacific Northwest over a lengthy period of time, I have come to the conclusion that if there is any chance of an immediate cessation of the violence and loss before the end of my term as President, then I have to investigate and assess it, regardless of my personal feelings in the matter and the deep-seated repugnance I feel in giving a vicarious legitimacy to terrorists, bombers, and murderers. But there are times when a leader's duty to her country and to human civilization itself demand that she make difficult and controversial choices. I have never feared controversy. I know that my decision in this matter will cause alarm, despondency, and suspicion in many quarters. I will tell you all tonight that these fears are misplaced. When you elected me as your President, you gave me a sacred trust, and I will never betray that trust. In this crucial time in our country's history I must ask for your faith in my intentions, your support in this vitally necessary development, and your prayers. I do not like doing this one bit. But if I can end the horrific violence that has poisoned our national life for so long, and that threatens to undermine and destroy everything which makes America great, then it is my duty to make the attempt. I can do no more or less.

"Accordingly, I have today signed and issued two special executive orders. In my capacity as commander in chief of the armed forces of the United States, effective immediately, I hereby direct all American military units and law enforcement agencies in the Pacific Northwest to halt operations and observe a full ceasefire. I have received a reciprocal commitment to a full ceasefire from the . . ." Chelsea suddenly stopped and pursed her lips, almost like she was trying to repress a cough or sneeze.

"Come on, baby, say it, say it!" prompted Parmenter.

"From the Northwest Volunteer Army, who shall in turn cease all attacks against American military, law enforcement, and civilian personnel from this moment on," she concluded, almost spitting out the sentence.

"Did we agree to that?" demanded Hatfield.

Chelsea hurried on. "Secondly, I am ordering that beginning on August the first of this year, a conference shall be convened at Longview, Washington, between representatives of the United States Government and the Northwest Volunteer Army, in order to bring about a negotiated settlement which shall permanently bring this conflict and its murderous violence to an end. My fellow Americans, thank you all, and good night."

The screen went momentarily blank and then returned to the news studio and the gawping negroid face of Paulus Ingram. His bubble-lipped jaw was down to his chest. "Mutha *fukka!*" he suddenly screamed. "Dat honky bitch done sold our black asses out! She gone *surrender* to those racist NVA muthafukkas!" Hill reached for the remote and hit the mute button. The people in the room looked at each other in stunned silence. There was no cheering, no laughter, no exultation, no joy. The realization hadn't sunk in yet, and they were in shock.

Finally Hatfield said the words out loud. "We won," he said simply. "I don't believe it. Dear God in Heaven. *We won!*"

"Not yet, we haven't," said Hill crisply, standing up in front of them. "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip, as the old saying goes." He pulled a notebook out of his pocket and referred to it. "This isn't victory yet, comrades. This is simply a very big opportunity that we can't afford to bungle. I have been instructed by the Army Council to let you know how we intend to handle this, and what your own roles in these coming events must be."

"What's all that moo about a cease-fire in place?" asked Jackson. "What are we supposed to do if we run into any Fatties on the way back tonight? Wave at them?"

"In theory, cease-fire in place means just what it says," said Coyle. "In practice, we're going to make it mean the Fatties stay in place while we grab

everything that's not nailed down. What we've got here is a truce, which means the NVA will be able to surface at least partially, and begin the process of assuming power in the Homeland. Starting with areas like the North Shore, which are pretty much clear of federal authority already, thanks to Zack and you Third Batt comrades. You know, after almost five years of fighting there's only any significant American presence left anymore in about fifteen or sixteen areas of the Pacific Northwest, the larger cities and towns. Everywhere else the Americans are hanging on by their fingernails, afraid to show their faces outside their police stations or their fortified courthouses, and there's huge stretches of territory throughout the Northwest where we've already run the bastards out and for all practical purposes we're the government already, like right here where we're sitting. We haven't stepped forward in these areas too much, because we didn't want to give ZOG stationary targets where they could bring their superior firepower to bear, but now we've got to. We've created a vacuum. Now we have to step in and fill it."

"This is going to be a time of transition for the NVA as well as for the whole country," said Oscar. "We're going to be morphing from an underground guerrilla organization into a new government, a new army, and a new order of society. Under General Order Number One the Army Council has officially been the provisional government of the Northwest Republic. Now we start to turn that into fact. Zack, you are henceforth that government's Administrative Officer for Clatsop, Columbia, and Tillamook Counties. That's just a stopgap title we dreamed up at the Seattle conference. Next week you'll probably be called something else, and we'll probably make you a general or something, but for now you're the basic head honcho for this neck of the woods. Your assignment is to assume full control of this area in both a military and civil capacity, make sure everything runs as well as you can manage given the time of upheaval that's coming, and above all keep the United States in all its slimy forms *out.* Commandants Coyle and Jackson are in a somewhat different position, since their urban area of operation is still occupied by the enemy, and you will need to provide them with every support service you can. That will include recruiting and training of new troops, weapons, supplies, medical service, vehicles, intelligence. To be blunt, you've got to prepare for an assault on Portland in case ZOG decides not to go quietly."

"I'm still not clear, are we supposed to keep on fighting in Portland or not?" asked Jackson keenly.

"In theory, all fighting is supposed to cease," said Oscar. "Hence the term *cease-fire*. In reality we will be edging the Zionists out of everywhere we can edge them out of, and that ride will get a little bumpy, but we ask that you

try to avoid any major confrontations that may upset the peace process, or whatever term they use for these Longview negotiations. Keep your heads down, and don't initiate any attacks except defensive ones."

"Define *defensive*," pressed Jackson.

"Anything you can get away with that doesn't totally upset the whole apple cart. Use common sense, Bill. Any time there's an incident, and we're sure there will be plenty of incidents, we want to be able to holler that the Feds were the ones who broke the truce. At some point, the question will come up regarding their evacuation of Portland under the terms of whatever treaty or agreement the Longview conference comes up with. This whole command needs to be ready to back up with force whatever the new government decides in that respect. The time may come when they balk, or we just get tired of waiting for them to leave, and you will be called upon to secure the Republic's territorial integrity. But this time it will be as a real army, of a real nation."

"*Our* nation . . ." whispered Christina, her eyes moist. "I still can't believe it . . . if only he could have lived another few months, just to see this day . . ."

"You know, Chris, my new capacity as chief cook and bottle washer is going to give me a fair amount of authority in Astoria," said Zack. "What do you think about Lockhart Avenue in place of Marine Boulevard?"

It was still Marine Boulevard on the next morning, overcast but warm, when Zack rolled into Astoria in his famous War Wagon Humvee. Behind him rolled six truckloads of armed Volunteers who peeled off and headed for their respective positions along the waterfront, in the downtown area, and to certain buildings that were to be commandeered for the use of the new régime. The high school was to become a barracks and training depot for the new national army that Zack had been told would be called the Northwest Defense Force; he hoped that other arrangements could be made by the time school was scheduled to start in September. An observation post and communications transmitter was to be established at the top of the Astoria Column, and guard forces against sabotage were to be installed on all the bridges across the Columbia River mouth and Youngs Bay.

The streets were quiet; traffic pulled over to let the NVA convoy by, and local pedestrians simply stood and watched in silent curiosity as Zack and the last truckload of rebels pulled up in front of the Clatsop County courthouse. There was little sense of history in the making. Sheriff Ted Lear was standing on the sidewalk alone, waiting for them. Zack clambered out of the Humvee, his broad-brimmed feathered hat on his head and his famous Winchester

in his hand. "Morning, Ted," he said to Lear. "Anybody inside?" he asked, nodding up at the courthouse.

"A few of the clerks and maintenance staff," said Lear. "Not much for them to do since you guys ran all the lawyers and judges off years ago, but they've held down the fort, I guess you could say."

"How about your department?" Hatfield asked, looking at him. "Anybody going to give us any trouble?"

"I called them all in last night and had a talk with them, after the President's speech," said Lear. "Them and what's left of the Astoria police department after you shot Sam Hall. I told them I was staying, but if anyone wanted to leave, they had my best wishes and God speed. A few handed in their badges, and they're home packing their U-Hauls. I probably could have listed their names beforehand. Some of them are scared you're going to retaliate against them for things past. Not yourself so much, but some of these men you have with you have seen the inside of our jail a few times, and there's likely bad blood against some of my deputies and Astoria PD officers. Or against me."

"Not too much," said Zack reassuringly. "You were always fair. You were never the village bully or the Chamber of Commerce's chief head knocker, like some of the local coppers around the Northwest. Like Sam Hall was. That's what killed him."

"He was no loss. I never did like corrupt cops, and I found out he was one of the ones responsible for calling that invasion force of government thugs into my county. Some of the others who are leaving are just too old dogs to learn new tricks. The rest of us are staying. How about you, Zack?" Lear asked. "Are you going to turn into some kind of medieval tyrant now, and decorate the streets with the heads of everybody who's ever offended you in the past?"

"I am going to secure this area for the Republic, Ted, and I am going to make sure the Americans never come back," Hatfield told him.

"You were an American yourself, once," said Lear sardonically.

"I was," replied Zack with a nod. "I've found I prefer being a white man instead. To answer your question, Ted, we've had a lot of law in the past few generations. Too damned much law, and not enough justice. Now there's going to be justice, and some of it may be pretty rough, but I don't think it's going to be anywhere near as bad as people think. Not around here, anyway. Remember that little meeting we had up on the bleachers back at Astoria High one night some years ago? Remember what I told you we were going to do? Well, we did it. The people who need punishing and the people who don't

belong here are all pretty much gone now, one way or the other. There's not going to be a need for any bloodbath. Elsewhere, the cities?" He shrugged. "That ain't gonna be pretty. But right now I want people here to learn that they not only need fear us, but that they can respect us and trust us. You can't win hearts and minds by going berserk in an orgy of vengeance, and I won't allow that to happen here."

"What about the Coast Guard station in Warrenton?" asked Lear.

"That's going to be ticklish," Hatfield agreed. "You know Commander Ratcliff?"

"Pretty well, yeah," said Lear.

"Red, white and blue fanatic type?" asked Hatfield.

"Duty type," said Lear.

"Will he talk to me?"

"I can call him and find out," offered Lear. "Am I still sheriff, by the way?"

"Of course." Hatfield walked back over to the Humvee and took out a folded Northwest Tricolor flag. He slung his rifle over his shoulder and walked across the street to the historic Astoria post office. Lear followed him. The flagpole was bare; the Stars and Stripes hadn't been run up there in a long time, by tacit agreement with the postmaster. Hatfield quietly unfolded the blue, white and green banner, hooked it up through the eyelets, and raised the flag of the new nation to the sky. A breeze caught the fabric and the Tricolor billowed out full for all to see. There was some scattered applause from the bystanders and a few cheers and rebel yells from the NVA men.

Lear looked at Hatfield oddly. "You crazy sons of bitches," he said softly. "You did it. You really did it."

"We did," agreed Hatfield.

"By the way, Julia called just before I left the house this morning."

"How is she?" asked Zack.

"She's good. She said she watched the Brat's speech last night, and she stayed up all night thinking and praying, and she's decided she's quitting her job down there in L.A. and coming back home to stay. Immediately."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Hatfield soberly. "I presume she understands that the rough stuff isn't over yet? That all this could still go bad, really bad?"

"Yeah, she understands," said Lear.

Hatfield sighed. "Now, I suppose I need an office of some kind. You know the courthouse. What would you recommend?"

"Well, if you're in a mood for irony, there's always the office of the old Clatsop County Diversity Commission, on the second floor," offered Ted

with a chuckle. "The Mexican lady who used to be in there doesn't seem to have come in to work for a while."

That afternoon Zack and several other Volunteers got into his War Wagon and took a ride over to Warrenton. They drove down 12th Place and pulled up outside the main gates of the United States Coast Guard Air Station. The post was surrounded with the usual Bremer walls and rolls of razor wire, and a large Stars and Stripes flew defiantly over the gate, as well as a second one from the flagpole in front of the main building. Several M-16 muzzles slid out of dark slits in the gatehouse. "Ignore them. Point the barrel high," he ordered his machine gunner, a German Volunteer named Karl Vogler who was wearing shades and a peaked Alpine winter cap, some kind of German or east European military surplus. Vogler was one of the increasing number of foreign Volunteers who were finding their way to the Northwest to fight for white freedom. There had already been talk of forming a separate German-speaking brigade in the new Northwest Defense Force.

"Zey have us covered, sir," said Vogler, staring at the gate house.

"I know. Just disregard unless they do something. We're not here in a hostile sense, at least not yet. I just want to have a word or two with the station commander."

After a time the gate opened and a Coast Guard officer in full uniform stepped out, Commander Anthony Ratcliff. Hatfield noticed Ratcliff was wearing a sidearm, but he left his own Winchester in the Humvee when he got out of the vehicle. He walked up wearing his usual tattered canvas duster and floppy Northwest fedora-style felt hat with the feather in it, and he saluted the scowling Ratcliff, who didn't return it, nor did he offer to shake hands. Hatfield ignored the Coast Guard man's discourtesy. "Afternoon, Commander," he said conversationally. "Name's Hatfield, officer commanding the NVA Third Battalion, First Portland Brigade. Sorry about the civvies. I understand some of our guys up in Washington have uniforms now, but they haven't gotten around to issuing us any down here as yet. Don't even know what they look like."

"I know who you are," said Ratcliff. "Sheriff Lear told me you were coming. I suppose I should be grateful that you've only murdered six of my sailors over the past few years."

"Your sailors had skins the color of shit, so they're not allowed here anymore," replied Hatfield easily. "Your predecessor knew that perfectly well, and yet he still sent them into town. I notice you don't."

"As it happens, we have no more African-American or Hispanic or Asian-American personnel serving in this station," said Ratcliff.

"I know," said Hatfield. "Smart move on your part, or whoever made that call. Whatever point your predecessor was trying to prove, at least you don't try to prove it with the lives of the men under your command, and I respect that."

"What do you want, Hatfield?" demanded the Commander.

"First off, to let you know that the NVA has now occupied the town of Astoria, and we are assuming the civil authority in Clatsop County. In the coming days we will be occupying Warrenton, Seaside, this whole stretch of coastline, preparatory to the transition of this chunk of real estate to the government of the Northwest Republic. I presume you heard the President's speech last night?"

"I did," said Ratcliff. "I am sickened and horrified that she is considering turning over the sovereign territory of the United States to—to you. Not to mention astounded."

"No more astounded than I am, Commander," said Hatfield. "I really thought we were going to have to scrape the last of you up off our streets with a shovel."

"I heard her mention a conference to be held up at Longview. I didn't hear her say anything about transitioning civil authority to your so-called Republic, here or anywhere else!" barked Ratcliff.

"No, she didn't," agreed Hatfield. "I guess it's a good thing we have no intention of asking her permission. It's over, Ratcliff. We've won. Do you think the President of the United States would have made a speech like that or called that conference in Longview if the Americans hadn't decided to throw in the towel?"

"You're an American yourself!" snapped Ratcliff.

"Actually, no," replied Hatfield. "In case you hadn't noticed, that's what these past few years of shooting and blowing things up have been all about. Just because I was born in a stable doesn't make me a horse, or in the case of the United States, a horse's ass. We've decided that *we* will choose what we want to be and what we want our children to be. War is when you let the government tell you who the enemy is, Ratcliff, like you do, like I used to. Revolution is when you decide who the enemy is for yourself. Oh, there's still a lot of yadda yadda and flapdoodle to be gone through, at Longview and maybe in D.C. or elsewhere, but the main point was conceded last night. They're going to give us our sovereign independence, maybe with a lot of kicking and screaming and face-saving rhetoric and bullshit, but we're going to get the Northwest Republic. Or else we'll just take it. Either way, there's no turning back now, and I suspect you know it. Let me ask you something.

Whose idea was it really to get all those black and beaner naval personnel out of this station?"

Ratcliff hesitated. "Mine, actually," he said.

"Must have been quite a hard sell to your superiors. Surprised you didn't get brought up on charges of racism. Why did you do that? Take a risk like that? Give in to our wicked and evil terrorism and all?" asked Zack.

"We have a specific mission here, one that has been made a lot harder by the conditions you people have created over the past few years, and I didn't need the added aggravation of having to protect certain members of the command 24/7," replied Ratcliff, somewhat defensively. "It was a decision I made for the good of the unit."

"Yes, we know. Your mission is air-sea rescue for ships and crews in distress on a particularly dangerous stretch of open sea, the Columbia Bar, the Graveyard of the Pacific out there." Hatfield gestured in the direction of the ocean. "You also assist the Columbia River pilots when necessary, whenever a ship out there gets into trouble. You've stuck with carrying out your mission to save sailors' lives, and you haven't allowed your base here to be used against the local community by FATPO or Blackwater or other criminal elements in the employ of the United States government, despite what I imagine must have been some pretty heavy pressure."

"Heavy enough," admitted Ratcliff. "We didn't want to make ourselves targets. Like you said, we're here to save lives."

"We appreciate your situation, sir, and you know damned well we've reciprocated," Hatfield told him. "Have we attacked this station? Has a single Caucasian member of your command been fired on or harmed in any way in all this time?"

"No," admitted Ratcliff. "Although I keep all off-base trips to a bare minimum. Sheriff Lear has been extremely helpful."

"Your guys must be going stir-crazy in there," commented Hatfield.

"We've got computers and satellite TV," said Ratcliff with a shrug. "And a very good games room."

"Well, I think it's a good idea for you to keep your men cooped up for a while longer," said Hatfield. "We're going to be doing things in town you shouldn't see, lest your duty compel you to start telling tales out of school. You've got what, 120 or so people in there now? Almost all of them support or medical personnel or technicians, pilots and so forth? Never mind, I don't expect you to tell me. Just keep on doing what you do. You leave us alone, and we'll leave you alone, if it turns out that's possible. Here's a card with my cell number on it," he said, handing the card to Ratcliff, who took it without

comment. "If there is any trouble, give me a call and we'll see if whatever the problem is can't be settled by talking instead of shooting. White men have murdered one another over the past couple of hundred years because we can't seem to decide who this continent belongs to, Commander. I say there's been enough white men killing one another. It's a habit we need to get out of. Your superiors are probably going to ask you to do some things that might upset the apple cart, like using your air-sea rescue helicopters to spy on our troop movements, that sort of thing. I understand that you may not be able to resist such orders even if you are so inclined. You have to understand that if I come to consider your presence here a threat to my own men or to the community here, we can and we will take you out. You know what happened on a certain beach a few miles south of here. We've got more manpower every day, and we're starting to acquire enough heavy weapons to do it. But I don't want this little Coast Guard station here to turn into a Northwestern Fort Sumter. All I ask is that you play as square with me as you feel your duty and your honor allows, and let's get along while the guys in Longview who will be doing the negotiating on both sides do their jobs. If you need help of any kind from us of an emergency or a humanitarian nature, you call me. There's been almost five years of slaughter in the Northwest and there's going to be more. It just doesn't have to be here. I'm going to go now. Thank you for your time, Commander." Before he turned around and walked back to the War Wagon, Hatfield snapped him another salute, and this time Ratcliff returned it.

* * *

The three counties of Oregon that comprised the Third Battalion's operational area were in fact one of the largest stretches of territory in the Homeland free of American civil or military authority, and accordingly these counties became a major staging area for the provisional government. By late August, Zack Hatfield was officially General Hatfield of the Northwest Defense Force, and military governor of the district. He was assisted in his duties by a growing staff of local people, including businessmen, former government employees, managers, engineers, merchants, community leaders and technical specialists who managed to make sure that the electricity in the towns and the rural areas stayed on, the sewage and waste disposal systems worked, the stores remained stocked with at least an adequate amount of basic necessities without shortages or runaway inflation, and civil order was maintained.

Gasoline and diesel fuel were the hardest things to obtain. Prompted by a heavy Christian evangelical element in their senior management, the major oil companies attempted to cut off fuel delivery to local stations in Nationalist areas and "send the racists back to horse and buggy days," to quote one Texas corporate spokesperson. However, on their way back from D.C. and New York, some of the Boys from Operation Applesmash and Operation Pigkill made a stop-off in Houston. Within the space of a week the CEO of Exxon turned the ignition key on his Ferrari and was blown through the roof of his garage; the chief financial officer of Gulf Oil was found hanging in his pool house by his own necktie wearing only black net stockings and high heels and lipstick; and the huge, garish main tabernacle of an Evangelical television ministry that was one of Israel's main financial and Scriptural supporters was leveled by a truck bomb full of gelignite. The two charred objects resembling human bodies found in the ruins were assumed to be the televangelist and his beehive-haired wife. After that, fuel deliveries to the Nationalist Pacific Northwest quietly resumed. The price of gas even dropped a few cents per gallon.

At the beginning of September Sheriff Ted Lear and his remaining officers, sheriff's deputies and town police from the municipalities, were mustered *en masse* into the new national police force, the Northwest Civil Guard. Ted was given a brevet rank of major and a new uniform; a heavy khaki shirt, dark green trousers, and jackboots with the Alpine-style ski cap as headgear. "I look like a Nazi Stormtrooper," he grumbled. "Especially with this thing." He thumbed the eagle and Swastika patch sewn over his right shirt pocket.

"I think that's kind of the idea," said Hatfield. "I'd say of all the movement's various factions and tendencies, over half of us are National Socialist to some degree or other. Helps balance out the fanatical Christians, the Christian Identity element, the libertarian quasi-anarchist types, the pagan fanatics, the Heroic Vitalists and whatnot. National Socialism is turning out to be a unifying thread because just about everybody agrees with at least ninety percent of it."

"What's a Heroic Vitalist?" asked Ted.

"Haven't got that quite figured out yet," admitted Zack. "But it sure sounds cool."

The military and political situation in the Northwest remained volatile and tense. The peace negotiations had commenced on schedule, with delegations from the NVA, the United States government, the Red Cross, the United Nations, and every media outlet in the world stuffed into the huge Lewis and Clark luxury hotel on the outskirts of Longview, Washington. [See *A Mighty*

Fortress by the same author.] Every television channel, including those that had been taken over by the new Republic's fledgling Northwest Broadcasting Authority, was filled with almost nothing anymore but news reporting from the conference, interviews with participants, official statements and press releases, speculation, rumors, gossip, and a tsunami of outright propaganda from both sides. The negotiations dragged on over many weeks with nothing seemingly getting accomplished, while out in the hinterlands of the Northwest the Nationalist forces quietly squeezed ZOG out of large swathes of territory. A village here, a stretch of road there, a factory or police station somewhere else fell into the NDF's hands every day. Everywhere except in Portland itself.

Zack's main worry militarily was the fate of the bridges across the Columbia River, the two main ones at Astoria and Longview, and also the bridges over Youngs Bay between Astoria and Warrenton. "We're vulnerable as hell," he admitted to his staff in one of their regular conferences. "Those bridges get bombed out, and a few more get knocked down along Highway 101, and we are virtually cut off from the rest of the country here. The Americans can do it, too. Not sure why they haven't yet. They have jets, copter gunships, B-52s, Cruise missiles, robot drones and God knows what else, and they can blow those bridges any time they want to. We have no anti-aircraft capability at all on the ground besides small arms, and our air force at this moment consists of a collection of Cessnas and other private planes as well as some media news copters we've confiscated."

"I thought we were going to get some SAMs from the Russkis, sir?" asked newly minted Major Rick Parmenter.

"There's some kind of hold-up," said Hatfield. "The Russians have been quietly backing us for years, as you know, what with the way successive American governments keep grinding their noses in the dirt, determined to keep Russia a third-class world power militarily and economically. But now that things have reached this sensitive point they don't want to be *seen* to be backing us. There have been enough questions raised already at Longview and elsewhere about all these Russian small arms and ammo that keeps rocking up in our hands."

"The fact that our negotiating team was flown into Longview by a thinly disguised Russian military helicopter and a Russian crew wasn't exactly subtle, either," remarked Colonel Lennart Ekstrom of the NDF's new Quartermaster Corps.

"I asked Red about that, and he said basically we simply didn't know which Americans we could trust not to have a mysterious accident on the way in," Hatfield told them. "Be that as it may, the Russkis understand that

the U.S. government is now naturally anxious to hold on to air superiority as a bargaining tool, since if these negotiations go south and the war resumes, it will be more conventional in nature and they might finally get a chance to use some of their high-tech toys against us. Moscow wouldn't mind upsetting that apple cart, but they don't want to be too obvious about it, hence the delay in getting our SAM batteries delivered. But that doesn't help our immediate problem. That gung-ho Marine general in Portland, Delmar Partman, has been saying some ominous things about refusing to go along with any treaty negotiated at Longview if it 'sunders our precious Union' as he puts it. I don't know if that moo is being scripted for him from Washington or not, whether somebody is winding Partman up or whether he's doing this on his own, but Third Section seems to think that he's dead serious about refusing to surrender and forcing a pitched battle."

"Which the Jews hope will create a chaos situation and give them a chance to tear up the treaty and return to full occupation again, blaming the whole thing on us, of course," added Colonel Wayne Hill grimly.

The provisional government of the Northwest American Republic, acting under the mandate of the October 2006 draft Constitution created back in the days when the movement was little more than one half-insane old man playing with his computer, had instituted a Bureau of Race and Resettlement to begin dealing with the problems caused by the massive population movement and dispersal. In Portland, Marine General Partman issued more and more bellicose statements about refusing to surrender the city to the Nationalists regardless of whatever was decided at Longview. In the rural areas skirmishing continued between the expanding NDF and the remaining government forces. The result was a two-way flow of refugees: Unionists fleeing into Portland and streams of white people who either harbored Nationalist sympathies, or simply wanted to get away from the bullying black and brown thugs of FATPO, who fled away from the city. There was a steady flow of traffic up and down Interstate 5. Most remaining non-whites in the Northwest, as well as many white middle and upper-class families packed their belongings and fled from what they feared would be a cartoonish totalitarian state of the kind the media had always portrayed all past white nationalist régimes to be. At the same time massive numbers of white families from California and the Southwest packed as well and fled to the Northwest for fear of the growing Hispanic separatist Frente de la Raza movement. The FDLR was already staking a claim to a new Hispanic state of Aztlan to be located in the Southwest, either as an independent nation, or possibly a United States territory, or even a province of Mexico itself. Much

of the incoming white flight came to the North Shore area. While the North Shore had in fact been seriously under-populated for years and could well afford some new blood, especially younger white blood, the influx did create some logistic and supply problems.

The BRR set up transit centers in places like Astoria and Seaside and Clatskanie, including one in a former bowling alley on Astoria's newly re-named Lockhart Boulevard. One cold and damp night in early October, Major James Wingo was filling in as officer of the day at this transit center, helping to process lines of incoming white refugees and their families, who were being issued with temporary ID documents and assigned to a wide variety of housing according to need. Sometimes the Republic's newest residents were given quite up-market housing that had been vacated by fleeing Unionists, sometimes crumbling tenements and trailers that had been vacated by Mexicans, sometimes dormitory-like facilities in whatever school auditorium or gymnasium or sequestered building could be adapted for such a purpose. At the moment it was luck of the draw.

Wingo was standing off to one side talking to Captain Christina Ekstrom, who had voluntarily assumed the duty of housing and transportation officer for the asylum seekers, when he felt a tug on his sleeve. He turned and found himself facing an elderly woman in a ragged dress and coat, with a seamed face and thinning white hair. At the old woman's side, holding her hand, was a little girl who appeared to be five or six, thin and blonde with watchful and suspicious blue eyes staring up at him. There was something disconcertingly familiar in the elfin little face, but Wingo couldn't quite place it. "Can I help you with something, ma'am?" he asked.

"I know you," said the old woman. "I saw you once on TV."

"Yes ma'am, I'm sure you did. I do a few toothpaste and barbecue sauce ads on the side," said Wingo.

"Don't be a smart-ass, young man!" snapped the old woman. "I want to ask you something important. When I saw you on TV, you were shooting up Flanders Street in Portland with a machine gun. You was with that Cat-Eyes Lockhart guy and somebody else, a girl named Kristin McGee. I'm May McGee, Kristin's mother. This is her daughter, Mary Ellen. Can you maybe tell me where Kristin is now?"

"Oh, Jesus!" said Jimmy softly to himself, his heart sinking and his knees going weak. "Yes, ma'am, I know who you are. Kicky told me about you both. She loved you both very much. I . . . I don't know how to say this, how to tell you this . . ." He waved his hands vaguely.

"She's dead?" asked May flatly.

"Yes, ma'am," said Wingo helplessly. "She was killed in action back in January."

"You're sure?"

"Yes, ma'am. I was there when it happened. I am truly sorry. Your daughter was a brave soldier, and a good comrade and friend. We all miss her."

"Well, I suppose I shouldn't be surprised," said the old woman with a sigh. "I never quite knew what to make of her after she—after she went with you lot. I suppose I can guess why she did it. I just always wondered if, well, if she was sure about it."

"Yes, ma'am, she was sure," Wingo told her.

"I think I knew in my heart I'd never see her again, one way or the other. Well, we got to get on a bus. That young lady says she's going to give us an apartment, maybe one we can keep if things work out." May turned to get back into the line for the transport.

"Wait a minute!" said Wingo. He pulled a notebook and a pen from his tunic pocket and quickly wrote down his name, and thrust the paper at her. "My name is Major James Wingo, First Battalion, Third Oregon Brigade, NDF. I want you to keep this, Mrs. McGee. Please. I don't know what is going to happen over the next few months. I might not make it myself. But I want to try and keep track of you and Mary Ellen as best I can through the BRR, and I want you to remember my name. I'll check back here later on and I'll try to find you, but if that doesn't work out for some reason, you try to find me. Now isn't the time and place to get into all this, since we don't know what's going to happen, but one way or another, if I'm still around I want to help you and your granddaughter. Any way I can, for Kicky's sake."

May looked at him steadily. "You know what she was? Before she came to you?"

"Yes, ma'am, I know. I also know what she was afterward, and that's all I care about. I owe her mother and her child everything I can give them. I mean that."

May stuck the paper in her pocket. "My guess is you don't know as much as you think, but Ellie and me have been living mighty rough these past few years, and we have to take it where we find it, so I might just take you up on that generous offer, Major."

* * *

The month of October dragged on, the days chill but clear, the leaves on the trees turning golden and layering the ground, the morning fog growing

denser. Around noon on October 22nd, the daily staff meeting of the Third Brigade command gathered around a long table in their conference room in the old Clatsop County courthouse, a converted courtroom. The walls were now papered with maps and shelves and filing cabinets, and a large Tricolor flag hung on a staff over the chair where once tyrants in black robes had sat when they sent white men and women into living hell. It was five years to the day since the morning that the U.S. Marshals had surrounded Gustav Singer's house in Coeur d'Alene to take away his children, because he and his wife told them "inappropriate" Norse myths and fairy tales at bedtime. But something on that morning had finally snapped, and America's gun thugs soon lay shot to pieces in their smashed body armor by Singer's neighbors. "Still no movement in the situation up at Longview?" asked Colonel Lennart Ekstrom.

"Well, there's activity of a sort," said his daughter Christina wryly, tossing over a copy of today's *USA Today.* The front page photograph, taken with a telephoto lens and rather fuzzy, showed two teenaged members of the NVA delegation to the peace conference out on a hotel balcony locked kissing in a passionate embrace. "I'd make some comment here about our tax dollars in action, if we were paying taxes."

"Hey, aren't you supposed to be wearing major's oak leaves now, Chris?" asked Zack Hatfield. "You're out of uniform."

"Ask the Quartermaster," she said, pointing to her father. "He doesn't have any."

"What's the latest intel on the Portland situation, sir?" asked Major Tony Campisi.

"I had a talk with Mr. Chips by coded wireless chat before I came over," reported Hatfield. "A code I hope the kikes can't break, because things may be about to blow. NDF General Barrow has informed the Army Council that the conference at Longview is about to come to a head one way or the other, probably with a walkout by our people because the Americans keep on stalling. The whole thing seems to have turned into a delaying tactic, although no one quite understands what they're delaying for. If an agreement is in fact reached, that Neanderthal jarhead Delmar Partman definitely intends to more or less mutiny against the Brat and the Sea Hag, and refuse to surrender the city to us."

"I never got the impression that buzz-cut ape had enough moxie or brains for that," said Captain Jerry Lundgaard.

"Somebody in D.C. is winding him up, we're sure," said Hatfield. "No good Marine would dare do such a thing as defy his commander-in-chief

unless he had the most powerful political backing he could get. My money's on that Jew rat Howard Weinbaum. He's acting as point for the irreconcilables on their side at the conference. Turns out he was behind that little project a few months ago of trying to set up evangelical death squads to wage guerilla war against the Republic, but SS General Carter Wingfield nipped that shit in the bud."

"How bad will it get if he does, do you think?" asked Christina.

Hatfield frowned. "Bad enough. Partman has almost two whole Marine divisions in the city, plus the FATPOs and assorted Unionist militia, police, and some Somalia-style gang-banger militia he's using as terror squads to keep what's left of the white population cowed. At least 35,000 men. The NDF's numbers are growing day by day as thousands of young white men and women step forward, some of them coming from all over the world. A lot of them have prior military service, but most of them are raw recruits, our basic training out at Camp Rilea is necessarily rushed, and we're still not up to par on our weapons and equipment. We've been trying to harass the enemy and cut off their supplies, but in a city the size of Portland there's all kinds of reserves of just about everything they can beg, borrow, or steal. Partman is going to launch an offensive with all he's got, most likely across the river against General Wingfield in Vancouver, but maybe down this way against us. Partman has the backing of a lot of powerful politicians in D.C., New York and Houston, the ones who never wanted this conference to take place at all. When he stages his mutiny they're going to wave the red, white and blue all over the media praising this patriotic Marine who is Semper Fi to the good ole U.S. of A., yadda yadda, you get the idea. They're going to threaten Chelsea with impeachment unless she backs off, renounces Longview, and resumes the war."

"Hell, her father and mother were both impeached, unsuccessfully, and it never seems to have bothered them," said Campisi.

"This time the impeachment move would be with the full backing of the whole pro-Zionist lobby, who backed the other Clintons back in the day," explained Hatfield. "Hillary's still running things, of course, but it could be that she's decided she doesn't like the odds and it's time to backtrack. The problem from our point of view is that we can just about assume that General Partman will launch an air attack on the two main bridges across the Columbia River, here in Astoria and the bridge at Longview. He's kept the Portland bridges up because he will need them for his own attack into Vancouver, but he's not a complete idiot. He knows he needs to stop the NDF from reinforcing each other either way across the river. He can't leave

those bridges up on his left flank. We figure that's how he'll make his mutiny announcement, by formally breaking the ceasefire and blasting down both bridges over the Columbia and maybe the bridges across Youngs Bay as well for good measure. And to be honest, guys, I don't see any way we can stop him. We've got nothing but pea-shooters, comparatively speaking."

"What has he got by way of air power?" asked Ekstrom.

"Latest report, two fully loaded B-52s and four F-16s at Portland Airport that Threesec feels are loyal to him and will obey his orders to devastate their fellow Americans, or former fellow Americans," said Hatfield. "Plus a number of Apache and Blackhawk gunships he could also use against the bridges. Fortunately, PDX isn't big enough to take many more military aircraft and still keep the civilian traffic flying, and he needs the runways for supply purposes. Those B-52s can level the bridges and the towns of Astoria and Longview as well from 30,000 feet, if he gives the order."

"Will we need to implement the evacuation plan, sir?" asked Lundgaard with concern.

"I'm sorry to say yes, I think we may have to, but I don't want to give the word until the last minute," said Hatfield. "Len, how are we coming on the bomb shelters?"

"We've got eight designated shelters fitted out around Astoria and Warrenton, mostly basements of public buildings," said Ekstrom. "I really don't know how they will hold up under a combined B-52 and F-16 strike."

"I saw those damned things at work in Iraq," said Hatfield with a scowl. "An Arc Light doesn't leave much behind. God damn Partman's buzz-cut soul to hell for even *thinking* about turning them loose on white people here! Crack in on the evacuation plans in case we all have to beat feet in a hurry."

"You won't have to worry about the B-52s, at any rate, General," spoke up a voice from the doorway. Hatfield looked up and saw Eric Sellars entering the room, wearing muddy and stained coveralls. He was followed by Annette Ridgeway, who surprisingly was dressed in full United States Army fatigues including boots, headgear, and second lieutenant's bars. Hatfield stared at her.

"Comrade Becky, may I ask how the hell you got in here wearing that get-up without being shot?" he demanded.

"Oscar brought us in, sir," she replied, saluting him. "I'm afraid I didn't have time to change. I used this ensemble to get into the secure area in Portland airport. Tom's right about the B-52s. They're gone."

"Burning rubble on the tarmac," confirmed Eric with a grin. "The Red Baron racked up two more Allied aircraft last night. Blowed up *real* good!" There were cheers and applause around the room.

"The F-16s and the copters?" asked Hatfield keenly.

"They were moved to another part of the field," said Eric, shaking his head. "They're still operational. Just afterward we learned our safe house had been compromised and Oscar decided to do a long E & E out here. He has something he wants to talk to you about and he didn't trust our communications."

Suddenly Colonel Wayne Hill, dressed in an incongruous sports jacket and tie, ran into the room. *"Turn on the TV!"* he shouted. "Now! There's something happening in Longview!"

Hatfield snapped the television set on. The picture came on to a large crowd scene in front of a building on extensive landscaped grounds, the Lewis and Clark Hotel in Longview. There was no sound, and Hatfield fiddled with the remote, thinking it was on mute, but then he realized that the silence was due to the fact that the entire crowd of at least ten thousand people standing around the hotel, spilling over onto the golf course, into the parking lot, and along the highway, was in fact dead quiet. The cameras were focused on the flagpole in front of the hotel, and the people in the conference room watched in growing shock and dawning joy as the Stars and Stripes was slowly lowered from the mast and folded by two men. "That's General Frank Barrow, the head of our delegation, and General Brubaker from the U.S. Air Force. He's the top American military rep at the conference," said Hill in a low voice. Barrow handed the American flag to Brubaker, who clutched it to his chest, overcome with emotion. Then a woman stepped forward with a blue, white and green bundle in her hand. Her face even at this distance was seen to be scarred and peeled, the mark of long years of torture and abuse at the hands of the FBI and FATPO because of her refusal to betray her own husband. She was a legendary figure in the NVA. "That's Cathy Frost," said Hill. "I'd heard they brought her in up there to stir things up." The woman hooked the Tricolor to the lanyard and slowly raised the flag of the Northwest Republic over the land. Not for the first time; the Tricolor had been flying in many parts of the Homeland for several months, since President Chelsea Clinton's speech. From hidden speakers somewhere in the hotel there crashed forth the mighty orchestra and chorus of what sounded like a hymn.

"What is that?" whispered Christina in wonder. "I know that song."

"You remember it from long ago in church, honey," said her father, his hand on her shoulder. "It is *A Mighty Fortress*, a hymn written by Martin Luther."

"*Ein Festem Burg Ist Unser Gött.* They are singing in German," said Sergeant Karl Vogler, Hatfield's driver. Tears were streaming down his face.

"So they are," said Hill somberly. "1945 is avenged, *korpsbrüder*."

"A century of tyranny, oppression, and murder is avenged," said Hatfield. Annette and Eric hugged one another, their eyes glued to the scene on the television. For a long moment they all simply stared at the screen, unable to take it all in, a long moment that stunned the entire world. But it lasted only for a short while for Third Brigade. Immediately the cell phones of almost every officer in the room started bleeping, and Hatfield snapped off the TV. "Comrades, on the day that General Order Number Ten is lifted, whenever that may be, I want you all to join me for a champagne toast to our new independent nation, followed by a rip-roaring blast of the best Northwest micro-brew we can scrounge up. Until then we have work to do."

"The first thing you need to do is clean out that Coast Guard station in Warrenton," said Hill soberly. "That's what I wanted to talk to you about, Zack. We know there's been a series of top-secret coded communications between the headquarters in Portland and the station across the water there. I don't know what they're saying to one another, but it can't be good. You know that buzz-cut birdbrain Delmar Partman will be sending his remaining aircraft to destroy the two Highway 101 bridges here. You can't have a nest of enemy military in your back yard anymore, Zack, to act as spotters or disrupt our military and civil defense during an attack. You need to move on that place now."

"F-16s are mainly fighters as I recall," said Zack. "They can be rigged with bombs, but mostly they rely on missiles and chain guns. They'll have to get in a bit lower than the B-52s would have, and their bomb loads won't be as potent, but they can still get the job done, and we don't even have any radar to let us know when they're coming."

"Should we close off the bridges to traffic now?" asked Len Ekstrom. "If they get hit with cars still going across them, civilian casualties will be bad."

Hatfield shook his head. "Not yet. Those bridges are crucial to the normal supply and functioning of this whole part of Oregon, never mind the Washington side as well. I want to keep them open as long as possible, not to mention avoid getting the Columbia estuary blocked to shipping with rubble and bomb debris. Oscar, is there *any* way we can get any kind of warning as to when the aerial assault is coming?"

"We've got people watching PDX and they'll call us the minute they see any of the Marine F-16s or helicopters take off," said Hill. "That might give you a few minutes' warning. It's about ninety miles from PDX to here, which is just a short hop for an F-16. Longview is closer so they will most likely be

hit first. Don't be too downbeat, though. There's still a chance we can find some way to get through the airport perimeter, and destroy the warplanes on the ground. I just hope Partman doesn't get any support from other Air Force units around the country who might send him more aircraft."

"We're willing to go back and take another stab at it, sir," said Eric.

"We don't know how much time we've got," said Hatfield. "We need to get hold of that Coast Guard installation now. I've developed something of a rapport with Ratcliff over the past few months, but he's still an enemy commander and he might decide to try some bad acts during an air raid. I sure wish we still had Don Hacker up here to talk to him. You know, that officer who swam ashore at Sunset Beach, and Sherry's kids picked him up? But he's up in Seattle now trying to sort out our new Navy."

Hatfield pulled out his cell phone and dialed. After a while he spoke. "Commander Ratcliff? General Hatfield here. I'm sure you can guess why I'm calling. You saw what happened at Longview?" He listened to Ratcliff for a bit. "I can understand your feelings, sir. I'm not sure which of us is more surprised, but it looks like the deed is done. That leaves us with a problem. I have it on good authority that U.S. Marine General Partman in Portland intends to mutiny and to launch his own private little war, to be kicked off with an air attack on Astoria and Longview to destroy the bridges across the Columbia River, and possibly with a ground attack as well against this part of the Republic. Things here are about to get a lot more complicated, and I'm afraid I must insist on immediately assuming command of your installation rather than waiting on whatever formal arrangements are being worked out. I will be at your front gate in an hour's time, under a flag of truce. Please speak with me before you do anything rash, but I need to tell you up front that this time, I'm going to have more than my driver with me. I hope you will surrender and spare our new nation a shedding of blood on this great day, but if you resist then it is my duty to proceed against you. See you in a bit."

"Should you have warned him you were coming?" asked Len Ekstrom.

"I may be wrong, but I get the impression Ratcliff has his own private reservations about the society and the government he's been serving all his life," said Hatfield. "I want to give him a chance to make the right decision, and save him as much face as I can if he decides to take the bloodless way out. Hopefully he'll just use that hour to skedaddle. If not, I'll try to talk him out. Tony, scramble First Battalion and any of Second you can find, and let's get over there. All the mortars and as many .50-calibers as you can find, and the EOD guys with their whizz-bangs. Oh, and bring our secret weapon."

"What secret weapon?" asked Hill.

The secret weapon turned out to be the old seven-pounder fieldpiece from World War One, which had once decorated the front of the courthouse in corroded glory. The old cannon had been commandeered, cleaned of rust and verdigris, sanded and polished and repainted a convincing gunmetal gray. A blue, white and green roundel had been painted on the battered armor shield plate in front of the breech. "You're not really going to try to fire this thing, are you?" said Hill, looking over the relic. "Do you even have any shells for it? Zack, there are cracks in the barrel, for God's sake! It's over a hundred years old! It would blow up in your gunners' faces!"

"Ratcliff and his people don't know that," said Hatfield. "We unfroze and rebuilt the breech block so we can open and close the breech nice and flashy, and we've got some guys who worked out a routine of loading dummy shells Len made up in his basement. Ever hear of Quaker guns? Same principle. It might concentrate Ratcliff's mind if he thinks we've got an artillery piece."

"How many real rockets and mortars have you got?" asked Hill as they rolled in convoy across Youngs Bay on one of the threatened bridges, a convoy of troop trucks strung out behind them. Hatfield looked skyward, hoping that none of Partman's Marine attack helicopters or jets chose this moment to show up.

"Four mortars that I'm using for this attack, if it turns out to be an attack," he said. "Plus the EOD people have built some Stalin's Organs they want to try out, racks of 16 solid-fuel rockets mounted on flatbed trucks. The rocket fuselages are made of PVC pipe, of all things, and the fins are plastic, but each one carries a 100-pound warhead of assorted HE and shrapnel, and the racks are reloadable. They've been test-fired out on our little proving range, and by now the crews can more or less hit the broad side of a barn with them, drop a pattern over about a 200 square yard area up to two miles away. I don't want to use them in a populated area like Warrenton unless I have to. We have a plan worked out in case we have to assault the base, in battalion strength. Mortar and automatic weapons fire to keep them pinned down inside while we use good old-fashioned scaling ladders to get over this one section of the fence we've spotted that looks vulnerable. Failing that, we've got a plan B involving ramming a truck bomb through the main gate and blowing it, but I really don't want to fight the Coast Guard. They're not combat troops, they're life-savers and medics and genuine good guys, most of 'em. I'm hoping Ratcliff will see reason."

By the time Hatfield pulled up in front of the main gatehouse, Ratcliff had seen more than that through his binoculars. From his watch tower he had seen hundreds of NDF soldiers, some in their new tiger-striped camouflage

fatigues, some still in civilian clothes, moving through the surrounding streets and clearing the inhabitants out of houses that were in the line of fire. He had seen the Stalin's Organs being set up and brought to elevation, hundreds of yards away to the east and north of his base. He had seen the 81-millimeter mortars being lugged in between houses and behind fences on his perimeter. He knew he was surrounded and outnumbered by a force that included many combat veterans from the insurrection and also from America's imperial wars in the Middle East, including some of the men and women who had decimated his own service and sank a Coast Guard warship at Sunset Beach. While his men had the edge in formal training, and they were holding fortified positions, the attackers would have the advantage in numbers and on this day, having seen their new nation born before their eyes, their morale would be stratospheric. Finally, he saw an antique cannon pulled behind a Toyota Tundra being unlimbered and set up in the road 150 yards in front of the base, the muzzle leveled dead center at his front gate. The crew opened the breech and rammed a shell into it.

Zack Hatfield rode up to within about thirty yards of the gate in his War Wagon, followed by a Jeep Cherokee. "Who's that?" he demanded of Oscar, pointing at the Jeep. Two women and a man, all in NDF tiger-stripe fatigues got out of the Cherokee. The man began setting up a tripod and a camera. "What the hell?" said Zack. He walked up to them. *"Julia?"*

"Hi, honey," she said, giving him a quick kiss on the cheek.

"Need I ask the obvious?" demanded Zack.

"My first assignment on my new job with the Northwest Broadcasting Authority," said Julia. "Historical documentation of the events surrounding the transition from American Empire to Northwest Republic. This is Erica Collingwood, by the way."

"Hello, General Hatfield," said Erica demurely. "Julia's told me a lot about you."

"I can imagine. Welcome Home, comrade," said Hatfield. "I'm sorry, ma'am, I didn't recognize you not covered in blood or cockroaches. I always thought *The Boogeyman Does Boston* was a classic."

"You would. She'll be doing the narration and voiceover," Julia told him. "I always wanted to be an independent producer, but I never thought I'd be doing my first documentary film with Erica."

"Comrade Collingwood, I assume you acquired a taste for being shot at on Oscar night. But what's your excuse, other than the obvious one that you've lost your mind?" he asked Julia. "You know this could turn into a firefight at any moment?"

"Yes, I know, but whatever happens, we're here to record it for posterity," said Julia. "Plus get some more of those hunky shots of you waving your Winchester in the air." She fumbled around in her field jacket pocket. "I have an authorization and clearance from the Army Council to accompany the NDF on operations, subject to blah blah blah," she said, pulling out a sheet of paper.

"Never mind, I wouldn't know what such a document looks like anyway," said Hatfield. Behind him Hill cleared his throat and gestured toward the main gate of the Coast Guard station, which was now standing open, and Commander Anthony Ratcliff was standing outside waiting for him. "Oh, shit! Let me go see if I can talk this guy out of a bloodbath. Try not to get shot, both of you." He turned and walked to the gate to confront the base commander.

"Is that Erica Collingwood?" was the first thing Ratcliff asked him, his hand over his eyes and peering at the camera crew.

"Yes," said Hatfield. "The taller one is the woman I'm going to marry if things work out, so you can see I'm kind of motivated to find some way to convince you to let me in there without all kinds of shooting and explosions."

"Does that thing work?" was Ratcliff's second question, pointing at the cannon. "Wait a minute, I know that piece! You stole it off the courthouse lawn! No way that hunk of junk is going to fire after a hundred years!"

"We had to re-bore the barrel, make a new breech block, and add all kinds of rubber fittings and whatnot to the carriage so it would roll, not to mention manufacture several hundred of our own shells, some which I have to admit are of indifferent quality. But they made good weapons in those days. Some of our snipers are still using Mausers and Enfields from World War One, not to mention Two, in perfect firing condition because they've been kept up. That gun works fine on the range, and it will blow your gate and your interior structures to shredded wheat," lied Zack briskly. "Not to mention the mortars and our guys who will play you a tune on Uncle Joe's ukulele, and if those don't persuade you, we've got enough just plain dynamite we can throw over the wall. I can get proper artillery and even some tanks from Salem or Vancouver if I want, but I'm not going to divert crucial equipment for a pointless sideshow like this. There's not going to be any siege here. We've got too much more important stuff to do to waste the time and effort and blood. You've got over two miles of perimeter to defend and you don't have the manpower to do it. You know damned well we're coming in today, Ratcliff. The only question is how many people will be lying here dead when

the sun goes down tonight? Look, Ratcliff, you seem to be a decent guy, a guy I wouldn't mind having a few beers with someday when they revoke General Order Number Ten. But if you kill a single one of my wonderful kids out there because of some stupid mixed-up idea of loyalty to this filthy evil empire that has turned this whole planet into a slaughterhouse and a cesspit, then you're going to piss me off, bad, and when we get in there my mood is not going to be sweet. Well?"

Ratcliff sighed. "I called a formation after that—that ghastly spectacle at Longview. I talked to my people. To my horror but not to my surprise, some of them want to stay here and join you. Probably more of us would stay if our families weren't elsewhere in the country."

"And vulnerable to American retaliation," said Hatfield. "May I ask where your own wife and children are?"

"With my wife's parents in Amherst, Massachusetts. Once things started getting bad here, you will pardon me if I didn't trust their safety to your Aryan chivalry. You seem to be a fairly decent guy yourself, Hatfield, but you've got maniacs like O.C. Oglevy and that crazy hillbilly John Corbett Morgan riding with you as well. I couldn't take that risk."

"I understand."

"Anyway, fact is, I really don't have squat to resist you with. I think as much of my people as you do of yours, and I won't murder them in a cause that I have just this morning learned is lost. Can we do this without any humiliating surrender ceremonies, Hatfield? We keep our colors, officers keep their sidearm, so forth and so on?"

"If you've got a band you can march out while they play," said Hatfield. "Do you have enough vehicles to transport your men? If so then we'll give them an escort to Portland as far as the first American outposts on Highway 30."

"I'd prefer to cut over to Salem and head down to California on the interstate," said Ratcliff. "I would rather not meet up with General Partman right at the moment."

"I can imagine," said Hatfield sympathetically. "My intelligence guy in the suit over there says you and he have been doing a lot of cyber-yakking. Don't suppose you'd care to tell me what all that was about? A little hint?"

Ratcliff looked up into the sky. "This is a beautiful place, Hatfield. Good people. I envy you, being born here, growing up here."

"It had its moments," agreed Hatfield. He nodded back to where Julia and Erica were watching as the cameraman filmed. "She was one of them."

Ratcliff looked at him. "You know Partman is planning on attacking the towns here as well, Astoria and Warrenton? Not just the bridges? B-52s,

F-16s, and Apaches? He's planning to punish the people here for their wicked racism."

"Yes, I know. Enraged tyrants always punish those who refuse to bend the knee," replied Hatfield. "You don't have to worry about the B-52s, though. Some of our extraordinary young people took care of them last night. They're toast on the runway up there now. What did Partman want you to do?"

Ratcliff appeared to make a decision. "He wanted me to make sure some items we had here were DX'd and rendered completely unserviceable. He was very anxious they shouldn't fall into your hands."

"And did you?"

"I couldn't seem to find them," said Ratcliff. "I think I was about to check the hard store in Hangar 19." He pulled a ring of keys out of his pocket. "Since you're relieving me of my command, perhaps you can also relieve me of that responsibility."

Two hours later, after the last of the Coast Guardsmen had evacuated the station and were on their way south under escort, one of the chief petty officers who had elected to stay on showed Zack, Hill, and Len Ekstrom what was in Hangar 19. It was a small storeroom stacked high with long OD green plastic crates. "The big brass was always paranoid about suicide attacks from airplanes ever since 9/11," the sailor explained. "They were always scared you guys were going to hijack an airliner and ram it into the big bridge or the station here or some stupid crap like that. They got so paranoid they sent us all these babies."

"Good God!" exclaimed Len Ekstrom "Stinger missiles!"

"No wonder Partman wanted them destroyed!" said Hill excitedly. "There must be at least 50 of them in here!"

"Oscar, contact the Army Council. Put out the word all through the NDF," said Hatfield. "Make it fast, but above all make it top secret. This is a priority. We are going to need every Volunteer with military experience who has ever fired, or handled, or who knows anything at all about Stingers."

"I do, sir," said the CPO. "Me and at least four of the guys who stayed. If you're short on vets who've used these weapons, we can work up a quick training course for the new crews."

"It will have to be a real quick course. Chief, you know Partman's coming with his F-16s and copters?" said Hatfield keenly. "This morning you were a member of the United States military. Technically you still are. The men flying those machines will be as well. Are you willing to fire on them in order to protect the people of this community and the future of this new country?"

"I'm from up in Anacortes, Washington, sir," said the Coast Guardsman. "That makes this my country."

"No, comrade," said Hatfield, shaking his head. "You are a white man, and *that* is what makes this your country."

* * *

Hatfield's fabled luck held. Thanks to multifarious political mumbling and maneuvering, it wasn't until the morning of October 27th that Partman launched his aerial assault on the Columbia River bridges, two F-16s loaded with bombs and missiles and four Apache gunships apiece against Astoria and Longview. The Stingers had been equally distributed between the two targets, and as the jets swooped in the hand-held missiles were fired almost like an old-fashioned volley of musketry. Even though the crews were half composed of new and inexperienced Volunteers, the effect was devastating. Of the Longview attack force, only two Apaches made it back to Portland. One of the F-16s crashed into the town and killed several people on the ground, and before it went down in a flaming spiral the second was able to get one missile hit on the bridge which blew a gaping hole in the tarmac and girders that was temporarily but effectively repaired within 24 hours. The Astoria attack force was completely wiped out, both F-16s disintegrating in mid-air and raining fire and molten metal into the Columbia River, causing geysers of steam to explode into the air. Two of the Astoria Apaches were blown to pieces by the Stingers, and one was shot down by machine gun fire. The fourth helicopter was forced down on the River Walk, where its Mexican pilot and black co-pilot were chased down by a mob of irate citizens who didn't appreciate being treated like Iraqi villagers, beaten to death with whatever came to hand, and then dragged down ironically re-named Lockhart Boulevard on ropes behind two pickup trucks.

On October 30th the Nationalist General Robert DiBella crossed the newly repaired Longview bridge from Washington to the Oregon side, bringing with him 14,000 NDF troops including 2,000 members of the crack new Special Service or SS, one unit of which called itself the Jesse Lockhart Brigade. He joined forces in Clatskanie with General Zack Hatfield, commanding around 8,000 more men, and together they began a careful enveloping movement eastward toward Portland, not just over the main highways which were vulnerable to air attack, but down logging roads and rural routes, guided by local men provided by Hatfield's Third Brigade. At the same time General Robert Gair, newly arrived from the Longview peace conference, moved in on Portland from Salem in the south with about 16,000 men. Across the river in Vancouver, Washington, SS General Carter Wingfield had massed 45,000

NDF troops including Panzer units of captured or surrendered American tanks, as well as a formidable artillery train courtesy of defecting U.S Army troops from Fort Lewis.

On Halloween night Zack and Julia stood on the south bank of the Columbia, a few miles up from the City of Roses. The night was cold but clear, and there was thunder and lightning up the river. "Those sound like cannons! That son of a bitch Partman!" swore Julia, hugging Zack for warmth. "He's shelling Vancouver!"

Zack studied the low flashing lights in the distance. "No, Julie," he said. "I'm pretty sure those flashes are coming from the north side of the river. Those are Carter Wingfield's boys. Those are our guns. The guns of white men who mean to be free."

The assault on Portland had begun.

XXX

Names On The Wall

"Here was a royal fellowship of death . . ."

King Henry V.—Act Four, Scene 8

It was October 22nd. Wayne Hill could see through his office window that the autumn afternoon outside was bright, golden and crisp, a perfect Northwest Independence Day.

It was now fifteen years since the bloody morning in Coeur d'Alene, when outraged white men had finally arisen in arms to strike at the bloody claw of Zion that sought the lives of their children. It had been ten years since the Tricolor had gone up over the Longview conference, and the Northwest Republic had proclaimed its independence. Hill still couldn't quite grasp in his own mind the fantastic changes that had taken place in the Homeland since the Revolution. Wherever he went now, he looked out over a clean, peaceful and prosperous world that had overcome every obstacle to establish a society that was stable, just, compassionate, safe, and fearless, a nation strong with faith in the destiny of this land and her people. Despite the sanctions and shortages of the early years, despite the monotonous threats of war and invasion from the rest of the world, despite the constant bombardment of screaming hatred from the media and the politicians from what remained of the world's Judaic liberal democracies, despite all the problems, every year white people Came Home to the Northwest by the hundreds of thousands. They ran the barbed wire and the minefields from Aztlan, Canada, and the United States. They dodged the helicopters and the shoot-to-kill patrols. They snuck in via the cargo

holds of blockade-running ships and planes. They used every conceivable subterfuge somehow to bring themselves and their families to this land where their present and their future had been won and secured by the sword, and where they were willing to die if need be to live among their own, and only among their own.

The oak-paneled office where Wayne Hill now sat at a desk of polished Northwest oak, a fire crackling in an open hearth, was in the city of Olympia, just across the street from the legislative building that housed Parliament, a structure which with delicious irony had been modeled after the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. It was there that the first National Convention had met in the days after Longview. Hill himself was now the Director of the Bureau of State Security, or BOSS as it was known. Mostly he and his men wore civilian clothes on duty. But on this Independence Day he was wearing the BOSS formal uniform that inspired both dread and respect within the Homeland and around the world, the simple boots and tunic and cap of an NDF private without a single insignia, badge of rank, or decoration except for the War of Independence medal that all veterans of that heroic time wore. Hill and his department were largely responsible for the prosperity, the stability, and the safety that the people of the N.A.R. now enjoyed. The Americans and world Jewry had spent the last ten years plotting against the life of the infant nation. It was like living in a fine house with a den of cobras nesting in the basement, but every time the Judaic serpent had reared to strike, Hill and his BOSS agents, and a hundred other strong white arms from every service and every walk of life crushed the reptile's head. Until the next time.

"Remember," Hill always told his new agents, "The Jews are still immensely richer than us, their slaves are more numerous than we are, their resources more vast than ours, and they are still far more powerful than we are. They can afford mistakes. We can't. ZOG only has to win once. We have to win every time."

There was a knock on Hill's door. "Come in," he said. The door opened and Special Service General William Jackson walked in, wearing full black dress uniform with silver piping, Swastika armband, peaked cap and dagger. He had a paper file folder under his arm. "Hey, Billy. I see you're all dolled up for your speech," said Hill.

"Yeah, I have to go in a few minutes," said Jackson. "NBA is broadcasting it on the Government Channel."

"And what's your competition?" asked Hill with a smile. "A 1950s Western on Channel Four and cartoons on the Children's Channel?"

"Actually, Channel Four is showing *Braveheart*, like they always do on Independence Day, and some of these new cartoons are actually pretty good," said Jackson. "You've seen Kappy the Kike?"

"Yeah, I've seen that one. It's cute," agreed Hill. "You know it's a straight rip-off of the old Road Runner cartoons? Kappy is constantly trying to steal somebody's money or gold or jewels, and he's always getting blown up, or impaled, or fed to alligators, or pushed off cliffs and otherwise mangled by Deputy Dawg and his animal friends. The little kids love it. Our satellites and internet stations are broadcasting it the world over, and every week somebody in the U.S. Congress screams bloody murder."

"Look, there's something I wanted to see you about," said Jackson seriously. "I was going to put it off until after the holiday but, well, I kind of wanted to just get it over with. This is a great day, ten years on since Longview, and I didn't want to have to think about this while I'm speechifying about how great a day it is."

"That sounds pretty grim," said Hill with a frown. "What is it?"

Jackson took a deep breath. "You remember back all those years ago when you were Threesec's man in Portland, around the second year or so of the war, when you vowed and swore on a stack of Mein Kampfs that there was a spy somewhere in First Brigade? And we all thought you were full of sheep dip?"

"I still maintain I was right. The pattern was there," said Hill.

"Well, actually, it turns out you *were* right," said Jackson with a embarrassed sigh. "As you may recall, when we finally got hold of Portland we went through what was left of the records of the various secret police agencies operating in the city, almost all of which were on computer drives. We didn't find too much. They had ample time to destroy or remove most of it, plus a lot of their drives and backups got busted up in the shelling and shooting, so forth and so on. As a matter of routine we also confiscated and inventoried the contents of all the private safe deposit boxes in the Portland banks. All of this was pretty rushed, since we had 50-eleven different other things we had to do, we didn't know if the enemy was going to counter-attack . . . hell, you remember how it was."

"I remember," nodded Hill.

"One of the safe deposit boxes we glommed was rented by one Elena Martinez, a detective lieutenant in the old Portland Police Bureau. You remember a spook and spic team in the Hatecrimes unit called the Mami and the Monkey?"

"Oh, yes," said Hill.

"Well, for whatever reason, probably blackmail or ass-covering of some kind, the Martinez woman seems to have run off a hard copy of a whole snitch file on the police printer, according to the tag line and date on the pages here, then absconded with the file and stashed it in a safe deposit box," said Jackson. "After things settled down, the Party eventually got around to assigning clerical teams to go over the mass of documents captured during the War of Independence, including the contents of all the Portland safe deposit boxes we'd appropriated. But as you know, we were always terribly short-handed, there was always higher priority stuff to do, and somehow, I have no clue how, this one folder kept finding its way to the bottom of the pile, and then getting lost, or misfiled, or God knows what."

"For *ten years*?" asked Hill incredulously.

"For ten years. I guess bureaucracy is one Zionist curse we still haven't fully eliminated yet. Maybe it was looked over by some little girl from the Labor Service with her mind on her boyfriend, or some guy thinking about what was for lunch or something, or it just didn't register and whoever it was simply didn't realize what they were holding in their hands. Whatever the story is, two days ago one of the permanent staff cleaning out the last of the backlog finally opened this file and *read* the damned thing, understood its historical relevance, and since I was the most senior Party member in the building at the time she brought it right upstairs to my attention, which I'm glad she did. At least that way I was able to keep it out of regular channels for a bit, until you decide how you want to handle it." Jackson sighed again.

"How bad is it?" asked Hill gently.

"Pretty bad. I always liked her and admired her. Thank God she's dead."

"Who is it, Bill? Who was it, I should say?"

Jackson threw the file down on Hill's desk. "Kicky McGee," he said, almost weeping. "*Kicky fucking McGee!*"

"Damn!" cursed Hill softly. "You can write me down an ass on this one, Bill, as Constable Dogberry would say. I never suspected her once. Hell, I was the one who approved bringing her in, after she mysteriously showed up at an important meeting one night instead of the contact who should have been there, who subsequently turned out to be conveniently dead at the hands of the cops. God, what was I thinking? My brain must have been swinging through the trees that night! Did she rat out the crew and set up the ambush on Flanders Street when we went after the Vice President?"

"That's not clear from the file," said Jackson. "It stops abruptly after that event. No further comments, nothing to indicate any further contact, zip."

"But hold on, this doesn't make sense!" said Hill. "You remember that Kicky McGee was on Task Force Director's Cut? She went on the team with me and Charlie Randall and Cat Lockhart down to Hollywood, in fact she was one of the triggers in the Kodak Theater on Oscar night, and she was with us all through Operation We Are Not Amused. If she was an informer, why the hell didn't she blow the whistle on that operation, take all of us out, and save Hollywood for the Kosher Nostra? She knew about Erica Collingwood, for Christ's sake, but Erica wasn't burned for months afterward, until that kike Shulman got onto her tail. If she was ratting us out there's no way the feds wouldn't have gotten most or all of us!"

"You know what I think, Oscar?" Jackson had unconsciously lapsed back into the old NVA lingo. "I think they must have pressured her into doing it, but it looks like she broke with them. You know the Wingos adopted her daughter after the war? The little girl was on the run with her grandmother for a long time before that, and I remember Kicky talking about the child sometimes, but now that I think about it, she always kind of avoided the subject if she could. There may have been a coercion situation there. The file does stop after Flanders Street."

"Can we talk to the grandmother?" asked Hill.

"She died last year. Look, Oscar, you know I would be the last to defend a traitor and an informer, and according to that file she was responsible for some bad damage and some Volunteer deaths. That's unforgivable. But I was this woman's commanding officer, and I feel obligated to point out that at the same time she was doing good service for the Army and that she died heroically in the line of duty, taking a couple of particularly nasty enemy agents with her."

"The same ZOG operatives who were running her as an informant, according to this," said Hill, riffling through the file.

"Yeah," agreed Jackson. "God knows how that came about."

"I was there, remember?" Hill reminded him. "We always figured the Mami or the Monkey grabbed her briefcase from her once they pulled her into the car and tried to open it, but maybe Kicky knew the jig was up and she blew that bomb herself as an act of atonement or apology. We'll never know."

"If that's a possibility, then she deserves the benefit of the doubt," urged Jackson. "We can't know what happened that day, but I do know it will damn near kill Jimmy and Lavonne Wingo if this comes out, as well as saddle the daughter with a burden of guilt she doesn't deserve. There's one other thing you need to know, Oscar. The Portland cops opened one of those secret snitch

accounts for her when she first started informing, paid her electronically every week from a police slush fund, and toward the end she was racking up a pretty impressive buck. I checked with the National Credit Union, who took over all the old American banking assets including the old Bank of America accounts, and the account is still there. It's not drawing interest because that's illegal now, but the principal is still there, and the NCU's records show that the account was never drawn on from the time the account was started. Kicky never touched a penny of that money. Not once. That must mean something."

"So, you're saying . . . ?" prompted Hill.

"That file was lost for ten years, Wayne. I can't see any reason why it shouldn't get lost again. Permanently You can talk about truth being our duty to history and all that, but how can it be right and just to open an old wound that nobody even knew was there, and dig up the dead when it will do nothing but cause pain to the living? Her name is on the wall down on the green a few hundred yards from here. Is it really our duty to go down there and scratch it off? Today of all days?"

"Bet that'll be a hell of a speech you make tonight," said Hill mildly. He closed the file. "Leave this with me, Bill. I'll look it over to see if there is anything in here that might even remotely impact anything going on today, or which requires that I or my organization take any action. I doubt it, since everyone concerned seems to be dead. If not, then I think I've got a Memory Hole stashed around here somewhere. Oh, and I think we can arrange to discover that bank account in some innocuous way and make sure the daughter gets the money. She deserves it, since one way or another, the poisonous and evil régime that paid it killed her mother and her father both, and destroyed her childhood. Go on and tell the folks who are waiting for you what a great day this is, Bill. Don't worry, you'll be telling the truth."

"Thank you, sir," said Jackson.

"How's Christina and the kids?"

"Fine, as always. Come over for dinner sometime soon. We'll talk about the old days."

"The good old days," agreed Hill.

After Jackson left the office, Hill picked up the file in his hand and walked over to the hearth, where the logs had burned down low. He stirred them up with a poker. He carefully read each page, then he crumpled it and tossed it into the fireplace, where each ball of paper caught and flared and burned into ash. The last papers to go before the folder itself were Kicky's old mug shots from her days as a drug-addicted prostitute under the old order and

the old world, now long past. They burst into bright flame and curled and folded into glowing ash.

"Rest in peace, comrade," said Hill into the silent room around him.

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Down on the wide green swath of the Capitol Mall, a number of veterans from the newly formed NVA Old Fighters Association had gathered for the Independence Day holiday. The Memorial Wall stood before them in massive black basalt, bearing the inscribed names of all the NVA and NDF personnel who had given their lives during the War of Independence. It had only been unveiled a few months before. A large Tricolor flag of blue, white, and green flew over it, on a stone pillar bearing the seal of the Northwest Volunteer Army. Along the base of the monument, chiseled into the finest Italian marble, were the words: *"Beloved kinsmen, from the world of darkness into which we were born, from the time of struggle in which we laid down our lives that you and your children may walk in the light, we greet you."*

Many people were taking sheets of white paper and stubby soft lead pencils from a small kiosk off to one side of the monument. They mounted the steps and walked along the long row of alphabetically listed names, finding and tracing onto the paper in graphite the names of former comrades. Many of them were quietly weeping, men and women alike. In front of the monument dozens of children were running around on the grass, playing and screaming and hollering, mostly oblivious to the solemn adults around them. No one tried to hush them or shoo them off. It was for them that the people on the monument had died, after all.

A small girl about four years of age marched up to her mother on the grass and tugged on her hand. "What is it now, honey?" asked Annette Sellars.

The child looked up and announced in a solemn voice, "Jesse Hatfield ate a bug. Janet told him to. Jimmy Wingo jumped off that man," she added, pointing to a nearby statue. "Janet told him to."

"Jimmy Junior, stop climbing on that statue!" yelled Lavonne Wingo at her son. "It's got nasty stuff from pigeons on it!"

Eric Sellars picked up his little girl. "We need to get you out of this tattletale phase you're in, young lady," he said sternly to her, beeping her nose. "Nobody likes a rat."

"Why?" asked the little girl.

"Because rats have long horrible gray noses and nasty-ass whiskers," her father explained. "Do you want to walk around with a long horrible gray nose and nasty-ass whiskers?"

The little girl thought for a bit, then shook her head. "No!" she said decisively.

"I didn't think you did."

Annette Sellars looked over at her oldest daughter Janet, named after her younger sister who had died. She was an angelic blonde creature, with a ribbon in her hair, standing primly aloof while a number of boys cavorted and wrestled each other to the ground around her, trying to get her attention. Annette shook her head in exasperation. "Honestly, what are we going to do with that child? She's only eight years old, and already she seems to be making a career out of manipulating boys to do all kinds of dumb things."

"Hmm. I wonder where she gets that from?" said Eric with a sidelong look at his wife.

"I think Jesse would try to catch a moose and ride it if Janet asked him to," said Julia Hatfield. "She does have such a lovely smile, though."

"Can we go see the puppies and go on the swings now, Daddy?" asked the little girl in Eric's arms.

"There's a playground and a small petting zoo at the hotel, and her mind's been on it all day," Annette explained to Lavonne Wingo and Julia Hatfield.

"We brought them here to try and teach them about their heritage, but I'm afraid at their age the Revolution can't compete with a litter of collie pups," said Eric with a sigh.

"They're kids," said Zack Hatfield. "They'll learn in time. Right now they can just enjoy being children, thanks to what we did back then. That's something we never had. One more victory we've ripped away from the kikes."

Jimmy Wingo senior was standing off to one side, dressed in a neat suit and tie. A slender and pretty teenaged girl in a blue skirt, white blouse, and sweater stood beside him. Wingo beckoned to his wife, and she came over to them. "You know why we brought you here today, Ellie?" her stepfather asked gently.

"I know," she said.

"You all right with it?" asked Wingo.

"Sure," said the girl with a smile. "Don't worry, it's not some big revelation. You guys never hid anything from me. I always knew I was adopted, and my father died in Iraq, and my mom was killed during the war here."

They walked up onto the platform in front of the monument wall, and they strolled down the list of names, every now and then stopping to hold one of the pieces of paper against the wall and etch in a familiar

name from the past. Finally they found the name they were looking for. *McGee, Vol. Kristin A.* it said, and then the date in January when she died. Mary Ellen quietly took the paper and pencil, held it up against the wall and etched her mother's name onto it, then folded it up and put it in her pocket book.

"You've never asked about her much before, honey," said Wingo. "Do you remember anything at all? You were very young."

"About my mother, no," said Mary Ellen, shaking her head. "I remember living in a lot of places with Grandma, and I remember coming to realize that there were bad men after us and that was why we always had to hide. But not my mother so much. I was really young the last time we saw each other. Grandma never talked about her much. I know Kristin was . . . well, she had a pretty hard time. That's probably why she joined the Revolution. Grandma never talked much about those times, the times before, but I know enough from history class at school so I think I can guess some of it. I don't think Grandma blamed Kristin or hated her. I think it just hurt so much she didn't want to burden me with it." She was silent for a bit. "I remember love. Mine and hers. I've always remembered loving my mother, and my mother loving me."

"Of all the things you could have kept, that's the best," said Lavonne.

"You know Vonnie and I both knew her?" said Wingo.

"Jim knew her better than me," said Lavonne, without jealousy or bitterness. "But we both remember her. We came here with some others, the Sellars and the Hatfields, and we'll be meeting the Randalls and the Jacksons later tonight for dinner. This is a part of your past that you need to know about, honey, before you move on with the rest of your life. Now is the time to ask, because ten years ago today, your mother and the rest of us gave you that life, which we hope will turn out to be happy, wonderful and fulfilling."

"If it is, it will be the life you two gave me," said Mary Ellen seriously. "You know you two are my real father and mother."

"We've tried to be," said Jimmy. "Out of love for you, and out obligation to your mother. Honey, you need to know Kicky so you can come to know yourself better. I think you already know that your mother was a brave and noble woman who lived in a bad time in history, but she never gave up on you, or on life. Most people back then just surrendered to the badness of it all. She never did. I'm sure you know that, because you can feel that part of her in you. But I think it's time you knew some of the details, and we can fill those in."

As the three of them walked down the steps of the memorial to their waiting friends and family, behind them the slowly setting sun illuminated the seal of the Northwest Volunteer Army engraved on the marble pillar that served as the flagpole for the Tricolor. The words on the seal seemed to glow with light and with life.

Ex Gladio Libertas.

Freedom comes from the sword.